

Generational Curses

Is there such a thing as a generational curse? Are there times when God punishes a person's descendants because of a sin that was committed by their ancestor?

At first glance the answer seems to be an obvious no. After all, God clearly said that children must not be punished for the sins of their fathers:

Deuteronomy 24:16: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers; every man shall be put to death for his own sin.”

God then repeated this command in the days of Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 18:20: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him.”

All of that seems very clear. Children may not be punished for the sake of their fathers, and fathers may not be punished for the sake of their children. Instead each person is only punished for their own sin.

But there are also passages such as this one:

Exodus 34:7: “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.”

So what is going on here? What are we to make of all this?

To answer this question, let's take a look at passages throughout the Bible where these principles are put into action. That will tell us the truth of the matter.

Crime

Under the Mosaic Law, if someone committed an offense worthy of punishment, the only person who was punished was the one who committed the crime. The law didn't permit their children to be punished as well.

For example, when Amaziah became king he punished the murderers who killed his father. He didn't punish their children because the Mosaic Law didn't allow it:

2 Kings 14:6: “But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the Lord commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin.”

Here we can see the principle of Deuteronomy 24:16 in action. God doesn't permit the government to punish a person's children for a crime committed by their father. That's what the verse is talking about.

Consequences

Even though children couldn't be punished for crimes that were committed by their father, there are times when fathers do

things that have consequences for their children. For example, when Saul sinned against God, the Lord told him that as punishment for his sin his kingdom would not continue:

1 Samuel 13:14: “But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee.”

If Saul hadn't sinned then his children and grandchildren would have been king after him. However, his sin put an end to his kingdom. This means Saul's wickedness had a direct negative impact on his offspring. It cost them the kingdom of Israel.

It's often the case that a person's sin impacts those around them. This doesn't mean God is punishing people for the wickedness of others. Instead it means that sin is a very bad thing and has terrible consequences on innocent people who weren't involved. Sin damages more than just the sinner! It can also bring terrible harm to those who are around them.

One example of this principle is Reuben:

1 Chronicles 5:1: “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright.”

This verse is referring to the fact that Reuben had sex with Bilhah, his father Jacob's concubine:

Genesis 35:22: “And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel

heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:"

Because Reuben (the firstborn son of Jacob and Leah) committed this terrible sin, he lost his birthright. That birthright was given to Joseph (the firstborn son of Jacob and Rachel). That's why two of the tribes of Israel come from Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh). If Reuben hadn't committed that sin, it's possible that two tribes may have come from him instead.

Another example is Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul. The sin of Saul had a lifelong impact on him:

2 Samuel 4:4: "And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth."

When God caused Saul to go into battle and die because of his wickedness, word of his death reached his household. In panic, Mephibosheth's nurse picked him up and fled. She accidentally dropped him, and as a result he sustained an injury that was with him for the rest of his life. This wasn't Mephibosheth's fault, and yet he suffered all the same. If Saul had been a righteous king then it's very unlikely this would have happened. Mephibosheth's life would have been entirely different.

This isn't the same thing as what many people mean by a generational curse. Instead this is simply the terrible and tragic impact of sin. If one parent murders the other and is sent to prison, that will have a horrible impact on their children (who have now been deprived of both parents). The actions of parents can directly impact their children in both good and bad ways. That's one of the reasons why it's such a serious and sober thing to be a parent.

Adam

One clear example of a true generational curse is Adam. When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden he did more than just condemn himself. He also condemned all of his descendants to death as well:

Romans 5:12: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:”

The sin of Adam brought death, disease, and suffering into the world. Every bad thing that's ever happened can be traced back to that one sin.

Why do people die? It's because they sin. Why do people sin? It's because they have a sin nature. Why do they have a sin nature? It's because they inherited it from Adam.

Is God punishing us for the sins of Adam? No. God is punishing us for our own sins. The Lord isn't saying “You are innocent and without sin, but I'm going to pour out My wrath upon you anyway because Adam ate the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden.” Instead Adam's sin corrupted him and we inherit his corruption. That inherited corruption causes us to sin, and God punishes us for that (which is what Romans 5:12 is saying)¹.

It's true that this act by our distant ancestor condemned us all to death (by means of the sinful corruption that we inherit from him). Adam's sin literally led to all the misery that's in the world. However, the fact that all sin and death can be traced back to a single act by a single person is also the reason why we can be saved:

Romans 5:15-19: “But not as the offence, so

1 I'm not arguing people are born sinless and become sinful at some point later in life. Psalm 51:5 teaches that we're sinful and corrupt from the moment of conception. At no point in our existence are we ever innocent (prior to God saving us).

also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."

