

## Sins of the Parents in Rabbinic and Early Christian Literature – Dov Weiss

| 1. Exodus 20: 1-6   | שמות פרק כ   |
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| <p>4) You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, <u>visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me,</u><br/> 5) but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments</p> | <p>(ד) לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם כי אני ייְהוָה<br/> <u>אליהיך אל קנא פְּקֻד עַוֹן אֶבֶת עַל בְּנִים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים</u><br/> <u>ועל רְבָעִים לְשְׁנָאֵב:</u><br/> (ה) ועשה חסד לאלפים לאחבי ולשמר מצוותי: ○<br/> (ו) לא תנסה את שם ייְהוָה אליהיך לשוא כי לא ינקה<br/> <u>יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר יְשָׂא אֶת שְׁמוֹ לְשָׂוא:</u> ○</p> |

| 2. Deuteronomy 24:16  | דברים פרק כד  |
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| <p>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.</p> | <p>(טז) לא יומתו אבות על בנים ובנים לא יומתו על<br/> <u>אבות איש בחטאו יומתו:</u> ○</p> |

### 3. Nag Hammadi Library (Coptic Gnostic Texts) – Testimony of Truth

But what sort is this God? First he envied Adam that he should eat from the Tree of Knowledge. And, secondly, he said: Adam, where are you? And God does not have foreknowledge, that is, since he did not know this from the beginning. [And] afterwards he said “Let us cast him out of this place, lest he eat of the tree of life and live forever.” Surely, he (God) has shown himself to be a malicious envier. And what kind of a God is this? For great is the blindness of those who read, and they did not know it. And he said: “I am the jealous God; I will bring the sins of the fathers upon the children until three and four generations.” [Exodus 20:5]

| 4. Ezekiel 18:1-4, 20   | יחזקאל פרק יח  |
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| <p>1) 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. <u>The person who sins, only he shall die...</u></p> <p>20) The person who sins, he alone shall die. A child shall not share the burden of a parent’s guilt, nor shall a parent share the burden of a child’s guilt; the righteousness of the righteous shall be accounted to him alone, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be accounted to him alone.</p> | <p>(א) ויהי ייְהוָה אלֵי לאמֶר:<br/> (ב) מה לכם משלים את המثل הזה על<br/> <u>אדמת יִשְׂרָאֵל לאמור אבות יאכלו בשר ושני הבנים</u>:<br/> <u>תקהינה:</u><br/> (ג) חי אני נאם אדני ייְהוָה אם יהיה לכם עוד משל<br/> <u>הمثل הזה בישראל:</u><br/> (ד) <u>הן כל הנפשות לי הנה נפש האב וכנפש הבן</u><br/> <u>לי הנה הנפש החטאתי היא תמותה:</u> ○<br/> <br/> (כ) <u>הנפש החטאתי היא תמותה בן לא ישא בעוֹן</u><br/> <u>האב ואב לא ישא בעוֹן הבן צדקת הצדיק עלי</u><br/> <u>תהיה ורשעת &lt;רשע&gt; הרשע עליו תהיה:</u> ○</p> |

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### 5. Philo of Alexandria (*De Sobrietate*, 1:47 and 1:48)

Very appropriately, therefore, the just man [Noah] will appear to have launched his curses against his grandson, Canaan. But I have used the expression "will appear," because in effect he is cursing his son Ham through the medium of Canaan; for Ham being moved to commit sin does himself become Canaan. For there is one subject, namely wickedness, of which one kind is contemplated in a stationary condition, and the other in motion. But a stationary condition is antecedent to motion, so that that which is moved appears to have the relation of offspring to that which is stationary.

