

The Biblical Foundations of Identificational Repentance as One Prayer Pattern Useful to Advance God's Kingdom and Evangelism

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April 2001

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, the prayer movement undergirding the final thrust of evangelism, especially in the 10/40 window stretching from the Mediterranean countries through East Asia, has grown explosively. The term "identificational repentance" has been heard more and more in prayer conferences, prayer meetings, and outdoor prayer events.

"Identificational Repentance" is a term referring to a type of prayer which identifies with and confesses before God the corporate sins of one's nation, people, church, or family.¹

Such sins often stand in the way of revival, and God seems to move with greater blessing and power to advance the gospel and the cause of Christ where the Body of Christ prays this way. The purpose of such prayer is to open doors for the gospel and allow God to heal the land, according to the promise of **2 Chron. 7:14**, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

2. NOT A NEW INVENTION BUT AN OLD TRUTH

Prayer involving identificational repentance is a practice which is first seen in the Old Testament and which has been revived in the contemporary prayer movement. In Latin

¹ John Dawson, Healing America's Wounds (Ventura: Regal, 1994), p. 15; Cindy Jacobs, Possessing the Gates of the Enemy (Tarrytown, NY: Revell, 1991), pp. 192ff., 236ff.; id., The Voice of God (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1995), pp. 237ff; C. Peter Wagner, Praying with Power (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1997), pp. 95ff.

American, Africa, and Asia, where united prayer among churches and identificational repentance have been employed to advance God's Kingdom, whole communities, cities, and people-groups have been opened up to the gospel. The Holy Spirit's power is being poured out, bringing many to saving faith in Christ and multiplying healing, signs, and wonders, which show the grace and power of Jesus as Lord.²

George Otis Jr., who has studied the spiritual transformation of cities around the world through revival and persevering prayer by the churches in those cities, says that identificational repentance prayer is typically one important aspect of the prayer and intercession that resulted in God bringing revival and publicly documented transformation to communities, cities, and people groups:

Latter –stage [spiritual] beachheads [of intercession for a community] . . . are nearly always characterized by intense groundswells of corporate repentance, social reconciliation and united prayer.³

For some time now, we have been hearing reports of large-scale conversions in places like China, Argentina, Nepal. In many instances, these conversions have been attended by widespread healings, dreams and deliverances. Confronted with these demonstrations of divine power and concern, thousands of men and women have elected to embrace the truth of the gospel. In a growing number of towns and cities, God's house is suddenly the place to be. In some communities around the world, this rapid church growth has also led to dramatic sociopolitical transformation. Depressed economies, high crime rates and corrupt political structures are being replaced by institutional integrity, safe streets and financial prosperity. . . . At least a dozen case studies have been documented in recent years, and it is likely that others have gone unreported. Of those on file, most are located in Africa and the Americas. The size of these changed communities ranges from about 15,000 inhabitants to nearly 2 million.⁴

² Wagner, Praying with Power, pp. 95-116; George Otis, Informed Intercession (Ventura, CA: Renew, 1999), pp. 15-53, 63, 94; id., The Twilight Labyrinth (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), pp. 284-287, 290.

³ Otis, Informed Intercession, p. 63.

⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

Otis describes such spiritual and social transformation in communities, cities, and people-groups like the following:⁵

Mizoram, India (a state in northeastern India) where 80-95% of the population are born-again believers, and where there are no homeless people, no beggars, no starvation, and 100% literacy;

Almolonga, Guatemala in central America, where over the last 20 years evangelism, persevering intercession, and corporate and personal repentance have changed this community of 19,000 Mayan people from its former state of widespread poverty, violence, drunkenness, alcoholism, idolatry to Mayan patron spirits, and persecution of evangelical Christians to a transformed community where 85% of the community are now born-again believers, there are over 20 churches in the community, there have been dramatic decreases in crime and drunkenness and a dramatic increase in the agricultural productivity of the land.

The Nigerian Umuofai kindred (clan) and their several villages in southeastern Nigeria where five years ago there used to be almost no born-again believers, and there was widespread, divination, sorcery, idolatry, and ancestor worship; the Umuofai clan have become a transformed community of villages today after intercession, evangelism, and corporate repentance and breaking ties with ancestral spirit-worship; the overwhelming majority of the Umuofai clan are born again believers today, including thousands of Umuofai youth that recently filled the traditional Anglican church in the town of Umuahia to learn more about Jesus;

Hemet, California, a city, which used to be a cult-haven (Moonies, Mormons, Scientology, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi), a center of witchcraft, gang violence, and illegal methamphetamine drug protection, has been transformed over the last decade by persevering united prayer, corporate repentance, and evangelism by local churches; today churches are growing through new conversions, gang members are getting saved, church attendance is double what it was a decade ago, most cults have left town and cult membership has decreased to 0.3% of the population, the illegal drug business has dropped by 75%, and Christians representation has increased dramatically in city government, the police, and in the public school system.

Cali, Colombia, which used to be ruled by violence and drug lords, and where now over 50,000 believers gather in the soccer stadium for quarterly all-night

⁵ Ibid., pp. 15-53.

worship and prayer for their city, the churches have grown dramatically through new conversions, crime and violence have fallen, and the social, political levels of the community have been transformed by the revival of the last six years.

Kiambu, Kenya, 14 kilometers northwest of Nairobi, which used to be a “ministry grave-yard,” a center of witchcraft, alcoholism, violence, and poverty; now after over a decade of intercession, corporate repentance, and evangelism, the town has been transformed spiritually, church growth through new conversion has increased dramatically, it has one of the lowest crime rates in Kenya, rape and murder are virtually unheard of, the economy has started to grow, and new buildings are being constructed throughout the town.

Vitória da Conquista, Brazil, in Brazil's Bahia state; six years ago this city used to be oppressed with extreme poverty, violence, and corruption, and the churches were very divided; after persevering intercession, corporate repentance by local pastors and churches, and evangelism, churches grew dramatically through new conversion growth, the crime rate dropped dramatically, the city elected a born-again mayor in 1997, and the city's economy rebounded significantly.

San Nicolas, Argentina used to be an economically depressed community with much division among churches and the pastors of the city; over the last six years, pastors have repented of the division in the churches of the city, and after much intercession, prayer-walks throughout the community, corporate repentance, and evangelism, churches are growing dramatically through new conversions, the Catholic bishop of the city is preaching Christ and coming to the pastors' prayer meetings, the mayor has created space for pastors to pray in the city hall, local newspapers print Christian literature, and the city's TV station invites pastors onto live talk shows to pray for the people of the city.

Otis concludes that “in other parts of the world God has been at work in *villages* (Navapur, India; Serawak, Malaysia [the Selakau people]; and the North American Artic), *urban neighborhoods* (Guatemala City; Sao Paolo, Brazil; Resistencia, Argentina; Guayaquil, Ecuador), and even *countries* (Uganda). The United States has witnessed God's special touch in places as far-flung as New York City (Times Square); Modesto, California; and Pensacola, Florida.”⁶

2.1 Identificational Repentance in Historic Denominational Traditions. Identificational repentance is not a new kind of prayer never before seen in the Church, as some suggest.

⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

For example, corporate confession of sin is a well established category, distinct from individual confession of sin, going back almost 500 years in the worship tradition of the Anglican Church. In the *Book of Common Prayer 1559 (the Elizabethan Prayer Book)*, for example, we find the following prayer:

Remember not Lord our iniquities, nor the iniquities of our forefathers. Spare us good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us forever. Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us.⁷

The 1789 ratified *Book of Common Prayer* of the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. includes the Psalter to be used for congregational prayers. The Psalms designated for morning and evening prayers, for example, specify on the twenty-first day of evening prayer the reading of **Psalm 106** which includes a corporate prayer confessing generational sin, **Psalm 106:6**, "We have sinned as our forebears did; we have done wrong and dealt wickedly."⁸ The introduction to the collection of Psalms for daily prayers explains that "the Psalter is a body of liturgical poetry. It is designed for vocal, congregational use, whether by singing or reading."⁹ And the *Book of Occasional Services* of the Episcopal Church, U.S.A., contains a prayer of corporate confession of generational sin:

Teach your Church, O Lord, to mourn the sins of which it is guilty, and to repent and forsake them; that, by your pardoning grace, the results of our iniquities may not be visited upon our children and our children's children; through Jesus Christ our Lord; Amen.¹⁰

Colin Dunlop, former Dean of Lincoln, articulates the nature of corporate identity and confession in Anglican worship with these words:

⁷ J. E. Booty, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer 1559: the Elizabethan Prayer Book* (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), p. 300 (part of "The Order for the Visitation of the Sick").

⁸ C. M. Guilbert, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer* (1789 Ratified Version of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.; New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1979), p. 742.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 582.

¹⁰ The Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., *The Book of Occasional Services* (New York: Church Hymnal Corp., 1979), p. 64 (Eighth Station of the Cross in the Service of the Way of the Cross).