Why is it possible for the death of a single person (Jesus Christ) to save us from sin and death? It's because the sin of one person is what condemned us to death in the first place. This generational curse both condemns us *and* makes it possible for us to be redeemed. Since we're all made sinners because of the sin of Adam, the obedience of Jesus is able to make us righteous.

Canaan

Another clear example of a generational curse is Canaan. When he did something evil to his grandfather Noah, he was cursed:

Genesis 9:24-26: "And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a

servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.”

In this curse it was said that Canaan would serve his brothers. This curse was fulfilled hundreds of years later when the Gibeonites (his descendants) became the servants of the Israelites (the descendants of Shem):

Joshua 9:27: “And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose.”

However, there's more to this story. This isn't a case where a godly and righteous nation was forced into slavery because of something one of their ancestors did long before they were born. Although God did give the land of Canaan to the Israelites as their inheritance, He waited 400 years to do so. The reason He waited was because He wasn't willing to destroy the nations that lived in Canaan until they became evil:

Genesis 15:13-16: “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full.”

When God gave the promised land to the Israelites, He did

indeed cast out the nations that once lived in that land. However, by that time those nations had become utterly depraved. The reason God cast them out was because of their sin:

Leviticus 18:24-25: “Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.”

Leviticus 20:23: “And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them.”

Deuteronomy 9:4: “Speak not thou in thine heart, after that the Lord thy God hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness the Lord hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord doth drive them out from before thee.”

By the time Joshua brought the Israelites to Canaan, the nations of that land were exceptionally vile. For example, they practiced human sacrifice by burning their children alive to idols:

2 Kings 16:3: “But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out from before the children of Israel.”

2 Chronicles 28:3: Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his

children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel.”

Since these nations were wicked, God cast them out and gave their land to His people. When the Gibeonites realized what was happening, they decided to trick the Israelites into making peace with them so they wouldn't be killed along with everyone else:

Joshua 9:24-25: “And they answered Joshua, and said, Because it was certainly told thy servants, how that the Lord thy God commanded his servant Moses to give you all the land, and to destroy all the inhabitants of the land from before you, therefore we were sore afraid of our lives because of you, and have done this thing. And now, behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do.”

Although God did curse Canaan and his descendants, that curse didn't fall upon the righteous. Instead it fell upon a wicked and vile nation. That's a significant recurring theme when it comes to curses in general:

Proverbs 26:2: “As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.”

The curses of God fall upon the wicked, not the righteous. We will continue to see this pattern as we make our way through this study.

Levi

Jacob had two sons named Levi and Simeon. When Shechem took Levi's sister Dinah and had sex with her, Levi and Simeon responded by murdering all the males in that entire town:

Genesis 34:25-26: “And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.”

Levi and Simeon slaughtered many people who weren't involved with what happened to Dinah. That means this was a horrifying act of mass murder.

Because of this bloody and violent atrocity, their father Jacob cursed both them and their descendants:

Genesis 49:5-7: “Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.”

This is exactly what happened. When the nation of Israel reached the land of Canaan, the tribe of Levi wasn't given its own territory. Instead the Levites were scattered throughout the land, just as Jacob said:

Joshua 14:3-4: “For Moses had given the inheritance of two tribes and an half tribe on the other side Jordan: but unto the Levites he gave none inheritance among them. For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance.”

Joshua 21:3: “And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the Lord, these cities and their suburbs.”

Although the tribe of Levi was indeed scattered throughout the promised land, this turned out to be a blessing. By the time the nation of Israel reached the promised land, God had chosen the tribe of Levi to be the priestly tribe. They were the ones who offered sacrifices, worked in the tabernacle, and made atonement for the sins of their nation. Being scattered throughout the cities of Israel made it possible for them to live among the people and do their job.

God gave them a greater inheritance than land:

Deuteronomy 10:8-9: “At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister unto him, and to bless in his name, unto this day. Wherefore Levi hath no part nor inheritance with his brethren; **the Lord is his inheritance,** according as the Lord thy God promised him.”

This raises a question. Why did God separate the tribe of Levi to serve Him? It was because they were the ones who stood

on God's side during a pivotal moment in Israel's history:

Exodus 32:26: “Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.”

Since they were the one tribe which was willing to stand with God in that moment, He gave them a blessing:

Exodus 32:29: “For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.”

Although the curse of Jacob still came to pass, in the end God turned it into a blessing for the tribe of Levi. Why? It's because they turned to God. When they did that the Lord turned their curse into a blessing.

