

## GENERATIONAL CURSING & SOUL TIES

(Two false ideas in modern evangelicalism)

“GENERATIONAL CURSING/BLESSING” - Greg Koukl - 03/12/2013

([https://www.str.org/w/does-god-visit-the-iniquities-of-the-fathers-on-the-third-fourth-generations-?p\\_l\\_back\\_url=%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dgenerational%2Bcurse%26category%3D35243](https://www.str.org/w/does-god-visit-the-iniquities-of-the-fathers-on-the-third-fourth-generations-?p_l_back_url=%2Fsearch%3Fq%3Dgenerational%2Bcurse%26category%3D35243))

*Greg interprets a commonly misunderstood and difficult passage by looking at the details of the context.*

**Caller:** There’s at least four places in the Old Testament that talk about the Lord visiting the sins of the Father unto the third and fourth generations. Can you work through figuring out what that’s about?

**Greg:** Let’s talk about that for a few moments. I think this is a good example of a “Never Read a Bible Verse” kind of application. I actually think this is a little bit of a difficult passage to figure out. Two things to look at. It’s made more difficult because it’s usually quoted in part, and not in whole. It is misquoted, and the details of even what is quoted are not attended to. So entire ministries, whole enterprises, have been built on a big misunderstanding about this passage. Even if someone doesn’t know what a passage means, it may be possible to figure out what the passage does not mean. The way this is usually cited—it comes up first in Exodus 20, which is the Ten Commandments—is that people say we know that “the sins of the fathers are visited on the children to the third and fourth generation.” What this is commonly said to mean is that you may have ancestral curses because of the activities of your fathers, your ancestors. Generally, these activities have to do with extreme sin or occult involvement, but it may also be having an abortion. This then results in something bad happening to an individual because of this other person’s sinful activity. The application of this is that someone is going through something really hard and has a besetting sin or problem that they can’t get rid of, and it is suggested to them that there is a spiritual dynamic that is tied to the teaching of this verse. There is a generational sin and curse that then must be broken through some spiritual discipline of some sort. Some have gone to great extent, written whole books, on how to unwind this spiritual oppression coming from past generations. They step you through all these little exercises. Does this sound familiar?

**Caller:** Yes.

**Greg:** Now, let’s go back to the verse, Exodus 20:5–6: “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (NASB). That’s the whole quote. That’s a lot more than most people who know about this verse have ever heard. Let me ask you a question. This visiting of the sins of the father on the children, whatever that means, whatever that “visiting” is, who is the active agent? God is doing the visiting. So, if you have a technique to undo this activity, who are you fighting? God. What could be more obvious? I don’t know exactly what’s going on here, but God is doing it. And if you try to undo it, you are fighting God. There is no technique, there is no prayer, there is no spiritual enterprise that you’re going to be able to invoke against this because anyone who is doing so will be fighting God. Now keep in mind, I am saying that whatever is going on here is God’s doing. There may be legitimate spiritual problems people are having that people should be praying about, but whatever spiritual problems they’re having may not at all be related to this. And, if they are, and what they’re experiencing is an example of the outworking of this declaration by God, then they are fighting God by trying to undo it. Confidence for every Christian Clear thinking for every challenge Courage

and grace for every encounter So then what is going on? Well, we know that God is a jealous God. They are not to worship idols. He says then He will do something and this is very odd. He will visit the “iniquities of the father on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me.” We have a father. We have a child, first generation. We have a grandson, second generation. We have a greatgrandson, third generation. So God is only visiting the iniquity on the son, the great-grandson, and the great-great grandson. Doesn’t it seem odd that he says third and fourth, and not second? Now maybe he means to the third and fourth so that it’s just for four generations before this peters out. Maybe. Verse 6 says, “but showing lovingkindness to thousands to those who love me and keep my commandments.”

**Caller:** But that’s a big part of my question. That thousands doesn’t seem to be thousands generations, that the third and fourth are. I wasn’t sure that the thousands meant thousands of generations or if it just meant thousands.

**Greg:** This is where it’s helpful to go back to some of the other four places where this same concept is quoted here.

**Caller:** It’s always the same word there. The word thousand doesn’t look like it has the “generation” in there.

**Greg:** It could mean thousands of generations. That could be a vagueness. But what is clear is there is a contrast between third and fourth generations, and thousands. Now what do you think God intends to be the greater number, those in the third and fourth generations or those in thousands?