We make our confession as members of the Church, "members one of another." We confess not only our own private sins, but . . . our share in that whole aggregate of sin which all but crushed our Master in the Garden of Gethsemane.¹¹

The psalms are the praise of Christ in His Church, or of the Church in Christ. They are not an individual's prayer, but the prayer of the whole Body; they are the very stuff of what we prosaically call "corporate worship."¹²

Another example of mainline denominational corporate confession comes from the German Lutheran Church. At the end of World War II, in October 1945, the newly formed United Evangelical Lutheran Church, under the influence of one of its leaders, the prominent anti-Nazi theologian and pastor, Rev. Dr. Martin Niemöller, who had resisted the Nazis alongside the famous Christian martyr, Rev. Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, issued the Stuttgart Confession of Guilt (Stuttgarter Schulderklärung). In the Stuttgart Confession, the German Lutheran church identified with and confessed the corporate guilt of the German people for the widespread suffering perpetrated by the former Nazi government with words like the following:

With great pain we say: Through us unending suffering has been brought upon many nations and countries. . . . Now a new beginning should be made in our churches.¹³

Apparently the Lutheran denominational leadership felt such identificational repentance was in keeping with their theological understanding of Christian confession. This kind of corporate confession of national guilt has been articulated and discussed over the past

¹¹ C. Dunlop, Anglican Public Worship (London: SCM Press, 1953), p. 95.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

¹³ "Mit grossem Schmerz sagen wir: Durch uns ist unendliches Leid über viele Völker und Länder gebracht worden. . . . Nun soll in unseren Kirchen ein neuer Anfang gemacht werden." Cited by M. Honecker, "Individuelle Schuld und Kollektive Verantwortung: Können Kollektive Sündigen? (Individual Guilt and Corporate Responsibility: Can Corporate Entities Sin?)," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 90 (1993): 217; *id.*, "Geschichtliche Schuld und Kirchliches Bekenntnis (Historical Guilt and Ecclesiastical Confession)," Theologische Zeitschrift 42 (1986): 132-158; G. Besier and G. Sauter, Wie Christen Ihre Schuld Bekennen. Die Stuttgarter Erklärung (How Christians Confess Their Guilt. The Stuttgart Confession), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 1985.

decades by German theologians like Dr. Martin Honecker and Dr. Gerhard Besier,¹⁴ as well as by German New Testament scholars like Dr. Bertold Klappert of the University of Göttingen.¹⁵

3. IDENTIFICATIONAL REPENTANCE IN RECENT EVANGELICAL TEACHING

Thus, identificational repentance is really not a new practice in the Christian Church. Over the past decade many Evangelical Christian leaders have revived the practice of prayer with corporate confession of corporate and generational sin at the family level, as well as at the level of city, people, and nation.¹⁶ All these leaders to one degree or another have taught or advocated the Old Testament model of corporate confession. On a personal level this means confessing and, in whatever way God's Spirit leads, repenting of the sins of one's parents and ancestors. On a national level this means the church identifying with the nation as a "royal priesthood" (**1 Pet. 2:9**), confessing the sins of the nation, repenting of those sins in whatever way God's Spirit leads, and asking God to heal our nation (**2 Chron. 7:14**) and turn it to Christ.

4. QUESTIONS AND CONTROVERSY

Prayer involving identificational repentance or confession of corporate sin has been questioned by certain evangelicals who consider it at best to be controversial and at worst to be unsupported in the New Testament. I would like to address the principle objections to identificational repentance, that I am aware of, and I would like to offer the core of the biblical evidence that I believe supports and instructs the Church to pray this way, as we attempt to complete the Great Commission and draw nearer to the end of the ages, which Jesus foretold in **Mat. 24:14**.

¹⁴ See references in the previous note.

¹⁵ B. Klappert, *Bekennende Kirche in Ökumenischer Verantwortung* (The Confessing Church in Ecumenical Responsibility), Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1988.

¹⁶ Cindy Jacobs (*Possessing the Gates of the Enemy*, pp. 192ff., 236ff.; *The Voice of God*, pp. 237ff.); John Dawson (*Taking Our Cities for God*, pp. 19ff.; *Healing America's Wounds*, pp. 15ff); Bob Beckett (in C. P. Wagner, *Breaking Strongholds in Your City*, pp. 160-162); Dr. C. Peter Wagner (*Confronting the Powers*, p. 260); Dr. Ed Murphy (*Handbook for Spiritual Warfare*, pp. 437-438); Dr. Neil T. Anderson (*Bondage Breaker*, p. 201); Dr. Charles H. Kraft (*Defeating Dark Angels*, pp. 74-75); Francis Frangipane (*The Divine Antidote*, pp. 68-69); and Tom White (*Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, p. 150).

4.1 Is The Old Testament Relevant to New Testament Faith? Many evangelicals who oppose identificational repentance prayer have unfortunately displayed the attitude that the Old Testament is basically irrelevant to New Testament faith. Such a view hardly reflects the attitude of Jesus, the apostles, and the early church toward the Old Testament, which was their Bible. We should be careful not to hold such a view either. I agree with the well-known evangelical, British New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce:

Some readers even today find difficulties in the acceptance of the Old Testament as part of the Church's canon. *The Old Testament was the Bible of our Lord and His apostles*, and its authority was fully acknowledged by them. . . . *The Old and New Testaments, in fact, cannot be dissociated. . . . We cannot understand the New apart from the Old.* The Old Testament is to the New as the root is to the fruit. It is a grave mistake to think that the fruit of the Spirit in Christianity will grow and ripen better if the plant is severed from its roots in the Old Covenant.¹⁷ [italics mine]

If we strive to be good scholars and students of the biblical text we must account for *all* the relevant evidence (or at least try), not simply marshal the evidence which looks like it supports our position and disregard the rest. (Where I may do this, I am glad to be corrected.) We must try to reflect accurately the varying levels of ambiguity or clarity in the evidence itself. And, *most importantly*, we don't want to be like the Pharisees who studied Scripture but refused to turn to God and listen to His voice in the process and ended up way off track (**John 5:37-40**). We must ask the Lord how *He* wants us to understand the evidence and what *He* wants the church to do with it (**James 1:4-7; John 5:37-40; 6:45; 7:17**):

John 5:37-40—“And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. *You have never heard his voice* nor seen his form, nor

¹⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1950), pp. 81-82; for similar remarks, see B. W. Anderson, *The Old and New Testaments: Their Relationship and the “Intertestamental” Literature*, edited by J. H. Charlesworth and W. P. Weaver (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1993), pp. 20-21: “For many Christians today . . . the Bible is the New Testament for all practical purposes. . . . This negative view of the Scriptures of Israel contrasts with the positive attitude of the early Christian community. The only Bible those early Christians had was the one shared in common with the Jewish community. . . . Whenever the word “scripture/s” (*graphe, graphai*) appears in the New Testament, the reference is almost always to the Jewish Bible.”

does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You *diligently study the Scriptures* because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, *yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*"

5. THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHES US TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF THE PROPHETS

All Old Testament prophets were also intercessors:¹⁸ **Gen. 18:16-26; 20:7, 17-18 [Ps. 105:5-15]; Exo. 8:28-32; 9:27-30; 10:16-18; 32:1-34; 34:8ff; Num. 11:2; 14:13-22; Deut. 9:8-12, 18-21, 25-29 [Ps. 196:19-23]; Jos. 5:13—6:1ff.; 1 Sam. 7:1-11; 12:23; 1 Kgs. 13:6; 17: 20-21; 18:1, 36-46 [Jas. 5:13-18]; 2 Kgs. 4:33-34; 19:3-4; Amos 7:18ff.; Hab. 1:2-4, 12-17; 3:2ff.; Jer. 14:7-9, 10-12, 13, 14-18, 20-22; 18:18-20; 27:16-18; 29:7; 37:1-10; 42:2ff; Ezek. 9:8; 11:13; 22:29-30; Dan. 2:17-19, 28; 6:10; 9:1-8; 10:1-6.** The previous passages show that God called the prophets to prophesy to and pray for God's people and the nations surrounding God's people. Prophetic ministry and intercession overlapped in the lives of the prophets. The place of intercession was the place of receiving prophetic words from God.¹⁹

The New Testament teaches us to follow the example of the prophets in prayer and persevering through suffering in **Matt. 5:12** (cf. **23:31-35**); **Heb. 11:32-38**; and **Jas. 5:10-18**. In the latter passage, Elijah and Job are examples of perseverance and believing prayer—**James 5:10, 17** "Brothers, as an example of patience in suffering, take the

¹⁸ On the function of prophets as intercessors see P. D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), pp. 262ff.; Y. Muffs, "Reflections on Prophetic Prayer in the Bible," *Eretz Israel* 14 (1978): 48-54 [Hebrew]; id., "Who Will Stand in the Breach?: A Study of Prophetic Intercession," in id., *Love and Joy: Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), pp. 9-48; R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 151, 156, 162-166, 178-179, 203-204, 238-241, 267, 283-284; S. E. Balentine, "The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 161-173; "E. Jacob, "Prophetes et intercesseurs," in J. Dore, et al., eds., *De la Tôrah au Messie: Études . . . à Henri Cazelles* (Paris: Desclée, 1981), pp. 205-217; ; H. G. Reventlow, *Gebet im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1986), pp. 228-246.

¹⁹ Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, p. 263: "While it is a commonplace to speak of the prophets as messengers and announcers of God's word of judgment or salvation, their mediatorial function worked both ways. They were spokespersons to God in behalf of the people and prayed for God's mercy upon them as well as God's healing upon individuals."

prophets. . . . Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain. . . .” As New Testament professor Gerhard Friedrich said, “The prophets . . . are thus a model for the [New Testament] community, James 5:10; cf. Heb. 11:23-38.”²⁰ This explains why in **Mark 6:35-43** God the Father led Jesus to multiply loaves of bread, just like the prophet, Elisha, did in **2 Kings 4:42-44**. And it explains why in **Acts 20:10** God led Paul to fall upon and embrace Eutychus to bring him back to life, after Eutychus had fallen to his death, just as Elijah and Elisha had done to bring dead boys back to life in **1 Kings 17:21** and **2 Kings 4:34-35**.

We will see below that one of the types of prayers the prophets prayed was identificational repentance prayer, confessing the corporate sins of God's people. If the prophets are examples to New Testament believers, as the New Testament teaches, then we should follow their example in praying identificational repentance prayer as one of the types of prayers God wants us to pray to advance His Kingdom and the spread of the gospel to every nation and people-group.

6. INIQUITY, FORGIVENESS, AND CORPORATE IDENTITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew language distinguishes between "sin" and "iniquity." In Hebrew, the synonyms "sin" (**ḥēṭ** pronounced *khet*, **ḥattāt** pronounced *khatat*) and “transgression” (**pešaʿ** pronounced *pesha*) refer to the act of sin, and the word "iniquity" (**ʿāwōn** pronounced *avon*) refers to the act of sin as well as the associated guilt and consequences of sin.²¹

The biblical model of receiving God's forgiveness of sin is illustrated in passages like **Proverbs 28:13**—“He who conceals his sin will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes it finds mercy.” God's forgiveness of sin comes through our confessing our specific sins and choosing to repent of them.