What about the tribe of Simeon? Well, when Moses called for people to stand with God, the tribe of Simeon did nothing. As a result things didn't go well with them. During the 40 years that Israel spent in the wilderness, the population of that tribe shrank dramatically. When the Israelites left Egypt the tribe of Simeon had 59,300 people:

Numbers 1:23: “Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Simeon, were fifty and nine thousand and three hundred.”

Forty years later more than half of the tribe was gone:

Numbers 26:14: “These are the families of the Simeonites, twenty and two thousand and two hundred.”

The tribe of Simeon was so small that they were only given 15 cities in Canaan, which were scattered throughout the territory of the tribe of Judah:

Joshua 19:9: “Out of the portion of the children of Judah was the inheritance of the children of Simeon: for the part of the children of Judah was too much for them: therefore the children of Simeon had their inheritance within the inheritance of them.”

Since the tribe of Levi turned to God and stood on His side, He turned the curse of Jacob into a blessing and used them to bless the whole nation. However, the tribe of Simeon didn't do that – and as a result they did indeed become small and scattered. The burden of Jacob's curse fell upon the wicked, not the righteous.

Eli

Before the days of King Saul, there was a priest named Eli. He had two sons who were very wicked in the sight of God:

1 Samuel 2:12: “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.”

Eli's sons literally robbed people of the offerings they were making to God. As a result, God was greatly angry with them:

1 Samuel 2:17: “Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord: for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.”

Eli had a responsibility to stop his sons from stealing God's sacrifices, but he refused to do that. He didn't cast them out

of the priesthood, or prosecute them for their theft, or ban them from entering the tabernacle, or take any steps at all to protect the Israelites from them. The only step he was willing to take was offering them a feeble rebuke:

1 Samuel 2:23-25: “And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress. If one man sin against another, the judge shall judge him: but if a man sin against the Lord, who shall intreat for him? Notwithstanding they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the Lord would slay them.”

Eli knew what his sons were doing. He could have removed them from the priesthood but he didn't. He could have stopped them from stealing people's offerings but he didn't. He chose to allow them to continue to rob God. Therefore God was angry with Eli's two sons for their wicked actions, and was also angry with Eli for doing nothing about it.

Since none of them were willing to repent, God cursed both Eli and his descendants:

2 Samuel 2:29-34: “Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people? Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days

come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age. And this shall be a sign unto thee, that shall come upon thy two sons, on Hophni and Phinehas; in one day they shall die both of them.”

When God told Eli this, he was indifferent. He did nothing to repent – and his sons didn't repent either. They ignored God and continued to do evil, so God did exactly what He said He would do. First He killed Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas all in the same day:

1 Samuel 4:15-18: “Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.”

A generation later King Saul slaughtered all the priests of the city of Nob, who were part of the house of Eli:

1 Samuel 22:17-19: “And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord: because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord. And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod. And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword.”

Finally, a generation after that, King Solomon removed Abiathar (another descendant of Eli) from the priesthood:

1 Kings 2:26-27: “And unto Abiathar the priest said the king, Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father, and because thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted. So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the Lord; that he might fulfil the word of the Lord, which he spake concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.”

This passage explicitly tells us that what Solomon did was a fulfillment of God's curse against the house of Eli. However, it's

important to note that this curse didn't fall upon Abiathar while he was faithfully serving David. Instead it fell upon him when he rose up against Solomon in an attempt to overthrow him and make Adonijah the king. As long as Abiathar was doing what was right he was spared, but when he became wicked he was punished. Once again the curse fell upon the wicked, not the righteous.

Families

There were a few times when a ruler committed a grievous sin, and as a result God commanded that his entire family was to be wiped out. For example, God cursed the family line of Baasha and said that He was going to utterly destroy it:

1 Kings 16:1-4: Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu the son of Hanani against Baasha, saying, Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; Behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha, and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat."

When the passage says that the dogs would eat those who died in the city and the birds would eat those who died in the field, God was saying that He wasn't going to allow Baasha's descendants to be buried. When He said that He would make Baasha's house like the house of Jeroboam, He meant there would be no survivors. God utterly wiped out all of the descendants of Jeroboam and didn't leave anyone alive:

1 Kings 15:29-30: “And it came to pass, when he reigned, that he smote all the house of Jeroboam; he left not to Jeroboam any that breathed, until he had destroyed him, according unto the saying of the Lord, which he spake by his servant Ahijah the Shilonite: Because of the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned, and which he made Israel sin, by his provocation wherewith he provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger.”

