

Passages Related to Transgenerational Punishment

Based partly on Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Neo-Assyrian Vassal Treaty (672 BCE)

As long as we, our sons [and] our grandsons live, Assurbanipal, the great crown prince designate, shall be our king and our lord. If we place any other king or prince over us, our sons, or our grandsons, may all the gods mentioned by name [in this treaty] hold us, our seed, and our seed's seed to account.

Exodus 20:5

For I the LORD your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me,

Exodus 20:6

but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Lamentations 5:7

Our fathers sinned and are no more; And we must bear their guilt.

Jeremiah 31:29-31

In those days, they shall no longer say, "Parents have eaten sour grapes and children's teeth are blunted."³⁰ But every one shall die for his own sins: whosoever eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be blunted.³¹ See, a time is coming—declares the LORD—when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah.

Ezekiel 18:1-4

The word of the LORD came to me:² What do you mean by quoting this proverb upon the soil of Israel, "Parents eat sour grapes and their children's teeth are blunted"?³ As I live—declares the Lord GOD—this proverb shall no longer be current among you in Israel.⁴ Consider, all lives are Mine; the life of the parent and the life of the child are both Mine. The person who sins, only he shall die.

Deuteronomy 7:9-10

Know, therefore, that only the LORD your God is God, the steadfast God who keeps His covenant faithfully to the thousandth generation of those who love Him and keep His commandments,¹⁰ but who instantly requites with destruction those who reject Him—never slow with those who reject Him, but requiting them instantly.

Deuteronomy 24:16

Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents: a person shall be put to death only for his own crime.

I include this verse because some scholars have counted it as a position that opposes Exodus 20:5, but most scholars see that the issue is quite different. The issue here is "mirror punishments" in human courts, not divine wrath. A "mirror punishment" is taking "an eye for an eye" farther, such that if I kill your son you (or the court) can kill my son.

Targum Onkelos to (Onkelos' interpretive translation of) Exodus 20:5

... visiting the guilt of the fathers upon the *rebellious* children, upon the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, *when the children continue to sin as their fathers*.