²⁰ G. Friedrich in G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [hereafter *TDNT*] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-74), vol. 6, p. 835.

²¹ F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1951), pp. 730-731. "Punishment" is a secondary, not primary, meaning of **ʿāwōn**; the secondary meaning "punishment" was disputed in the past by various scholars such as Siegfried, Stade, and Buhl, who claimed that in the passages in question, **ʿāwōn** should be translated with its primary meaning, "iniquity, sin" or "sin-guilt" rather than with the secondary sense of "punishment" (Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 731).

The Old Testament shows that sin and guilt may have not only a personal nature but also a corporate nature. Corporate sin and iniquity may stretch horizontally across a clan, a family, or a nation or it may stretch vertically across several generations of a clan, a family, or a nation.²² This view of corporate identity in the Old Testament has been described by Pedersen as follows: “Man is only what he is as a link in the family.”²³ Robertson Smith described corporate identity as follows:

A kin was a group of persons whose lives were so bound up together, in what must be called a physical unity, that they could be treated as parts of one common life. The members of one kindred looked on themselves as one living whole, a single animated mass of blood, flesh and bones, of which no member could be touched without all the members suffering.²⁴

This explains why in **Psalm 81**, for example, Asaph, who wrote this psalm several generations after the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, can say “Egypt, where *WE* heard a language *WE* did not understand” (**Ps. 81:5**). Throughout the book of Deuteronomy, Moses is addressing the second generation, whose parents had all perished in the wilderness and who were about to enter the Promised Land (**Deut. 1:39; Num. 14:22-24, 29-33; 26:63-65**). And yet Moses includes them when he describes the sins of their parents in making the golden calf:

Deut 9:16—“ When I looked, I saw that *YOU* had sinned against the LORD your God; *YOU* had made for *YOURSELVES* an idol cast in the shape of a calf. *YOU* had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded *YOU*.”

Even though corporate identity is very pronounced in passages like these, the Old Testament also has a strong undercurrent of passages showing individual identity coexisting alongside corporate identity in creative tension or balance (e.g., **Deut. 29:18-**

²²See the studies of J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, JSOT supplement 196, Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995; P. Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, JSOT suppl. 51; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989; H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964.

²³J. Pedersen, *Israel: its Life and Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 462.

²⁴W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (London: A. and C. Black, 1894), pp. 273-274.

21 [individual responsibility]; **29:25-28** [corporate responsibility]). Discussing **Exodus 20-23**, J. R. Porter says, "The idea of individual responsibility, as far as the law is concerned, is seen to be at least as primary and as early as group responsibility, and this, not only in Israel, but throughout the entire Semitic world."²⁵

We must emphasize the reality of corporate identity, which the Old Testament and the New Testament both bear witness to (see below), because many evangelicals today in western countries have so emphasized individual identity before God that they have forgotten that according to the witness of Scripture, God sees us not simply as individuals but also as families, cities, people-groups, and nations, and He expects us to act accordingly.

7. WHAT DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT SAY ABOUT GENERATIONAL SIN?

A number of passages throughout the Old Testament describe how the Lord transfers the iniquity of parents onto children: **Exo. 20:5; 34:7; Lev. 18:25; Num. 14:18, 33; Deut. 5:9; 7:10; Isa. 65:6-7; Jer. 32:18; cf. Job 21:19; Ps. 79:8; 109:14-16.**

According to **Exodus 34:5-7**, the corporate effects of sin and the transferring of iniquity from one generation to the next are tied to God's very own character of holiness and mercy. When Moses asked to see the Lord's glory in **Exo 33:18**, The Lord came down in a cloud in **Exodus 34** and showed Moses the back side of His glory. Then the Lord explained His glory by proclaiming His name, Yahweh (the Lord), and describing to Moses His core nature of compassion and holiness. The heart of God's character is that He shows compassion and love toward thousands of generations of those who love Him, but His holiness causes Him to visit the iniquity of parents upon their descendants to the third and fourth generation of those who hate him. **Exodus 34:7** states the principle that parental sin patterns and sin guilt (Hebrew **āwōn** pronounced *avon*, "iniquity, [state of] guilt")²⁶ will be "visited upon," "assigned to," "associated with" or "appointed (to be) upon" (Heb. **pāqād** pronounced *paqad* "visit, assign, appoint")²⁷ the children:²⁸

²⁵ J. R. Porter, "The Legal Aspects of the Concept of 'Corporate Personality' in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965), p. 365.

²⁶ See note 21 above.

²⁷ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 823; Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon*, 3: 900-901: "direct, assign" (anweisen), "appoint" (bestellen zu), "set over" (setzen über), "deposit" (hinterlegen); M. Buber and F. Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift* (Köln, 1954-62)

Exo 34:5-7 “Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and *proclaimed his name, the LORD*. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he *appoints the iniquity of the fathers (to be) upon the sons and upon the grandsons* to the third and fourth generation.”

7.1 God’s Mercy Deferring Full Judgment for Sin. Reflecting on how such a divine action could be related to God’s compassion, some scholars suggest that such transference of iniquity and guilt and the deferring of full judgment from one generation to the next are actually an expression of God's mercy. Since one generation did not overcome certain sins, full judgment would be deferred and the next generation would have a chance to confront the same temptations and to choose to repent, turn to God, and escape God's full judgment for the same sins.²⁹ It is as if God is looking for the generation that will stand up and say “No more! The sins of our parents and ancestors will stop here. We will not walk in these sins, and we will turn away from them and turn back to the Lord.”

Exodus 34:5-7 clearly shows that the transferring of generational iniquity from one generation to the next is connected to God’s fundamental character of compassion and holiness. How often does God’s fundamental character change? The following passages say never:

Ps. 102:27—“You *remain the same*, and your years will never end.”

sub Deut. 5:9 translates the verb with German "zuordnen" [assign to, appoint to, coordinate with, associate with] (cited by M. Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 1-11 (Anchor Bible, New York: Doubleday, 1991), p. 278. See the Septuagint evidence cited at note 36 below and B. Grossfeld, "The Translation of Biblical Hebrew *pqd*," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 96 (1984): p. 87 and n. 18; H. Fürst, Die göttliche Heimsuchung (Rome: Pontificum athenaeum Antonianum, 1965), pp. 15-17.

²⁸ S. J. De Vries, "Sin, sinners," Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, ed., G. Buttrick et al. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1962), p. 365.

²⁹ J. S. Kaminsky, Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible, p. 136, n. 56: "There is evidence that the transference of punishment may have been a sign of God's mercy upon the sinner, rather than God's unfair behavior toward the children of the sinner"; Y. Muffs, "Reflections on Prophetic Prayer in the Hebrew Bible," Eretz Israel 14 (1978), p. 52 [Heb.]: "Visiting the sins of the fathers on the sons [Exo. 34:7] is a matter of mercy and not an absolute obligation." Muffs refers to narrative examples of mercy through deferred judgment in 1 Kings 11:11-13; 21:27-29; 2 Kings 20:17-18; 22:16-20.

Mal. 3:6—"I the LORD *do not change*."

Heb. 13:8—"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

Jas 1:17—"the Father of the heavenly lights, who *does not change* like shifting shadows."

7.2 The Passages and Hebrew Verbs Describing Generational Sin. The principle of generational sin—the vertical cycling of corporate sin, guilt, and bondage from generation to generation—is clearly described across the range of Old Testament passages mentioned above (**Exo. 34:7; Lev. 18:25; Num. 14:18, 33; Deut. 5:9; 7:10; Isa. 65:6-7; Jer. 32:18; cf. Job 21:19; Ps. 79:8; 109:14-16**). The second commandment of the Decalogue **Exodus 20:5** also connects the generational cycling of sin to God's own character, as **Exodus 34:7** does.

Exo. 20: 4-6--"You shall not make for yourself an idol . . . You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God, am a jealous God, *appointing the iniquity of fathers (to be) upon the sons to the third and fourth generation* of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

The Hebrew word **pāqād** denoting "visiting, assigning, appointing" in **Exo. 20:5, 34:7, Lev. 18:25, and Num. 14:18**, cannot simply denote mere cognitive acknowledgment, "taking note of" or "paying attention to (the iniquity of the fathers with regard to the children)"--both meanings being well-attested connotations of Heb. **pāqād**. This is so because the same theme found in these passages is restated in **Deut. 7:10, Isa. 65:6-7, and Jer. 32:18** with *other* Hebrew verbs denoting the *transferring or returning* of iniquity from the fathers to the sons--verbs such as Hebrew **šillam** (pronounced *shillam*) "repay, return (the iniquity of the fathers upon the sons)," and Hebrew **mādad** (pronounced *madad*) "measure, measure out"³⁰ (the iniquity of the fathers onto the sons)." For example:

Isa. 65:6-7--"I will not keep silent but will *repay*, I will *repay* fully (Heb. **šillam** "return, repay")"³¹ onto their bosom both their iniquities and

³⁰ Ruth 3:15; Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon, p. 551.

³¹ Brown, Driver, Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon, p. 1022.

the iniquities of their fathers. . . . and I will *measure out* (Heb. **māḏad** "measure, measure out,³² apportion³³")³⁴ their earlier deeds onto their bosom."

Jer. 32:18--"Showing love to thousands but repaying (Heb. **šillam** "return, repay")³⁵ the iniquity of the fathers to the bosom of their sons."

