

## **What does the Bible say about Generational Curses?**

What is a generational curse? Is it possible that you can be cursed because of the sins of your parents or grandparents?

This teaching is prevalent in the church community. The thought is if a person in one's family lineage has done something to receive a curse that it will continue to travel down through generations unless someone knows how to break it. For instance, families with generations of alcoholism, drug addiction, and divorce are some examples that are used to validate the evidence of a generational curse.

Many deliverance ministries will also give you steps on how to break the curse in your family line. Some steps include: asking God to show you what kind of curse is in your family, repenting for the sins of your parents or ancestors, applying the blood of Christ, and commanding demons to leave, to name a few.

Several scriptures are typically used to support this idea: Exodus 20:5, 34:7, Numbers 14:18, and Deuteronomy 5:9.

In this study, we will determine whether generational curses are a biblical concept based on these scriptures.

## WHAT IS A CURSE?

*Curse: Prayers or invocations for harm or injury to come upon someone*

Much like our definition today, people in ancient times believed that curses were tools of magic to gain power over their enemy.

Examples of the use of a curse can be seen as early as the book of Genesis and throughout the entire bible.

- The serpent in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:14)
- The ground for Adam's sake (Genesis 3:17)
- Cain for the murder of his brother (Genesis 4:11)

However, the biblical use of the word curse reflects a different meaning than that of what we see today. For instance, in the Old Testament it is used as:

- A warning (alah) – a curse to warn God's people of the judgments that would follow should they break their covenant with him. (Deut 29:14-21)
- The act of binding (arar) – A punishment imposed by God to bind or render powerless. To reduce one's ability. i.e. the ground was cursed for Adam's sake, it would no longer be fertile and produce, without effort and hard labor (Genesis 3:17)

In this sense, the word curse speaks more to a divine judgment or a warning.

In the New Testament, the usage of the word *curse* is referenced as anathema or accursed. *A person that is dedicated to destruction or delivered to God to be judged.* Paul uses this terminology to describe anyone who preaches another gospel different from the true gospel (Galatians 1:8-9)

### Does Satan pronounce curses?

One of the implications of this teaching is that the generational curse would come from Satan.

While Satan is the god of this age and does have power (1 John 5:19, Corinthians 4:4) it is not unlimited power. As in the story of Job where he must seek God's permission to inflict Job (Job chapters 1 and 2).

He can, however, influence or draw us into sin giving him access to afflict our lives through our disobedience. That is why we are commanded to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, nor to touch what is unclean (Ephesians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Keep in mind:

- Satan is a created being (Ezekiel 28:15)
- Satan, as the serpent was cursed by God (Genesis 3:14)
- Satan and the demons are all subject to God (Job 2:1-7, Luke 4:34, Matthew 8:29)
- Jesus destroyed the works of the devil (Hebrews 2:14, 1 John 3:8)

### **Generational Curses - Is it Biblical?**

Let's review the scriptures that are used to promote this idea of generational curses. I will summarize these chapters so that you can get an idea of what is happening in the context, but I encourage you to please read the chapters for yourself.

#### **Exodus 20:5**

In the preceding chapters, we see the children of Israel have been delivered from Egypt and are now on the journey to the Promised Land.

Chapter 20 is where God begins to give the children of Israel, commandments as it relates to him. He instructs them about idolatry, warns that he is a jealous God, and then describes his character:

*Exodus 20:5 - You shall not bow down to serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,*

#### **Exodus 34:7**

In the preceding chapters, the children of Israel have rebelled by convincing Aaron (Moses' brother) to make them a golden calf to worship as their god.

Moses atones for the sins of Israel. God tells Moses to cut out two stone tablets like before and then The Lord descends in a cloud and proclaims:

*Exodus 34:6-7 – 6 And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth 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.*

#### **Numbers 14:18**

In the preceding chapter (Numbers 13) God tells Moses to send in representatives from each tribe to spy out the Promised Land. All the men except for Joshua and Caleb bring back an evil report and in doing so rebel against God.