Why did God destroy the entire family line of Jeroboam? It was because Jeroboam deliberately turned an entire nation away from God. Jeroboam created two golden calves and commanded the nation of Israel to worship them, *and they did*:

1 Kings 12:26-30: “And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan.”

1 Kings 13:34: “And this thing became sin unto the house of Jeroboam, even to cut it off, and to destroy it from off the face of the earth.”

Since Jeroboam destroyed the household of God (by leading His people away from Him), God destroyed his house in return.

But there was one child of Jeroboam that this curse didn't apply to. God was going to have mercy on one person in Jeroboam's household:

1 Kings 14:13: “And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the Lord God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.”

Jeroboam had one child who wasn't evil. Since that one child sought God, he was exempted from the curse. That child wasn't hunted down and slaughtered with the rest of his brothers. Instead he died in peace and received an honorable burial.

That brings us back to the verse that was brought up at the very beginning of this study:

Exodus 34:7: “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.”

God does indeed punish children, *when the they commit the same sins as their fathers*. When they don't commit those same sins God has mercy upon them. The child of Jeroboam wasn't evil like his father so he was spared.

This is because God doesn't punish the righteous along with the wicked. The Lord won't pour out His wrath upon the righteous:

Exodus 23:7: “Keep thee far from a false matter;

and the innocent and righteous slay thou not:
for I will not justify the wicked.”

Deuteronomy 27:25: “Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person. And all the people shall say, Amen.”

We can see this when Abraham interceded on behalf of Sodom. Abraham told God that He wasn't someone who would slay the righteous along with the wicked:

Genesis 18:23-26: “And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.”

In the end God didn't slay the righteous with the wicked. Instead He sent two angels into the wicked city of Sodom to remove Lot, so that the righteous Lot was spared when God poured out His wrath upon the city.

God doesn't condemn the righteous along with the wicked. Instead He puts a distinction between them. The Lord justifies the righteous and condemns the wicked:

Deuteronomy 25:1: “If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that the judges may judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked.”

Did God wipe out the entire houses of Jeroboam and Baasha? Yes, He did. Why? Because they were wicked. However, God didn't kill righteous people along with the wicked. Instead He found the one righteous person and spared him, and then cast out the others who didn't repent or turn from their wickedness.

Jehoiakim

During the days of Jeremiah the land of Judah was ruled over by a wicked king named Jehoiakim. When God sent a copy of His words to that king, he had them tossed into the fire and burned:

Jeremiah 36:22-24: “Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words.”

Since this king despised the words of God and literally set them on fire, God cursed him and his descendants:

Jeremiah 36:30: “Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David: and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost.”

Under this curse, none of his descendants had the right to

sit on the throne of David and reign over Israel. This created a problem because the Messiah came from the line of Jehoiakim:

Matthew 1:6-11: “And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa; And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias; And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias; And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon; and Amon begat Josias; And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:”

“Jechonias” is an alternate spelling of Jehoiakim. Joseph was the son of David, the son of Solomon, and the son of Jekoiakim. However, thanks to the curse of Jehoiakim, neither Joseph nor any of his children could sit on the throne of David.

But Jesus wasn't Joseph's natural son; He was his *adopted* son! In Luke 3 we can find Mary's genealogy. It turns out that Mary is also of the line of David, through David's son Nathan:

Luke 3:31: “Which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David,”

Nathan's line was never cursed. Jehoiakim's line was cursed – but Jesus was *adopted* into that line. Since Jesus wasn't Jehoiakim's natural son He didn't inherit the curse, and therefore He has the right to sit on the throne of David and reign over Israel. This fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah foretold:

Isaiah 9:6: “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 said “unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given”. What Isaiah is saying is that the Messiah will come by both birth *and* adoption. The Lord Jesus was *born* into the line of Nathan and *adopted* into the line of Jehoiakim. Jesus thus fulfilled both requirements of Isaiah and avoided the curse of Jehoiakim as well. The Messiah came the only way he could possibly come.

This means the righteous Messiah avoided the curse that was put on the wicked king Jehoiakim.

Jerusalem

There came a day when God turned the city of Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed it and took its people captive:

2 Kings 24:1-4: “In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets. Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; And also for the innocent blood that he shed: for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not

pardon."

Why did God do this? Because of the sins of Manasseh, the king of Judah. Manasseh shed a great deal of innocent blood, and that blood couldn't be forgiven. The sins of Manasseh doomed Jerusalem to destruction and there was no cure.

However, the judgment *could* be delayed. When Josiah learned about God's law he repented and sought the Lord. As a result God said that the judgment wouldn't come during his lifetime:

2 Kings 22:16-20: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the words of the book which the king of Judah hath read: Because they have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore my wrath shall be kindled against this place, and shall not be quenched. But to the king of Judah which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought the king word again."