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament dating from the third century to the second century B.C., corroborates this fact. The Septuagint consistently translates Heb. **pāqad** in these passages with Greek verbs that denote *transferring* the iniquity—the state of sin and sin-guilt³⁶—from one generation to the next: The Septuagint translates Heb. **pāqad** "visit, appoint" in **Exo. 20:5**, **Deut. 5:9**, and **Num. 14:18** with Greek **apodidōmi** "give back, return, repay," hence, "*returning* the sins of the fathers *on* the children"; it uses Greek **epagō** "bring upon, bring on" in **Exo. 34:7** "*bringing* the transgression of the fathers *upon* the children"; it uses Greek **antapodidōmi** "give back, return" in **Lev. 18:25** "I have *returned* (their) wickedness to them (i.e., successive generations of Canaanites before Israel's conquest of Canaan)." Similarly, the Syriac Peshitta renders **Exo. 20:5** and **Deut. 5:9** with *pr* "repay."³⁷

The Hebrew of **Exo. 34:7** and its parallel passages does not say that children will be *punished* for the sins of their parents, as some translations (e.g., NIV) suggest, but that the parents' iniquity (the broader range of the sin *and* the state of sin-guilt) will be "visited upon," "assigned," or "appointed (to be)" upon the children, according to **Exo. 20:5; 34:7; Lev. 18:25; Num. 14:18; and Deut. 5:9**, or "returned" upon, "repaid" to, or "measured out" upon the children according to **Isa. 65:6-7; and Jer. 32:18**.

Thus, **Exodus 34:7** and its parallel passages clearly speak of the Lord returning (or appointing) the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. This implies that children will be

³² Ruth 3:15.

³³ 2 Sam. 8:2.

³⁴ Brown, Driver, Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon, p. 551.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1022.

³⁶ See note 21 above.

³⁷ B. Grossfeld, "Biblical Hebrew *pqd*," Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 96 (1984): 95.

particularly influenced by and challenged by the sin-weaknesses and sin-tendencies of their parents along with any accompanying spiritual bondage (spiritual bondage is explicitly referred to in **Hos. 4:12-13**: see below). The implicit challenge to the children in these passages (made explicit in **Ezek. 18:19-20** and **Jer. 31:29-30** which will be discussed below) is to *repent* and *make a break with* parental and generational sin rather than continue in it.

8. GENERATIONAL INIQUITY BECOMING ENTRENCHED IN THE CHILDREN

Children may still be affected by but *not punished for* their parents' sins and iniquities. Even common sense suggests that just as we may inherit physical weaknesses from our parents--such as tendencies toward alcoholism, cancer, high cholesterol, etc.--so we may also inherit spiritual weaknesses and tendencies toward certain sins such as anger, lust, criticism, greed, idolatry, or occultism.

According to passages like **Lamentations 5:7, 16**, and **Psalms 106:6** the cycling of generational sin becomes entrenched individually and nationally as children enter into and commit the same sins as their *parents* or *past leaders* (see also **Ps. 79:8**; **2 Kings 17:14, 22-23; 23:36-37; 24:1-4**):

Lam. 5:7, 16--"Our fathers have sinned and are no more, and we bear their iniquity. . . . Woe to us for we have sinned."

Ps. 106:6--"We have sinned, even as our fathers did (Heb. literally, "we have sinned *together with* our fathers"); we have done wrong and acted wickedly."

Exodus 34:7, Deut. 5:9, and **Exo. 20:5** already allude to this. Parents' iniquity is visited upon generations that "hate" the Lord--upon the children of parents who persist in sin against the Lord and upon children who continue in their parents sinful ways.³⁸

Demonic oppression may also be passed down to succeeding generations according to the context of **Exo. 20:5** and **Hos. 4:12-13**. The generational sin principle in **Exo. 20:5** and its parallel passage, **Deut 5:9**, is found in the context of the second of the Ten

³⁸ M. Noth, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), p. 163; J. Scharbert, *Biblische Zeitschrift* 4 (1960): 219; Keil and Delitzsch, I, pp. 117-118; E. W. Hengstenberg, *Die Authentie des Pentateuchs*, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1836-39), p. 448: "The threatening is directed against those who tread in their father's footsteps."

Commandments prohibiting idolatry. Passages like **Ps. 106:36-37** and **Hos. 4:12-13** (also **Deut. 32:16-17** and the Hebrew of **Lev. 17:7; 20:5**) make it clear that the ancient Israelites understood demons and demonic influence were involved in idolatry and the worship of foreign gods.³⁹

Hosea 4 contains an indictment oracle in which Hosea is prophetically reflecting on the Ten Commandments. **Hosea 4:2** explicitly mentions the sixth through the ninth commandments—murder, adultery, stealing, and lying. **Hosea 4:12-13** is a prophetic reflection on the the second commandment prohibiting idolatry in **Exo 20:5** and **Deut 5:9** and the statement in this commandment that the iniquity of the fathers will be transferred to the sons. Hosea mentions a demonic spirit related to parental iniquity affecting the children:

Hos. 4:12-13--"They consult a wooden *idol* and are answered by a stick of wood. A *spirit of prostitution* (Heb. **רֹאֵה זְנוּנִים** pronounced *ruakh zenunim*)⁴⁰ leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant. *Therefore your daughters turn to prostitution and your daughters-in-law to adultery.*"

The "spirit of prostitution" is a personal demonic spirit, since the text clearly states that the wooden idol with which it is associated "answers" those who consult the idol. This refers to the common ancient Near Eastern phenomenon of demonic gods giving prophetic oracles in answer to the questions of worshipers as in **2 Kgs. 1:2** and **Isa. 19:3** (cf. **1 Sam. 28:8**).⁴¹

³⁹ H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 60-150* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1989), p. 321; F. Stolz, *Strukturen und Figuren im Kult von Jerusalem* (BZAW 118; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1970), p. 206; A. Bertholet, *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments*, vol. 2 (Tübingen : J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1911), pp. 385ff.; B. Duhm, *Die bösen Geister im Alten Testament* (Tübingen : J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1904), p. 21; A. Jirku, *Die Dämonen und ihre Abwehr im Alten Testament*, Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1912; H. Kaupel *Die Dämonen im Alten Testament*, Augsburg: Benno Filser, 1930.

⁴⁰ Hardly just an inner attitude, since the theme of spiritual prostitution and idolatry elsewhere clearly refers to involvement with personal evil spirits and demonic deities (**Lev. 17:7; 20:5, 6; Nu. 25:1-3; Ps. 106:28, 36-39**; see references in the previous note), and since the idol in this passage "answers" (*yaggid* Hos. 4:12) its worshipers.

⁴¹ J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1969), pp. 29-31.

A clear cause-effect relationship is asserted by Hosea between the sin of the parents—idolatry ("a wooden idol" **Hos. 4:12a**)—and the demonic spirit related to the parents' sin—a "spirit of prostitution" (**Hos. 4:12b**)—and the resulting move of the next generation ("daughters, daughters-in-law" **Hos. 4:13**) into the same sin and a related sin (cultic "prostitution" and "adultery" **Hos. 4:13**).

The implications are clear: the cause of the younger generation walking into the sin of adultery and prostitution is not only the *parents' sin of idolatry* but *also* the *demonic "spirit of prostitution"* related to the parents' sin. (Similarly in the New Testament, Paul lists a number of sins in **Ephesians 4**, chief among which is anger, which give the devil and demonic forces a "foothold"—**Eph. 4:27** and context.) **Hos. 4:12-13** suggests that not only are children vulnerable to special oppression from parental and ancestral sin patterns and weaknesses but they may also be tempted or oppressed by demonic spirits related to parental and ancestral sin.⁴² The passage also suggests that the overall effect of such oppression is to push children into the same or related sins as were found in their parents' lives.

A student I'll call Sarah from Dallas, Texas, and her husband came to my office one day. In the course of our conversation, they said they wanted prayer for struggles in her life and her husband's life. When she was very young, her father, who was a practicing homosexual took his own life when Sarah was very young. After his death, Sarah still remembers, as a young girl about five years old, that, in her words, "A spirit would come into my room and talk to me and say things like, 'You are a lesbian. You like women.'" She prayed with her husband asking God to forgive the sin of sexual promiscuity and homosexuality in her father's life and anywhere else in her family's past. She followed **James 4:7-8** literally, submitted herself to God in prayer, declared her intention to make a break with the past, not to walk in the sins of her father, and thereby not to allow any more oppression in her life or her children's lives. She then resisted satan commanding satanic forces of homosexuality and sexual promiscuity to leave her and her family (**Jas. 4:7; Mat. 4:10; 16:23**).

⁴² Demonic spirits which follow family sins through successive generations have been called "familiar spirits" by some in deliverance ministry. But these sorts of generational spirits are clearly not to be identified with Hebrew **רוח** "familiar spirit, medium, spiritist" which denotes a "familiar spirit" of the dead or a "medium / spiritist" who seeks revelation from demonic spirits masquerading as the spirit of a dead person (e.g., **1 Sam. 28:8-9**). Being oppressed or specially tempted by generational spirits related to generational sin is *not* the same as being a medium or spiritist who seeks demonic spirits "of the dead" for revelation and fortune telling.

I could give dozens more examples like Sarah's experience where satan was able apparently to exert greater than usual influence on children in the areas in which particular sins had become entrenched in their parents' lives or in their family lines. **Hos. 4:12-13** shows that satan's goal is to try to move the children into the same types of sins that their parents succumbed to and practiced. The cycle is not stopped until someone like Sarah says enough is enough, makes a break with the past, and resolves before the Lord to resist the devil and live a new life in Christ's power.

9. THE VULNERABILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN AND SPIRITUAL CONFLICT

Some evangelicals rule out the possibility of satan controlling areas of a Christian's life through temptation and sin. They claim that because the Christian is a temple of the Holy Spirit (**1 Cor. 6:19**) and because Christ who is in us is greater than satan who is in the world (**1 Jn. 4:4**), Christians cannot be influenced by demonic spirits. Such a claim would have difficulty explaining any kind of demonic activity with regard to Christians and, when followed to its logical conclusion, would leave one with no alternative but to conclude that Christians cannot even be tempted to sin by satan or his forces. A simple perusal of the New Testament shows that this is clearly not a biblical view of what satanic forces can do to Christians.

