

**PROFITABLY UNDERSTANDING TRAGICALLY MISINTERPRETED BIBLE PASSAGES**  
**Part I: Understanding Verses Where God Visits The Sins Of The Fathers On Following Generations**  
**(Exodus 20:5-6 et al.)**

**I. Introduction**

- A. A Christian man I knew decades ago who had just learned his infant son had died at birth was told by his mother that God was judging him with the death of his infant because she had committed immorality as a young woman. Her reason came from passages like Exodus 20:5-6 where God visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.
- B. This dreadfully painful event came from a tragic misinterpretation of Scripture, and we demonstrate as much in the following study:

**II. Understanding Verses Where God Visits The Sins Of The Fathers On Following Generations.**

- A. Of **all** the Bible verses that mention God's visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons to the third and fourth generations, **EACH VERSE** supplies a *qualification* clause to indicate the **ensuing generations** involved are **just as sinful as the fathers** (as follows):
  - 1. Exodus 20:5-6 with Deuteronomy 5:9-10 have the qualifying clause: ". . . of them that hate me":
    - a. Both Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9 cite God to say: ". . . 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.**"
    - b. Since Exodus 20:6 and Deuteronomy 5:10 both continue to show God ". . . shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me . . .," both passages imply the **descendants** are *equally sinful*, and are thus judged.
    - c. By implication, if the descendants adopt the hateful attitude toward God expressed by their fathers, they along with their fathers will be judged by the Lord!
  - 2. Then, Exodus 34:7 with Numbers 14:18 have the qualifying clause: ". . . and by no means clearing the guilty . . ." that introduces God's visiting the iniquity of the fathers on ensuing generations. Thus, the **sons** of ensuing generations have *themselves adopted the iniquities of the fathers!*
  - 3. Matthew 23:35-36 portrays Jesus warning that the sins of the fathers would come upon that generation, including the wicked martyrdoms of the past going from Abel in the Garden of Eden to Zacharias the son of Barachias who was slain in 2 Chronicles 24:21! However, this prophecy was given to men who had adopted the sins of their ancestors and were thus as guilty as they had been of past martyrdoms:
    - a. Jesus complained in Matthew 23:29-30 that the Pharisees and scribes of His era claimed they would not have partaken in the martyrdoms of past prophets as had their forefathers.
    - b. Yet, Christ predicted they would persecute the Old Testament prophet John and would crucify Him and persecute the future Apostles of the Church, sealing their need for judgment in line with the sins of the fathers, Mtt. 23:33-34; cf. *Ryrie Study Bible, KJV*, 1978 ed., fn. to Mtt. 23:34.
    - c. Thus, the generation of Jesus' era was just as guilty as their forefathers!
  - 4. Leviticus 26:39 mentions how Israel under judgment would suffer divine judgment as they were embedded in the sins of the father; however, where she to repent under such judgment (Lev. 26:40-41), God would recall His covenant with them and restore them to blessing, Leviticus 26:42-45!
- B. In summary, Ezekiel 18:1-28 details God's concern that people not think the children who are innocent of the father's sins will be judged for the sins of the fathers: arranging for several scenarios where the father might be evil and the son upright, or vice-versa, or there might be a change in the heart of a father or a son, God reveals: "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." (Ez. 18:20 ESV).

***Lesson:*** *Though the fathers can readily INFLUENCE following generations to perform the wicked deeds they themselves have done, and God will then judge these descendants as He had the fathers, God's judgment is for PERSONAL sins, REGARDLESS what generation is involved. Every individual is personally accountable to God and will individually answer to God for his OWN life's actions!*

***Application:*** *May we uphold the truth of INDIVIDUAL, PERSONAL accountability before God.*