

# Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

Vol. XXXVI

March 15, 2026

No. 11

## Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers Upon the Children

(by: Jerry Fite)

**I**n addition to the Ten Commandments, there were sundry laws God laid down to Israelites. Among them: “*The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin*” (Deuteronomy 24:16). The death penalty was clearly connected with sin resulting from breaking God’s Ten Commandments. Personal accountability for one’s own sin is clearly being communicated.

Ezekiel, God’s priestly prophet, emphasizes “*the soul that sinneth 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*” (Ezekiel 18:20). The Calvinist’s doctrine of the depravity of man caused by inheriting Adam’s sin is falsified by the light of Ezekiel’s inspired declaration.

But we cannot ignore what God revealed to Moses when the Law was initially given from Mt. Sanai, and when it was renewed to a new generation, as God’s people prepared to enter and dwell in the promised land of

Canaan. God declares He is a “*...jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the third and upon the fourth generation of them that hate Me...*” (Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 5:9).

After Moses threw down and broke the original tablets containing the Law, he received the renewed tablets. God descended in a cloud proclaiming His name before Moses. While declaring His mercy and forgiveness, the lord adds, “*...and by no means clear the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, upon the third and fourth generation*” (Exodus 34:7).

How do all these passages reveal harmonious Truth regarding the sins of fathers affecting their offspring and not be contradictory to one another? Is God revealing the truth that sins of a father can foster hurtful “consequences” upon the lives of his children without the child being charged with the father’s guilt?

Or does the harmony lie not in the “consequences” of a father’s sin, but in his “influence” upon future generations? Is the eternal and holy God “visiting” the sin of the fathers upon the

third and fourth generation who are now committing the same sin?

Moses warns Israel of the chastisements of disobedience when they would “*pine away in their iniquity in your enemies’ lands; and also in the iniquities of your fathers shall they pine away with them*” (Leviticus 26:39). Their own iniquity is distinguished from the fathers’ while together they would face the punishment of sin in a foreign land.

Ahab, the King of Israel, “did that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah above all that were before him” (1 Kings 16:30). He had Naboth murdered; and followed idols in his twenty-two-year reign. Yet, when Ahab humbled himself, God extended mercy to him: “*I will not bring evil in his days, but in his son’s day will I bring evil upon his house*” (1 Kings 21:29). Israel enjoyed three years without war.

Then, Ahaziah, Ahab’s son, walking in the way of His idolatrous father, suffered the consequences of his own idolatrous ways (cf. 2 Kings 1). God visited (punished) the iniquity of the father (idolatry) upon the next generation (Ahaziah) who walked also in his father’s way, but not because of his father’s guilt!