

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Jon Macon

Isaiah 14:21-22 says, "Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the Lord." The children of the king of Babylon were going to be slaughtered "for the iniquity of their fathers." This prophecy teaches an important principle about the nature of sin, but does not teach that God imputes the wickedness of one person to another.

The consequences of sin upon others

Ezekiel 18:20 says, "The soul that sins, 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." This verse does not contradict the prophecy in Isaiah 14:21-22. Rather, they speak of two different things. Isaiah 14:21-22 speaks about suffering the *consequences* of sins. People *do* suffer certain things as a result of the wrong actions of others. It is an inescapable fact that one man's wrong choices will have a negative impact on others. The children of the king of Babylon certainly bore the consequences of their father's wickedness. God was determined to destroy Babylon because of the pride and wickedness of her king and people (Isa 13:9-13; 14:4-20). Innocent children would suffer the consequences of the evil committed by their parents (Isa 13:15-19; 14:21-22). They suffered the consequences of the sinful actions of others. But we all do. God says that He *visits* the iniquities of the fathers on the children, even to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him (Exod 20:5; 34:6-7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9; Psa 109:9-13; Isa 14:21-22; Jer 32:18; Lam 5:7). The consequences of one's sins may affect several generations to come, because his wrong actions will generally affect his family more than any other people. We still suffer certain hardships because of the sins of Adam and Eve. When they sinned, God told the woman, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the

SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

(continued)

ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen 3:16-19). Men and women still bear these things today. Similarly, we all suffer certain consequences of the sins of the people at the time of the Flood. Prior to the flood, there was no rain on the earth (Gen 2:5-6; Heb 11:7). There was a canopy of water vapor above the earth (Gen 1:6-8). This fell to the earth as rain (“the windows of heaven were opened,” Gen 7:11) when Noah and his family were in the ark. Along with this, “all the fountains of the great deep” were broken up. Continents moved, mountain ranges were formed, and the entire climate on earth changed permanently. Ever since the Flood, we have been subject to great thunderstorms, hail, lightning, localized flooding, tornadoes, hurricanes, cyclones and many other kinds of severe weather and “natural disasters.” All of these things came about because of the sins of mankind over 4,000 years ago. But we still suffer for what they did. Murder, stealing, lying, and all other kinds of violence and wickedness “work ill” towards others (Rom 13:8-10).

The guilt of sin in the judgment of God

Ezekiel 18:20 speaks about suffering the *guilt* of sins. Though we suffer because of what others do, we will *never* be charged by God with the guilt of someone else’s sins. There is a difference between someone’s iniquities being visited upon you and bearing their iniquities. Denominations wrongly teach that we all are born stained with the “original sin” of Adam. But Romans 5:12 says that (spiritual) death passed upon all men because all men have sinned, not because Adam did. Paul was born spiritually alive (Rom 7:9). He died (spiritually) when *he* sinned, not when Adam did. Nobody bears the guilt of another’s sin (Deut 24:16; Ezek 18:20). Sin is the transgression of God’s law, not something inherited from someone else (1 John 3:4). 1 John 3:4 shows that sin is *committed* (by breaking God’s law), not inherited. A man is separated from God by his own sins, not someone else’s (Isa 59:2). Depravity and alienation from God comes by one’s own “wicked works,” not from inheriting Adam’s sin (Col 1:21). God will judge every man according to his own works, not someone else’s (Psa 28:4; Prov 24:12; Matt 16:27; John 5:28-29; Rom 2:5-11; 14:11-12; 2 Cor 5:10; 11:15; 2 Tim 4:14; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 2:23; 22:12-13; 22:12). The children will not *bear* the iniquity of the fathers, but the iniquity of the fathers will be *visited* upon the children, even for generations. The former speaks of who will be charged with someone’s sin (Ezek 18:20), and the latter speaks of who will suffer because of someone’s sin (Isa 14:21-22).