The Bible from Genesis to Revelation shows that God's people are part of a multidimensional sin war⁴³ between the Lord and satan. God's creation rebelled against Him, beginning with satan, and we, God's people, are caught up in that war (**Eph. 6:12-18**). The New Testament shows that this war creates a tension between God's sovereignty over His creation and His people and satan's control of the world through human sinfulness (**1 Jn. 5:19; Eph. 2:1-5**).

This tension can be seen on a number of different levels in the New Testament. Christ is "the head of all rule and authority" (**Col. 2:10** and **Eph. 1:20-23**) while "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (**1 Jn. 5:19**). Christ in us is greater than the devil (**1 Jn. 4:4**), while the devil can potentially have a "foothold" in our lives through sins like anger (**Eph. 4:26-27** and context). Peter, to whom God the Father revealed Jesus' true

⁴³ An accurate term coined by Dr. Ed Murphy to refer to spiritual warfare in his survey of Old and New Testament evidence for spiritual warfare (E. Murphy, [The Handbook for Spiritual Warfare](#) [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992], p. vi).

identity as Messiah in **Mat. 16:16-17**, turned right around and spoke words influenced by satan in **Mat. 16:21-23**.

Ananias and Sapphira were bonafide believers—there is no other way they could have been among the community of believers, since the boundary between believers and unbelievers was so stark according to **Acts 5:13-14** ("No one else dared joined them"). But Ananias and Sapphira were *filled* in their heart by satan through acting out of greed and deceit ("Why has satan filled your heart." **Acts 5:13**).⁴⁴ Satan can potentially "devour" a believer according to **1 Peter 5:8-9**, even though Christ in the believer is greater (**1 Jn. 4:4**). Through unforgiveness satan can also "take advantage" of the believer in whom Christ is greater (**2 Cor. 2:10-11**). A believer, in whom Christ is greater, can actually be held "captive" by satan to do his will according to **2 Tim. 2:26** (reminding one of Peter's description of Simon the sorcerer in **Acts 8:23** who was a baptized believer but was still in "the chains of sin"). James teaches that a believer who has Christ in him may, at the same time, have attitudes that are "of the devil" (**Jas. 3:14-15**). Paul warned the believers of Corinth, who had Christ in them, that they might "receive a different spirit"—obviously a demonic spirit⁴⁵ opposed to the Holy Spirit—by receiving a different gospel according to **2 Cor. 11:4** (recalling the warnings of **1 Tim 4:1** and **1 Jn. 4:1-3**).

These passages hardly show that the presence of Christ through the Holy Spirit in the believer makes him or her automatically immune to satan's influence and control. It is also clear that the view is not supported by the New Testament evidence that simply becoming a Christian and putting ones faith in Christ automatically cancels out the believers' possible vulnerability to certain types of sin and to demonic influence and temptation. Rather, we are warned throughout the New Testament that by the power of God's Spirit and the power of the truth we must resist satan's schemes to influence us through sin, temptation, and deception.

10. CONFRONTING A BIBLICAL VIEW OF REALITY

Dr. Clinton Arnold, an evangelical New Testament scholar whose dissertation (Cambridge University, 1986) analyzed Paul's treatment of demonic powers in

⁴⁴ **Acts 5:13** 's language describing satan filling Ananias' heart uses the same Greek verb *plēroō* "to fill" used in **Eph. 5:18** of believers being filled with the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁵ So W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, W. F. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 678.

Ephesians, writes about Paul's instructions on spiritual conflict and the reality of the believer's struggle with the demonic in **Ephesians 6:10-18**:

The expressed opposition of the believers is the "devil" (v. 11), the various "powers" (v. 12), and "the evil one" (v. 16). The believer needs divine strength to resist the devil not only because of his supernatural nature and power, but also because he employs many "insidious wiles" (*methodeia*). The term is invariably used in a bad sense and carries the notion of attacks that are constantly repeated or have an incalculable variety. This would include the usual function of satan as tempting the believer to do evil deeds, but would also involve any effective method in the overall goal of hindering the progress of the gospel and the cause of Christ.

The manner of diabolic attack is expressed in a different way in 6:16, where the aggressor bears the appellation, "the evil one," and launches "flaming arrows" at the saints. This probably involves more than just inner temptations to evil. . . , but extends to "every kind of attack and assault of the 'evil one.'"

The "devil" is mentioned only at one other point in Ephesians (4:27), where he stands ready to take "ground" (*topos*) from those who would surrender it by sinning. The immediate reference is to uncontrolled anger (v. 26), but there is no reason to limit the reference solely to anger. Practicing falsehood (v. 25), stealing (v. 28), and presumably any other conduct characteristic of the "old self" (v. 22) is viewed by the author as surrendering territory to the devil and grieving the Holy Spirit (v. 30).

The author goes far beyond the mention of the devil as the opposition: various kinds of spiritual "powers" are set forth as the opponents of the believers (6:12).⁴⁶

The New Testament teaches, then, that satan and his demons are a real and palpable foe to the Christian. Furthermore, it teaches that we must submit to God (**Jas. 4:7-8**), be filled with His Spirit (**Eph. 5:18**), and turn away from sin so that we do not come under demonic influence or oppression (**Eph. 4:26-27; 6:10-18**).

⁴⁶Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 118-119.

11. THE WAY OUT: CONFESSING OUR SINS, THE SINS OF OUR FATHERS, AND THE SINS OF OUR NATION

As mentioned above, the biblical model of receiving God's forgiveness for sin is by openly *confessing* sin and *repenting* of it. This is summarized in **Prov. 28:13**, "He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever *confesses* and *forsakes* them finds mercy."

We see in the Old Testament that one should not only confess *personal* sin, but also *parental*, *ancestral* sin and *national* sin (generational sin on the level of family and nation). The principle is stated in **Lev. 26:38-40** in a passage outlining the blessings that would come to God's people for obeying the Lord and the curses and calamities that would come for disobeying Him. Milgrom points out that the priestly, levitical model of repentance is represented by the act of confessing ones sin.⁴⁷ The immediate context of **Lev. 26:38-40** predicts the exile of God's people from the Promised Land. In the context of judgment by exile, the Lord shows Israel that the way back to Him was through confessing (which the parallel passage **Deut. 30:1-3** shows also implies repenting of) their sins *and* their fathers' sins:

Lev. 26:39-42--"Those of you who are left will waste away in the lands of their enemies because of *their iniquities*; also because of *their fathers' iniquities* they will waste away. But if they *confess their iniquity* and the *iniquity of their fathers--their*⁴⁸ treachery against me and *their*⁴⁹ hostility toward me . . . then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob . . . and I will remember the land."

⁴⁷ J. Milgrom, "The Priestly Doctrine of Repentance," *Revue Biblique* 82 (1975): 186-205.

⁴⁸ Note that this is a trans-generational use of the pronoun "their." It refers to the fathers' generations and the exiled younger generation; J. S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 41: "These passages not only reveal that the deuteronomistic historian employs the idea of intra-generational retribution [guilt being transferred from an individual such as a king or leader to the whole community]. . . , but additionally they provide support for the existence of another type of corporate thinking in which sins transfer across generations. . . . The above-discussed passages . . . advocate the idea that the sins of Manasseh and his generation are inherited by later generations who ultimately pay for this wicked behavior by being exiled."

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Confessing personal sin and parental sin as prescribed by **Lev. 26:40** is the background for the often quoted promise of **2 Chronicles 7:13-14**: "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

For those who *do not confess and repent* but continue in their parents sins in any way, there is only punishment for such sin according to **Ps. 109:14-16**: "May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out. May their sins always remain before the Lord that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth. *For he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor. . . . He loved to pronounce a curse. . . .*"

12. CORPORATE SIN AND CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY TO REPENT

The sacrificial system in ancient Israel recognized corporate sin in specific ways. **Lev. 4:13-21**, which contains instructions about sin offerings, includes a category for the *sin of the nation as a whole* in addition to sacrifices for individual leaders and people:

Lev. 4:13-14--"If the *whole Israelite community sins* unintentionally. . . . When they become aware of the sin they committed, *the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering* and present it before the Tent of Meeting."

Similarly, **Deuteronomy 21:1-9** shows the *corporate responsibility* among the elders of cities *to confess the sin* of an unsolved murder *that none of them committed*. The fact that they are responsible to confess the sin and receive God's forgiveness by sacrifice suggests that they would *bear corporate guilt and its consequences* before the Lord if they did not identify with the sin, *which they did not commit*, and repent of it. They were the elders of their cities and they had spiritual responsibility for sins committed in their cities' territories, *whether they were directly involved in those sins or not*.