Chapter 14 begins with the people murmuring against Moses and Aaron and God. God determined he would destroy the Israelites and start a new Nation through Moses.

Moses intercedes on the behalf of the Israelites and reminds God of his character by stating:

*Numbers 14:18 – The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.*

#### Deuteronomy 5:9

Moses is giving his discourse to the children of Israel who have survived the wilderness experience.

He summarizes by reminding them of what God has done for them and follows up with what God expects from them. Then Moses begins to rehearse to them the commandments of the covenant given to them by God. Again he warns about idolatry and then states:

*Deuteronomy 5:9 – You shall not bow down to serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,*

#### Think about these questions:

- Who is God speaking to in Exodus 20:5?
- Who is God revealing his character to in Exodus 34:7
- Why is Moses reminding God of his character in Number 14:18?

These passages within context can be understood as a proclamation of God's character within the context of a covenant relationship with the children of Israel.

These scriptures do not support the teaching of generational curses for a few reasons:

#### 1. God does not say he will curse but visit the sin of the fathers.

The word *visit* in these verses is the Hebrew word *paqad* meaning to attend to or to punish. In these verses, God is proclaiming that he is a jealous God who will not forget sin and that he will punish the guilty. In essence, there is always a consequence to sin. That is, in this case, the consequence of sin affects the generations that follow.

#### 2. There is a condition for God punishing the sin.

*Exodus 20:5b visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6 And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.*

God reveals that he is just and that he will punish the sin of those who hate him (that is those who disobey his commands). At the same time, he reveals that he is merciful to those who love him and keep his commandments.

There are many examples where we see this in effect, for example, King Solomon. God gave him a direct command not to marry outside of Israel because the women would turn his heart to follow other gods.

Solomon disobeyed God and intermingled with many women and followed after many gods (1 Kings 1-11). The result of his sin was visited upon his son:

*1 Kings 11:11-13 ESV*

*<sup>11</sup> Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. <sup>12</sup> Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. <sup>13</sup> However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen."*

Because of King Solomon's disobedience, his son would not rule as king over all of Israel, thus Solomon's sin was visited upon his son. In the same token, God's covenant with David would not allow for David's house (or lineage) to be obliterated, so although Solomon's son would not be King over all of Israel, he would be king of 1 tribe of Israel the tribe of Judah for David's sake.

Another example is King Ahab, noted as one of the more wicked Kings of Israel. God had determined he would destroy his whole household and all the males born in his lineage. (1 Kings 1-28) Although, Ahab repented, God still visited his sin upon his son.

*1 Kings 21:29*

*<sup>29</sup> "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster in his days; but in his son's days I will bring the disaster upon his house."*

These are not curses, but consequences to sin that the Lord forewarned he would address if disobedience ensued.

Do these verses apply to us?

These lessons are given to us so that we can learn about God, his character, and how he relates to his people. These specific verses were written to the children of Israel and not us, so to use these scriptures to validate a generational curse for us today would be an error. (1 Corinthians 10:1-11)

### **Are we responsible for the sins of our parents or those in our family tree?**

This was a common theme in Israel where the people believed their suffering was because of the generation that preceded them.

Ezekiel explains to them that every person is responsible for their sin (Read - Ezekiel 18:1-30)

*<sup>20</sup> 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. Ezekiel 18:20*

As we can see, this issue of suffering for the sins of our fathers was addressed in the Old Testament. Even then, it was established that everyone would be responsible for their sin.

God's punishment of his people is an act of mercy and grace. We must suffer the consequence of our sin, or our decisions to disobey God. Albeit, his punishment is not for our ruin but our restoration, that he might bring us to repentance.

### **The Problem with Generational Curse theory**

There are a few issues that are concerning as regards the teaching of Generational curses:

1. It's works based – Many of the teachings require some type of work on our part. Multiple steps are suggested from searching out one's family history, to saying a special prayer, positive confession, or applying the blood of Jesus to break the curse, to name a few.