In reference to which fact Canaan is, according to the order of nature, described as the son of Ham; commotion as the offspring of tranquility, in order that the statement made in another passage may be true, namely, "visiting the iniquities of the fathers [ἀνομίας πατέρων] upon the sons to the third and fourth generations." [Exodus 20:5.] For against these accomplishments of, and as it were, children of thoughts, punishments advance which await them, but which will hardly seize upon these thoughts which are not carried out by any action, and which consequently escape accusation.

| מגילתא דרבי ישמעאל מסכתא דבחדש פרשה ו [ע"פ מהדורות רבי-הורביז]  | מגילתא דרבי ישמעאל מסכתא דבחדש 6. Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael Bahodeh, 7 according to MS Munich 117   |
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| <p>פוקד עון אבות על בניים. בזמן שאין מסווגין או בזמן שהוא מסווגין, הא כיצד רשאי בן רשע בן רשע...</p> <p><u>רבי נתן</u> אומר, קוצץ בן קוצץ בן קוצץ</p> <p>כיוון ששמע משה את הדבר הזה, ויקד ארצתו וישתחו. אמר, חס ושלום, אין בישראל רשע בן רשע בן רשע</p> | <p><i>Visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children etc. the fourth generation</i> [Exod. 34:7]: During a time when there is no skipping [מסורגין] or a time when there is skipping? According to which side? An evil person [who is] the son of an evil person, who himself is the son of an evil person].</p> <p><u>Rabbi Nathan</u> says: A cutter [who is] the son of a cutter [who is the son of a cutter]. When Moses heard this thing <i>he bowed low to the ground in homage</i> [Exodus 34:8] and said: Holy One, Blessed be He, Heaven forbid! There is not in Israel an evil person the son of an evil person [the son of an evil person].</p> |

| מגילתא דרבי שמעון בר יוחאי פרק כ   | מגילתא דרבי שמעון בר יוחאי פרק כ 7. Mekhilta de Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, ed. Epstein and Melamed (Exodus 20:5)   |
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| <p>פוקד אין פוקד אלא מזכיר וכן הוא אומר וה' פוקד את שרה (בר' כא) ואומ' פוקד פקדתי אתכם (שם' ג טז).</p> | <p>"Poked" means remembers [מצזכיר], and so it says <i>and God remembered Sarah</i> [פקד] (Genesis 21:1) and it says <i>I will surely remember you</i> (Exodus 3:16).</p> |

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| <p>Rabbi Yehuda [the son of Ilai] says: I [God] will collect their sins to my hands and suspend [punishment] until four generations like Jehu the son of Nimshi. And so it says <i>Children until the fourth generation will sit on the throne of Israel</i> (2 Kings 15:12). And it was so.... If the fathers are meritorious then He will suspend for them, and if the fathers are not meritorious than He will not suspend for them</p> | <p><b>ר' יהודה</b> אומר כנוס אני עונותיהם ליד' ותולה אותן עד ארבעה דורות כי הוא בן נמיין וכן הוא אומ' בני רבייעים ישבו לר' על כסא ישראל (מ"ב טו יב) והוא לו כן. .... אם היו אבות זכאי תולה להן ואם לאו אין תולה להן.</p> |
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| 8. Bavli Makot 24A (according to MS Paris 95)   | تلמוד בבל' מסכת מכות דף כד עמוד א [ע"ג]<br>כתב יד פריס 95]  |
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| <p>Rabbi Yossi bar Chaninah said: Four decrees did Moses our teacher decree upon Israel and four prophets came and nullified them... Moses said ‘who visits the iniquity of parents upon children’ (Exodus 34:7), and Ezekiel came and nullified it ‘The person who sins only he shall die’ (Ezekiel 18:4).</p> | <p>א"ר יוסי בר' חנני ארבע גזירות גזר מש' על ישראל ובאו ארבע נביא' וביטלו ... מש' א' פוק' עון ابو בא יחזקאל וביטל' של הנפש החוטא' היא תמות</p> |