It is precisely this kind of corporate guilt and its consequences which we see in **2 Sam. 21:1** where David and his generation are suffering drought and famine because of unconfessed murder committed by Saul against the Gibeonites. Needless to say, **2 Sam. 21:2-6**, shows how David should *not* have resolved this problem--he handed over the

sons of Saul to be executed and exposed by the Gibeonites.⁵⁰ **Lev. 4:1-26** provided a substitutional sacrificial solution that David strangely ignored (**Deut. 21:1-9** offers an example of a possible substitutional sacrificial solution). It is no coincidence that this account is in a larger section of chapters in 2 Samuel which highlight many of David's *weaknesses and failures*, **2 Samuel 10-24**.⁵¹

13. JEREMIAH 31 AND EZEKIEL 18 AND GENERATIONAL INIQUITY

Some claim that Ezekiel 18 and Jeremiah 31 teach that parental, ancestral iniquity is no longer transferred to the children. But this claim fails entirely to explain the relevant evidence from the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. **Ezekiel 18:19-21** states, "Yet you ask, 'Why does the son not share the iniquity of his father?' Since the son *has done what is just and right* and has been careful to keep *all my decrees*, he will surely live. *The soul that sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the iniquity of the father*, nor will the father share the iniquity of the son. . . . But if a wicked man *turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees . . . , he will surely live; he will not die.*" And **Jeremiah 31:29-30** states, "In those days people will no longer say, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.' Instead, *everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes--his own teeth will be set on edge.*"

Jeremiah 31:29-30 and **Ezekiel 18:19-20** do not contradict or update the covenant law principle of **Exo. 34:5-7** or **Exo. 20:5**, **Deut. 5:9** and their parallel passages (**Lev. 18:25**; **Num. 14:18, 33**; **Deut. 7:10**; **Isa. 65:6-7**; **Jer. 32:18**; cf. **Job 21:19**; **Ps. 79:8**; **109:14-16**) that the iniquity of the fathers will be visited upon the sons. **Jeremiah 31:29-30** and **Ezekiel 18:19-20** complement the covenant principle of generational sin and corporate confession of generational sin. Children will still be affected by, but *not punished for*, their parents' and ancestors' sins. As mentioned above, even common sense suggests that just as we may inherit physical weaknesses from our parents--such as tendencies toward alcoholism, cancer, high cholesterol, etc.--so we may also inherit spiritual weaknesses

⁵⁰ He did not inquire of the Lord to get the Lord's solution as commanded in **Deut. 17:8**. The king and the state were only to execute the guilty party and not the children of the guilty party according to **Num. 35:33**; **Deut. 24:16**; **2 Kgs. 14:5-6**. Allowing the Gibeonites to expose the bodies before the Lord violated covenant law which required that the bodies of executed criminals be buried before sundown (**Deut. 21:22-23**; cf. **Jos. 8:28-29**; **10:27**). It was not until David did the right thing--provide Saul's executed sons a decent burial--that the Lord answered prayer and the drought ended (**2 Sam. 21:11-14**).

⁵¹ A. E. Hill and J. H. Walton, A Survey of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), pp. 190-191.

and tendencies toward certain sins such as anger, lust, criticism, greed, idolatry, or occultism. **Ezek. 18:19-20** and **Jer. 31:29** teach that generational sin will not bring judgment on those who "turn away from" (**Ezek. 18:21**) and repent of personal sin and parental, ancestral sins. Children will not be punished for the sins of the parents unless they choose to walk in the sins of their parents. Ezekiel and Jeremiah both point to the individual's responsibility to repent and turn away from the sins of the parents and ancestors.

Suggesting that both of these passages teach that the iniquity of the fathers is no longer visited upon the children simply misrepresents the relevant evidence in Ezekiel and Jeremiah and in the Old Testament as a whole. It also implies that these passages contradict **Exo. 34:5-7** which relates the generational cycling of iniquity to God's very character. Again, how often does God's fundamental character change? **Mal. 3:6**, **Ps. 102:27**, **Heb. 13:8**, and **James 1:17** say never.⁵²

Such a suggestion also implies that **Jer. 31:29-30** and **Ezek. 18:19-20** contradict the same principle restated in the Ten Commandments as a fundamental principle of Covenant Law (**Exo. 20:5** and **Deut. 5:9**; also **Lev. 18:25**; **Num. 14:18, 33**; **Deut. 7:10**; **Isa. 65:6-7**; **Jer. 32:18**; cf. **Job 21:19**; **Ps. 79:8**; **109:14-16**). The glaring problem with this assumption is that **Jer. 31:29-30**'s statement "everyone will die for his own sin," which thematically and chronologically parallels the statement of **Ezek. 18:20** "the soul that sins is the one who will die," is followed one chapter later by an affirmation that the iniquity or sin-guilt of parents is visited upon children--**Jer. 32:18** "repaying the iniquity of the fathers to the bosom of the sons." In the same way the prophecies of Ezekiel assume the ongoing reality of generational sin (see full discussion below, section **13.2.4**). **Ezekiel 20:18-36** charges the Israelites with walking in the same sins as their fathers "to this day" (**Ezek. 20:31**) and says they will therefore be judged for it (**Ezek. 20:23-26**). **Ezekiel 4:4ff** explicitly points to Israel's generational iniquity extending over 390 years.

13.1 MISREPRESENTING THE EVIDENCE IN EZEKIEL & JEREMIAH

The view that **Ezekiel 18** and **Jeremiah 31** mark a new stage of individual responsibility which replaced older ideas of corporate responsibility simply misrepresents the evidence in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, and in the Hebrew Bible as a whole, as several Old Testament

⁵² **Ps. 102:27**—"You remain the same, and your years will never end"; **Mal. 3:6**—"I the LORD do not change"; **Heb. 13:8**—"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"; **Jas 1:17**—"the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."

scholars like Dr. Paul Joyce and Dr. Joel Kaminsky have pointed out recently. The notion of individual responsibility coexisted with the notion of corporate responsibility as early as the Deuteronomic Law code (e.g. **Deut. 24:16** [indiv. responsibility]; **29:18-21, 25-28** [indiv. responsibility alongside corporate responsibility]; etc.):

There is no evidence that those using the proverb in **Ezek. 18.2**, nor Ezekiel's response to them is an attempt to reject trans-generational retribution even in instances when all generations are guilty. The proverb and the argument that Ezekiel uses to refute it are focused specifically on the question of an innocent generation that is apparently being punished for something that earlier generations committed. . . . It should be noted that **Ezek. 20.23** affirms the concept of trans-generational retribution regardless of the innocence or guilt of the later generation.⁵³

*The view that the contribution of Ezekiel marked a crucial stage in the evolution of individualism in Israel not only misrepresents the evidence concerning Ezekiel but also attempts to impose an excessively simple pattern upon language about collective and individual responsibility in the Old Testament as a whole.*⁵⁴ [italics mine]

Neither in criminal law texts nor in material concerning God's punishment of human sin are there to be found any good grounds for regarding individualism as an exclusively or even a distinctively late phenomenon. Conversely, it must be stressed that strongly collective elements are to be found in the later Old Testament period (for example, **Dan. 6.24** . . . and **Esth. 9.7-10** . . .), and indeed in the New Testament (for example, **Mt. 23.35-36**, where punishment for all the righteous blood shed from Abel to Zechariah the son of Barachiah is to come upon the present generation of the scribes and the Pharisees). . . .⁵⁵

⁵³ Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 173.

⁵⁴ Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, pp. 86-87.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

13.2 FOUR REASONS EZEKIEL AND JEREMIAH COULD NOT BE HERALDING THE END OF GENERATIONAL SIN

13.2.1 God's people continued repenting of generational sins long after Ezekiel and Jeremiah's prophecies. Some claim that Ezekiel and Jeremiah are prophesying a new era when it would no longer be necessary for children to repent of generational iniquity. But this claim fails to explain all the relevant evidence. If it is true that Ezekiel and Jeremiah herald the end of repentance for generational sins, how does one explain why some *35-45 years after Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's prophecies, which date to the first quarter of the 6th century B.C.*, Daniel continues to repent for the sins of his ancestors in **Dan. 9:8, 20** dated to 539/38 B.C.? One cannot explain why some *125-135 years after Ezekiel's and Jeremiah's prophecies*, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the post-exilic Jewish community of Jerusalem in the mid-fifth century B.C. continued to confess the generational sin of their ancestors in **Ezra 9:6ff, Neh. 1:6ff, and Neh. 9:2**. Nor can one explain why Jesus, Paul, and Peter all assume the continuing reality of generational sin being passed down and continued from one generation to the next in **Mat. 23:32-35; Rom. 5:12; 1 Thes. 2:16; and 1 Pet. 1:18** (see discussion of these passages below), or why the Jewish community of their day continued the Old Testament model of confessing not only personal sin but also parental, ancestral sin and national sin, as is shown by intertestamental Jewish apocryphal, pseudepigraphical, and sectarian literature (e.g., **Baruch 1:15—3:8; Tobit 3:1-17; 1 Esdras 8:74-90; 1QS [Qumran Manual of Discipline] 1.23-26; CD [Cairo Genizah Damascus Document] 20.28-30; cf. 2 Esdras 1:4-8** all dating from the 2nd century B.C. to the 1st century A.D.).

13.2.2 Ezekiel was a priest, who quoted Leviticus 26 in many of his prophecies, and he would hardly contradict priestly, levitical laws in Leviticus 26 that he quotes in his prophecies. Ezekiel was thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament levitical model in **Lev. 26:39-40** of confessing personal sin as well as parental, ancestral sin and national sin. Ezekiel was a priest (**Ezek 1:3**) who was so familiar with Leviticus that he used the language and imagery of **Lev. 26** and often quoted verbatim words and phrases from **Lev. 17-26**. Scholars have long known that the Hebrew of **Ezek. 4-6, 14 and 34-37** closely parallels and draws on the language and idioms found especially in **Lev. 26**.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ A. Bertholet, *Leviticus* (Tübingen / Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr, 1901), p. 94; M. Fishbane, "Famine," *Encyclopedia Miqrta*, vol. 7 (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1976), p. 386 [Hebrew]; A. Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study on the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Paris: A. Gabalda, 1982), pp. 32-35, 94-97, 102-107, 111f.; M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel I-XX* (Anchor Bible, New York: Doubleday, 1983), p. 126; B. Levine, in J. Neusner et al., eds., *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*

My friend, Dr. Mark Rooker, in his doctoral dissertation study of the Hebrew of Ezekiel (Brandeis University, 1988), proved that Ezekiel's prophecy in **Ezekiel 4-5** quoted Hebrew words and phrases verbatim from **Leviticus 26**.⁵⁷ Ezekiel's intimate familiarity with the language of **Lev. 26** shows that he was thoroughly familiar with the concept of confessing parental, ancestral sin prescribed in **Lev. 26:39-40**. Ezekiel, a priest, could hardly have been quoting the priestly material in **Lev. 26** as the foundational framework of many of his prophecies and then turn around and contradict the principle of confessing generational sin taught by **Lev. 26:40-42**. Indeed, Ezekiel quotes a verse *before* and a verse *after* **Lev. 26:40-42**:

Leviticus

Ezekiel

Lev. 26:39--"Those of you who are left will waste away (Heb. verb *māqāq*, in the lands of their enemies because of their iniquity ('*āwōn*); also because of their fathers' iniquity ('*āwōn*), they will waste away (Heb. verb *māqāq*)."