**Caller:** The point is that His lovingkindness is so much greater.

**Greg:** Oh, God bless you! “...On the children, and on the third and fourth generations of those who hate me.” Notice the qualifier. “...And showing lovingkindness to thousands to those who love me and keep my commandments.” Now what does the history of Israel demonstrate? It demonstrates that when God deals with Israel, He deals with them as a nation. When the fathers, the ones in control, the adults are bad, everybody gets the punishment. It’s not because the children are singled out to be punished for the sins of the father. In fact, there’s an entire chapter, Ezekiel 18, one whole chapter that is meant to repudiate that concept. The way the chapter starts is, “You have a saying, ‘The fathers eat the sour grapes, but the children’s teeth are set on edge.’” Do you see the play on words here? The fathers do it, but the children get the result. God says to quit saying that thing because I’m not going to punish the kids for what the parents do wrong. That’s different, I think, from dealing with the nation as a whole. When the nation as a whole is rebellious and idolatrous, which is what the Exodus passage is about, God punishes the nation. Even though Elijah found out there were still 5,000 people who had not bent their knee to Baal, still the nation was a nation of Baal-worshippers so they were punished by God as a nation. The kids got it just like the parents. As long as the group as a whole continued in that, God would punish them. And He did until you got a king and a people that reformed the nation. Then God blesses them. There were reformers like Hezekiah and Manasseh, later in his life. There were these times when this happened. Then God’s lovingkindness was abundant. In Exodus, God is talking about how He’s going to deal with the nation. After all, this is the Mosaic Covenant with the nation of Israel, so He’s setting up the blessings and curses for the nation as a whole based on how they keep up their end of the covenant. They should not be idolatrous because He’s a jealous God, and if they’re idolatrous they’re going to be punished. And this is the way He characterizes the consequences, “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” If you keep hating me, I’ll keep punishing you for it. However, He will show lovingkindness to thousands to those who love Him and keep His

commandments. He's emphasizing His long suffering and His mercy over and against His justice and wrath. He does that many times in the Old Testament text. He is abundant in lovingkindness; He is slow to anger. And I think that's what is really going on in this passage. He's laying out the consequences for worshipping false idols, and He's contrasting His great lovingkindness with his wrath. That's my take on it.

**Caller:** So you think the point the contrast that His lovingkindness is much greater than his anger?  
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**Greg:** I think the reason He says third and fourth generations versus thousands is to show that one is greater than the other. He's speaking in general terms here, not specific numbers. One father does it; one kid gets it. That's excluded by the Ezekiel passage that teaches against the idea that a child is punished for his parents' sin. God is talking about the nation of Israel in Exodus, the group as a whole, as He's making a covenant with them that has obligations on each side. He is expressing His judgement on them for their idolatry, which shows they hate Him, and He will continue to do that generation to generation to generation as long as they hate Him. This verse is a linguistic device, a poetic device if you will, "visit the iniquity of the father on the children, and on the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me." But for those who don't hate Him but do love Him and do keep His commandments, He's going to pour out His grace and lovingkindness to the nation. I think there's a kind of literary device that's going on in the verse. **It is not about individual people who receive generational sins or curses; it's a covenant for how God will deal with the Nation depending on whether they hate or love Him.**

### **Question: "What does the Bible say about soul ties?"**

**(<https://www.gotquestions.org/soul-ties.html>)**

**Answer:** The phrase "soul ties" is not in the Bible; rather, the idea of soul ties is a man-made speculation which some teachers superimpose onto Scripture in an attempt to explain certain human behaviors. Soul ties are said to be connections from one person's soul to (or into) another person's soul, a concept that has no basis in Scripture.

The Bible does speak of close friendships, such as that of David and Jonathan. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1 KJV). This is simply a way of expressing Jonathan's total commitment to, and deep friendship with, David. To try to make this passage teach a mystical binding of the actual soul is unwarranted.

The Bible also warns against entering ungodly relationships. "My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. ... do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths" (Proverbs 1:10, 15). This passage and others like it caution us against the wrong types of friends but stop short of describing any type of spiritual union of souls. We also have clear warning against fornication in Scripture. "Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh'" (1 Corinthians 6:16). Note that the body is joined; the Bible says nothing of the souls being joined.

The Bible presents evil as addictive; however, nowhere does the Bible speak of "fragmented" souls or "dividing" one's soul. In short, the Bible gives us clear direction for our lives, and we know the remedy for sin is to confess it and forsake it (1 John 1:9; John 8:11). **There is no need for overly complex human theories such as "soul ties."**