God's judgment was still going to come because it couldn't be stopped. However, Josiah's repentance prevented it from coming during his lifetime. God's wrath didn't fall upon a righteous king. Instead it was delayed.

Years later the Lord offered to spare King Zedekiah if he would obey Him and do as He commanded:

Jeremiah 38:17-28: “Then said Jeremiah unto Zedekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; If thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: But if thou wilt not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand.”

All Zedekiah had to do was obey God by surrendering to Nebuchadnezzar. If Zedekiah did that then he would live, his household would live, and the city of Jerusalem wouldn't be burned.

But Zedekiah refused. He wouldn't do it. Instead of surrendering he chose to flee the city. That fateful decision didn't turn out well for him:

Jeremiah 39:4-8: “And it came to pass, that when Zedekiah the king of Judah saw them, and all the men of war, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, by the gate betwixt the two walls: and he went out the way of the plain. But the Chaldeans' army pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up

to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he gave judgment upon him. Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him with chains, to carry him to Babylon. And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem.”

If Zedekiah had obeyed God then he would have been spared, just as Josiah was spared. Since he refused he suffered God's wrath. The righteous king Josiah was spared and the wicked king Zedekiah suffered the consequence of the curse.

That gives a new meaning to this verse, which is speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of the Babylonians:

Lamentations 5:7: “Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.”

Why did that specific generation suffer? It's because they were wicked and refused to turn from their wickedness. In fact, that generation was so wicked that God sent Jeremiah into His temple to tell the people who were worshiping Him there to *stop burning their children alive as human sacrifices to idols:*

Jeremiah 7:1-3: “The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, that enter in at these gates to worship the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.”

Jeremiah 7:31-32: “And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be called Tophet, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter: for they shall bury in Tophet, till there be no place.”

The very people who were going into the temple to worship God were also murdering their children in an act of worship to idols. God commanded them to stop that because it was an abomination in His sight. He *hated* it.

How did that generation respond? Instead of repenting of burning their children alive they arrested Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 20:1-2: “Now Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashur smote Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord.”

Notice that the person who assaulted and arrested Jeremiah for telling people to stop murdering their children was *the chief governor of the temple*. That's how bad things had gotten, and that's why God's judgment fell upon that generation. It refused to repent.

Mercy

A great example of this same principle can be found with

the Moabites. God forbade the Ammonites and Moabites from *ever* entering into the congregation of the Lord:

Deuteronomy 23:3-4: "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the Lord for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee."

Because of the terrible things the Ammonites and Moabites did to the Israelites when the Israelites were in the wilderness, God forbade them from ever entering into His congregation. This is clearly a generational curse.

However, the story doesn't stop there. You see, the book of Ruth is all about a woman who travels to Israel and becomes one of the ancestors of the Messiah. One of the points the book makes over and over again is that Ruth was a Moabite:

Ruth 1:22: "So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest."

The reason this was such a big deal is because *Moabites were forbidden from ever entering into the congregation of the Lord*. Yet Ruth found mercy in God's sight and became one of the ancestors of the Messiah! Why? It's because she abandoned the nation of Moab for Israel, and also abandoned the false gods she worshiped for the Lord:

Ruth 1:16-17: "And Ruth said, Intreat me not to

leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.”

God shows mercy to those who turn away from their wickedness and seek Him. He doesn't punish the righteous with the wicked. When Ruth turned to God He had mercy upon her. The Lord didn't continue to exclude her on the grounds that she was a Moabite and Moabites were cursed. Instead God received her and she became part of His family.

Throughout the Bible the Lord tells us that He's against the wicked but spares the righteous:

Psalm 37:17: “For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous.”

Proverbs 10:30: “The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.”

Proverbs 11:21: “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.”

Proverbs 12:7: “The wicked are overthrown, and are not: but the house of the righteous shall stand.”

Proverbs 13:6: “Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinner.”

Proverbs 15:9: “The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness.”

That's how sin works. All of us are born under the curse of sin, which we inherit from Adam. All of us can be forgiven if we repent of our sins and put our faith in Jesus. That means *generational curses have a cure*. God forgives all those who turn away from the sins of their fathers:

Nehemiah 9:2: “And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.”

If children continue in the sins of their fathers then they'll suffer the consequences of their actions. However, if people turn away from those sins and do what's right, God will receive them. In fact, He'll receive them even if He's pronounced a curse upon their family line, because He's merciful to those who turn to Him.

How do you escape a generational curse? Through repentance.