Ezek. 4:17b--"and they will waste away (Heb. verb *māqāq*, because of their iniquity ('*āwōn*)."

Lev. 26:40-42--"But if they will confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers--their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them . . . I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land."

Lev. 26:43b--"because they rejected my laws (*bəmišpāṭay mā'āsū*), and my decrees (*wə'et-ḥuqqōṭay*), they abhorred."

Ezek. 5:6b--"because they rejected my laws (*bəmišpāṭay mā'āsū*), and my decrees (*wəḥuqqōṭay*), they did not follow."

The fact that Ezekiel quotes a phrase from **Lev. 26:39** in **Ezek. 4:17b** and quotes almost word-for-word from **Lev. 26:43b** in **Ezek. 5:6b**⁵⁸ suggests that he knew well the text in between, **Lev. 26:40-42**, with its teaching on confessing generational sin. The fact that Ezekiel frequently makes allusion to and quotes the language and imagery of **Lev. 26** in

(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), p. 30; M. F. Rooker, Biblical Hebrew in Transition (JSOT suppl. 90, Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), pp. 60-62 and notes; J. E. Hartley, Leviticus (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 4, Dallas: Word, 1992), pp. 459-460.

⁵⁷ Rooker, Biblical Hebrew in Transition, pp. 60-62 and notes.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Ezek. 4-6, 14 and 34-37 shows that he considered **Lev. 26** to be the thematic foundation of many of his prophecies. And this in turn suggests that he assumed **Lev. 26:40-42**, with its teaching on confessing generational sin, to be a foundational Covenant principle by which God's people are to turn away from personal and parental sin, as Ezekiel describes it in **Ezek. 18:19-32**.

13.2.3 Ezekiel 18:19 says the son is to keep "ALL My decrees" including the command in Lev 26:40 to confess generational sin. Ezekiel 18:19 prophesies that the son will not share the iniquity of the fathers, if the son "keeps ALL My decrees," which would have included the command of **Lev. 26:40** to confess the iniquities of the fathers. No evidence in the book of Ezekiel demonstrates or even suggests that in **Ezek. 18:19-21** Ezekiel assumed any other model of repentance than the standard Covenant model set forth in the levitical law code of *confessing* personal and generational sin and *repenting* of them. Nowhere does Ezekiel teach that one should *not* confess both personal sin and generational sin. On the contrary, the only model of turning away from sin that Ezekiel had was the standard Old Testament model of confessing and repenting of personal and parental sin prescribed by **Lev. 26:40**, a passage Ezekiel was thoroughly familiar with, which he quoted in many his prophecies, and which no evidence demonstrates he was opposed to.

13.2.4 Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah affirm the ongoing reality of corporate, generational iniquity. As several scholars point out,⁵⁹ **Ezek. 18:19-20** and **Jer. 31:29** do not teach that generational sin, guilt, and bondage will not be visited upon or appointed (to be) upon children. Both Ezekiel and Jeremiah *affirm* the reality of generational sin and say that iniquity and abominations will be "returned" or "repaid" by the Lord from one generation to the next generation of those who rebel against the Lord (**Jer. 32:18; Ezek. 7:3, 9; 20:18-31** compared to **Deut. 7:10; Isa. 65:6-7**):

Jer. 32:18--"Showing love to thousands but repaying (Heb. *šillam* "return, repay")⁶⁰ the iniquity of the fathers to the bosom of their sons."

⁵⁹E.g., Kaminsky, , *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 173; Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, p. 80-87; J. Hempel, *Das Ethos des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 67; Berlin, 1964), pp. 32ff.; De Vries, "Sin, sinners," *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, pp. 365-366; W. H. Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19, Dallas: Word, 1986), p. 291.

⁶⁰Brown, Driver, Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 1022.

Ezek. 20:18-36--"I said to their children in the desert, 'Do not follow the statutes of your fathers or keep their laws or defile yourselves with their idols. . . .' But the children rebelled against me. . . . I swore to them *in the desert* that I would *disperse them*⁶¹ *among the nations*. . . . I let them [the ancient desert generation] *become defiled* through their gifts--the sacrifice of every firstborn. . . . Therefore say to the house of Israel [Ezekiel's contemporaries]: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Will you defile yourselves the way your fathers did and lust after their vile images? When you offer your gifts--the sacrifice of your sons in the fire--*you*⁶² *continue* to defile yourselves with all your idols *to this day*. . . . As *I judged your fathers* in the desert of the land of Egypt, *so I will judge you,*' declares the Sovereign Lord."

Furthermore, **Ezekiel 4:4ff.** mentions the iniquity of Israel's 390 year history--obviously iniquity which was repeated over the course of several generations.

Ezek. 4:4--"Then lie on your left side and put the iniquity of the house of Israel upon yourself. You are to bear their iniquity for the number of days you lie on your side. I have assigned you the *same number of days as the years of their iniquity*. So for *390 days* you will bear the iniquity of the house of Israel.

Ezekiel says the children have continued in the iniquity of their fathers "to this day" (**Ezek. 20:31**) and will be punished for it (**Ezek. 20:23-26**).

Scholars who have weighed the evidence carefully concur:

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel protested (**Jer. 31:29-30; Ezek. 18; 33:10-20**). No son was to be held accountable for his father's crimes. "The soul that sins shall die" (**Ezek. 18:4**). In saying this, *they did not mean to deny corporate involvement in sin: this was beyond dispute*. Their purpose was to *accentuate individual responsibility*, which was in

⁶¹ Note that this refers to the Israelites in the desert after the exodus from Egypt and is only fulfilled upon the *later* generation of descendants in 6th century Judah.

⁶² Note that this is a trans-generational use of the pronoun "you." The pronoun "you" and the phrase "to this day" refer to the span of time from the ancestral generation in the desert down to the exiled younger generation that Ezekiel addresses here.

danger of becoming submerged in a consciousness of overpowering national calamity. Even though the nation was now suffering a bitter corporate punishment, there was *hope for the individual if he would repent*.⁶³ [italics mine]

*From the sociological perspective, the visitation of the sins of parents upon subsequent generations (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9) contains truth. . . . Ezekiel does not dispute the organic unit of society, as his monotonous surveys of the rebelliousness of each succeeding generation of Israel (as in chaps. 16, 20, 23) imply. What his argumentation [in Ezek. 18] declares is that it need not be so, that repentance of traditional and deeply ingrained sin can reverse the slippery trail whereby we slide into oblivion. Our repentance is not only personal, but a reversal of the ways of the fathers (Ezek 2:3-5).*⁶⁴ [italics mine]

So, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel clearly *affirm* that children will be affected by generational sin. They assume that though children will be tempted to walk in the sins of their parents, children can and must repent of parental and ancestral generational sins.

13.3 THE ABUSE EZEKIEL AND JEREMIAH ARE ADDRESSING

The specific abuse Ezekiel and Jeremiah address is the false assumption of the Judean exiles in Babylonia that they were exiled from the land because of their *parents' and ancestors'* sins and not because of their *own* sins. The implication of the proverb quoted in **Ezek. 18:2** is clear: the exiles in the land of Babylonia, who were recently deported from Jerusalem and to whom Ezekiel prophesied, were saying "*about the land of Israel*" (**18:2**) that they, as children, were suffering *exile from the land* because of *their fathers' sins not because of their own sins*:

Ezek. 18:2--"What do you people mean by quoting this proverb *about the land of Israel*: "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"?"

⁶³ De Vries, "Sin, sinners," *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, pp. 365-366.

⁶⁴ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p. 291.

But elsewhere Ezekiel makes it crystal clear to them that *they were the sinners who committed the same sins their fathers had*, resulting in the Lord's judgment on them (compare **Ezek. 7:3-9; 20:18-31; cf. 8:1, 12-13; 14:1ff., 6; 16:3, 44-52**). **Ezekiel 18:2-31** clearly teaches, then, that children who *turn away from* or *repent* of their sins and the sins of their parents will escape judgment for their sins and the sins of their parents.

The same observations regarding the continuing reality of generational sin and the need to confess personal and generational sin is true of Jeremiah's correction which thematically and chronologically parallels **Ezek. 18:20**. As mentioned above, **Jer. 31:29-30** "Everyone will die for his own sin" hardly teaches that generational sin no longer affects children, since Jeremiah affirms that it does in **Jer. 32:18**. In the latter passage, Jeremiah connects the generational sin principle to the Lord's holy character just as **Exo. 34:5-7** and its parallel passages do--**Jer. 32:18**, "Oh, Sovereign Lord . . . (you) show love to thousands but *repay* (Heb. **šillam** "return, repay") the iniquity of the fathers to the bosom of their sons."

13.4 Identificational Repentance Prayer in Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Further, **Jer. 31:30**, "Everyone will die for his own sin," does not teach that God's people should no longer confess the sins of their fathers and nation, since, as Miller notes,⁶⁵ this is exactly what Jeremiah himself is doing in his intercessory prayer for Judah in **Jer. 3:25; 14:7; 14:19-21**:

Jer. 14:19-20--"Have you rejected Judah completely? Do you despise Zion? . . . O Lord, *we acknowledge our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers; we have indeed sinned against you.*"

Moses did the same thing in **Exo. 34:8-9**. Moses did not commit the sins he was confessing for his people Israel, the sins of murmuring and apostasy through making the golden calf (**Exo. 33:7ff.**). But Moses nonetheless identified with the Israelites, as he asked for forgiveness for their sins:

Exo. 34:8-9--"Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. 'O Lord, If I have found favor in your eyes,' he said, 'then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive *our iniquity and our sin*, and take us as your inheritance.'"