This gives us the responsibility of searching out and doing the steps to break the curse. However, if we who were once sinners were unable to procure salvation for ourselves, how could we be responsible for discovering and breaking curses for ourselves? Read Ephesians 2:1-22

***8** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **9** Not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9*

Jesus was given the task of bearing the sins of all humanity and redeeming us back to God (John 3:16; Colossians 2:8-14). The Holy Spirit was given the task of transforming our lives (this is not His only task) to look like Christ. (Read Galatians 5:16-26)

This is the work of the Spirit, who is truth and guides us into all truth (John 16:13). If there is something that needs to be exposed in our history the Spirit of truth (the Holy Spirit) will expose it, we need only to be ready to repent, ask for forgiveness or extend forgiveness to someone else, and allow the Spirit of God to heal us.

## 2. There is no responsibility for sin

A generational curse is convenient in that it allows us to blame others for our sinful behavior and not take responsibility for our actions. Instead of taking ownership of our behaviors, we will instead blame failed relationships, our parents, or even God, for our actions. (James 1:13-14)

Unfortunately, this also moves us further away from the grace that is offered through repentance.

3. It negates the finished work of Christ on the Cross – Finally, this concept of generational curses negates Jesus' power over sin and death.

- Christ appeared to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8)
- Christ was made sin for us so that we could become righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- Christ has the keys of hell and death (Revelation 1:18)
- Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Galatians 3:13)
- We are new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Everything that Jesus came to do was done. When he said "It is finished" that meant EVERYTHING was completed. Fulfillment of prophecy, the redemption of mankind, forgiveness of sin, and power over sin, death (that includes curses).

We don't possess any power in ourselves, but Jesus does. We were not able to break the curse of sin off of our lives, but Jesus did. Therefore our hope and trust are in the sufficiency of Jesus and his power alone.

## Summary

There is no biblical evidence that supports the claim of generational curses based on the scriptures that we reviewed.

However, we know that we have inherited a nature of sin and rebellion against God which entered through the disobedience of Adam. (Romans 5:12)

Due to this and the effects of living in a fallen world, we have and indeed do, sin. Thus we suffer the consequence of our sin, opening the door for Satan to bring destruction and despair, in our lives because of our bad choices.

These are our personal choices, to which we must give an account. While we may have been influenced by friends, family, and even the devil himself, we are ultimately responsible for the choices we make.

Even so, God was so rich in his mercy towards us that he made a way for us to be redeemed back to himself (Romans 5:8). He provided a one-time sacrifice that would atone for all of our sins. He made right in one moment what we could never make right in our entire lifetime.

There are no formulas, five-point plans, activations, or new revelations that we can do that will break anything off of our lives. If there is something else that WE can do, that would imply that what Jesus did (death and resurrection from the dead) was not enough. (John 19:28-30)

Jesus alone paid the penalty for sin and death (that includes curses), we need only to repent and believe.

Now, I am not saying that God won't reveal to us patterns of sin in our families. It is a part of the sanctification process where God begins to bring up sins, traditions, values that we may have learned from our parents, family, etc., that were wrong or go against the truth of his word.

Participation in ungodly organizations, Freemasonry, sororities, etc., can hinder our relationship with God. If He exposes such things to you it is your opportunity to repent for your involvement in these practices and renounce any future involvement (as well as discard any paraphernalia affiliated with these practices).

God is not revealing these things for us to "break the curse" he is exposing sin so that we can repent and receive healing.

We can leave a legacy of sinful acts. It is so important to understand that every choice we make affects someone else, especially when it comes to sin. Although we are responsible for our own sinful decisions, the consequences of those decisions can impact the lives of our children and those around us for generations to come.

However, when we are born again we are washed from the stain of sin in our past. We have a new family altogether, our blood has been regenerated with the blood of Jesus. We have new DNA.

Thus the plan of God was perfect and perfected at the Cross. The blood of Christ took away the sting of death, the power of sin, and ALL its curses. That is all we need, and that is enough.



### **References**

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