| 9. Numbers Rabbah (19:33)   | במדבר רבבה (וילנא) פרשה יט  |
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| <p>Then Moses Sang: This is one of three instances where Moses said something before God and He responded ‘you have taught me something’ ...</p> <p><u>The second instance:</u> When the Holy One blessed be He said to him ‘visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children’ (Exodus 20:6), Moses said “Master of the World, how many evil people give birth to righteous people? Shall they take from the sins of the parents? Terach worshipped idols and Abraham his son was righteous. And also Hezekiah who was righteous and his father Ahaz was a wicked man. And also Josiah was righteous and his father Amon was a wicked man. Is it appropriate that righteous people shall receive lashes for the sins of their parents? <u>God said to him ‘you have taught me something. By your life I will nullify my teaching and establish your word</u> as it says ‘Parents shall not be put to death for children, nor children be put to death for parents’ (Deut. 24:16). And by your life I will write it in your name as it says ‘in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Teaching of Moses...’ (Kings 2 14:6).’</p> | <p>לא ד"א אז ישר ישראל זה אחד מג' דברים שאמר משה לפני הקב"ה וא"ל למדתני, .... השניה כשאמר לו הקב"ה פוקד עון אבות על בניים אמר משה רבש"ע כמה רשעים הולידו צדיקים יהיו נוטלים מעונות אביהם תרה עובד צלמים ואברם בנו צדיק וכן חזקיה צדיק ואחץ אביו רשע וכן יאהו הצדיקים לוקין בעון אביהם אמר לו הקב"ה למדתני, חייר שני אני מבטל דברי ומקיים דבריך שנאמר (דברים כד) לא יומתו אבות על בניים ובנים לא יומתו על אבות, וחיר שני אני כותבן לשמר שנאמר (מ"ב =מלכים ב' יד) כתוב בספר תורה משה אשר צוה ה' וגוי,</p> |

#### 10. Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Exodus*, 8,

Now let us also see what follows, how the “sins of the fathers” are said to be avenged “on the sons in the third and fourth generation.” For the heretics are accustomed to scoff at us on this word because they say it is not a word of the good God which says that one is punished for the sins of another....It remains, therefore, *that we pray that the Lord might show us how these precepts are in harmony with a just and good God.*

#### **11. Ambrosiaster (*Questions on the Old and New Testament*) – Question 14**

Why is it that God, *who is declared just*, promised that he would assign blame for the fathers’ sins to their sons up to the third and fourth generation? *It is insane to doubt that the Lord does or says nothing unjust.* Thus...what is thought to be not just at all [Exodus 20:5] will be considered upright....God indeed bound himself to assign blame for the fathers’ sins to their sons, *but to those who hate him*, that is to those who serve idols, having remained in their fathers’ evils, just as their fathers did. [Emphasis mine]

#### **12. Cyril of Alexandria, Commentary to John 9:2,3**

It is ignorant to suppose that the sins of parents are actually visited upon children and that God’s wrath extends so far that it reaches the third and fourth generation, unjustly punishing the innocent for the sins of others. After all, would not any who are wise have to think, as is fitting, *that the source of righteousness and morality would not do such a shameful thing?* ...It is quite incredible, therefore, and not far from complete idiocy to think that God attributes to himself love and gentleness towards humanity and, at the same time, such immense irrational anger. [Emphasis mine]

#### **13. Augustine of Hippo (354-430)**

[God] said that He would punish the children for the sins of their parents, and by this He showed that He punishes the sins *contracted by birth, not by imitation.* [Augustine, *Incomplete Works against Julian* 3:16, emphasis mine]

When [God] destroyed all the rest except for Noah and his family, he did not separate out the infants who had not yet imitated their parents.... [but] what evil, then, did the little ones do? Was it not on account of the sins of their parents, *sins which they could neither know nor imitate...?* [Augustine, *Incomplete Works against Julian* 3:12, emphasis mine]

Many times God said that He punishes children for the sins of the parents...He wanted us to know that, when this is said, *it is generation, not imitation that is blamed.* And you too could understand this in the words of God if you were not prevented by the Pelagian error. [Augustine, *Incomplete Works against Julian* 3:28, emphasis mine]