⁶⁵ Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, p. 253.

Ezek. 22:29-30 also affirms the role of not only prophets but also the leaders of God's people ("princes . . . priests . . . officials" **22:25-27**) to intercede, like Jeremiah and Moses did, and to ask God to forgive the sins of the nation. **Ezekiel 22:30** and **Psalms 106:23** quite obviously use the same language to describe this kind of identificational repentance prayer (compare **Ezek. 22:30** with **Ps. 106:23** and **Exo. 32:11ff.**):

Ezek. 22:29-30--"The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice. I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and *stand in the breach before me* (Heb. participle of *ʿāmad*, *ʿōmēd bappereš ləpānāy*) *on behalf of the land* so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.

Psalms 106:23--"So he said he would destroy them--had not Moses, his chosen one, *stood in the breach before him* (Heb. perfect of *ʿāmad*, *ʿāmad bappereš ləpānāw*) to keep his wrath from destroying them."

It is with this language and imagery of identificational repentance prayer in mind that Ezekiel himself also cried out to God for mercy on Judah in **Ezek. 9:8** and **11:13**.

13.5 THE BALANCE BETWEEN CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY IN EZEKIEL, JEREMIAH, AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Ezekiel and Jeremiah, then, do not deny the reality of generational sin or the need to confess ancestral and national sins.⁶⁶ They simply stress *individual* responsibility to *repent* of generational sin, and they show that the Lord not only deals with His people as corporate families and nations through the generations but also deals with them as individuals.

In teaching individual responsibility, Ezekiel and Jeremiah are *not* saying something *new* that was foreign to the Ten Commandments and Covenant Law⁶⁷ in which the generational sin principle was taught. They are only *reemphasizing* the theme of

⁶⁶ De Vries, "Sin, sinners," pp. 365-366.

⁶⁷ "Covenant Law" refers to Mosaic law in the Pentateuch: cf. "the Book of the Covenant" referring to the earliest Mosaic laws in Exo. 24:7.

individual responsibility found in **Deut. 24:16** which was *already* taught in Covenant Law alongside the generational sin principle: **Deut. 24:16**--"Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, *nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.*"

The coexistence of individual responsibility and corporate responsibility in Deuteronomistic law, the Deuteronomistic Historical books, the Prophets, and the Writings of the Hebrew Bible has been noted by many scholars recently.⁶⁸ The balance between the two levels of responsibility is already articulated in the Pentateuchal law codes (e.g., **Deut. 29:18-21** [individual responsibility] + **29:25-28** [corporate responsibility]) and indeed can be traced throughout the Hebrew Bible and throughout *all* periods of Israelite history, as recent studies by scholars like Kaminsky and Joyce have shown.⁶⁹

It is by no means clear that Ezekiel was concerned to stress individual responsibility. . . .

The absence from Ezekiel of any sense that individualistic elements are being advanced as innovations is readily understandable in the light of the fact that notions of individual responsibility seem to have played a part in thought about responsibility in Israel from early times. . . .⁷⁰

Jeremiah, for example, shows that it is not a question of *either . . . or*—*either* individual responsibility to confess and repent of individual sins *or* corporate responsibility to confess and repent of corporate, generational sins—but a matter of God's people doing

⁶⁸ Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, pp. 84-85: "Neither in criminal law texts nor in material concerning God's punishment of human sin are there to be found any good grounds for regarding individualism as an exclusively or even a distinctively late phenomenon. Conversely, it must be stressed that strongly collective elements are to be found in the later Old Testament period (for example, **Dan. 6:24** . . . and **Esth. 9:7-10** . . .), and indeed in the New Testament (for example, **Mt. 23:35-36**, where punishment for all the righteous blood shed from Abel to Zechariah the son of Barachiah is to come upon the present generation of the scribes and the Pharisees)"; Hempel, *Das Ethos des Alten Testaments*, pp. 32ff.; Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOT Suppl. 196) Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995; P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 310; J. Milgrom, *Numbers* (The JPS Torah Commentary, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp. 394f.

⁶⁹ Kaminsky, , *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, pp. 133, 137-138; Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, pp. 82-83.

⁷⁰ Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, p. 80, 86.

both in God's view. **Jer. 32:18-19** explicitly juxtaposes *both individual* responsibility and *corporate* responsibility.⁷¹

Jer. 32:18-Corporate Responsibility

"Showing love to thousands but returning the iniquity of the fathers to the bosom of their sons. . . ."

Jer. 32:19--Individual Responsibility

"Your eyes are open to all the ways of men in order to reward a man according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds."

Jeremiah's words show that God allows the consequences of parental sin and sin bondage to come on the children of those who reject Him (**Exo. 20:5b; Deut. 5:9b**). The point of **Jer. 31:29-30** is that those that *repent* of personal *and* parental, ancestral sin will not suffer the consequences or punishment they might have otherwise experienced because of personal *and* parental, ancestral sin. Jeremiah himself is an example of one who repents of ancestral and national sin in **Jer. 14:20** while at the same time emphasizing individual responsibility for sin, confession, and repentance in **Jer. 31:29-30** and **32:19**.

Jeremiah 14:20, "We acknowledge *our* wickedness and the iniquity of *our fathers*," is only one explicit example of Old Testament confession of individual, personal sin *and* corporate, family and national sin (alongside Daniel in **Dan. 9:8**, the writer and worshipers represented by **Ps. 106:6**, Nehemiah in **Neh. 1:6**, and the fifth century Jewish community of Jerusalem in **Neh. 9:2**). But Jeremiah is the clearest example of the *balance* between *both* individual responsibility *and* corporate responsibility for sin and confession.

In **Jer. 14:20** Jeremiah shows that he, as an *individual*, is responsible to confess *ancestral and national* sin, since he is a member of his people, for whom he is praying: **Jeremiah 14:20**, "We acknowledge *our* wickedness and the iniquity of *our fathers*." No, he didn't commit the sins his people did. He didn't rebel against the Lord, worship false gods, and oppress the poor. But he *did take part in confessing those sins* on behalf of Jerusalem and Judah.

⁷¹ Milgrom, Numbers, p. 394.

Do we (American Christians) really have to be racists or abortionists to confess America's sins of racism and abortion? Jeremiah would say "no."

14. EXAMPLES OF IDENTIFICATIONAL REPENTANCE PRAYER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Prophets, leaders, and ordinary people prayed identificational repentance to advance God's Kingdom—so should we (**Exo. 34:8-9; Ezra 9:6-15; Neh. 1:6ff.; 9:1-2; Ps. 106:6; Jer. 3:25; 14:7, 20; 2 Chron. 7:14**). We see the kind of confession of personal and parental, ancestral sin prescribed by **Lev. 26:40** in the passages mentioned above. **Psalm 106** is a psalm written after the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of Judeans to Babylonia (cf. **Ps. 106:27, 41**). This means that the survivors and descendants of the southern kingdom were confessing the sins of their ancestors and confessing that they committed the same sins their ancestors had:

Ps. 106:6--"We have sinned, even as our fathers did (Heb. literally, "we have sinned *together with* our fathers"); we have done wrong and acted wickedly."

Nehemiah 9:2-3 shows outdoor public confession by the Jewish community in Jerusalem in the fifth century B.C., almost a century and a half after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C. and the subsequent exile of Judah. The post-exilic community in Jerusalem had been listening to Ezra and the Levites reading and instructing them from the Book of the Law of Moses (**Neh. 8:1-18**) and then:

Neh. 9:2-3--"They stood in their places and *confessed their sins and the iniquities* (עַוְוֹנוֹת, "iniquities") *of their fathers*. They stood where they were and read from the book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and *spent another quarter in confession* and in worshiping the Lord their God."

It is clear that the community was confessing *specific sins* of theirs and their fathers, since they spent a quarter of the day—*three hours*—doing so.

In the cases of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel, we need to note that they identified with the sins of their ancestors and their people, not all of which they themselves committed:

Dan. 9:8—“O Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you. . . .”

Dan. 9:20—“While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill. . . .”

Ezra 9:5-7, 14—“Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God and prayed: "O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. From the days of our forefathers until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today. . . . Shall we again break your commands and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor?”

Neh. 1:6-7—“Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses. Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’”

15. THE PRIESTLY ASPECT OF IDENTIFICATIONAL REPENTANCE

First, **1 Peter 2:9** says that we are a "royal priesthood," and there is a priestly aspect to biblical examples of identificational repentance prayer. Like the high priest on the Day of Atonement, who confessed all the sins of God's people, according to **Lev. 16:21**, we can act as a royal priesthood by confessing and asking God to forgive the sins of our families, churches, and nations. Even in cases where we have not personally committed the corporate sins we are confessing before God, John Dawson points out that "we can all identify with the roots of any given sin."⁷² We may not have had an abortion, but we can identify with the lust, the love of comfort, the love of money, the rejection, and the unbelief which are the sinful root attitudes leading to abortion.

Again, it is important to note that in **Jer. 3:25, 14:7, 20**, when Jeremiah confessed the sin of his nation in prayer to the Lord, Jeremiah had *not committed the sins he was confessing*. He was opposed, mocked, and beaten by the people of Jerusalem not because he committed the sins he was confessing here, but because he consistently prophesied *against* them (**Jer. 11:18-23; 12:6; 18:18-20; 20:2; 37:15-16; 38:6**). But Jeremiah confessed Judah and Jerusalem's sin nonetheless in obedience to Lord's command in **Lev. 26:40**. His words suggest he had **Leviticus 26** in mind when he prayed (compare **Jer. 14:20-21** "we acknowledge our wickedness and the iniquity of our fathers . . . remember your covenant" with **Lev. 26:40-42** "if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers . . . I will remember my covenant"):

16. IDENTIFICATIONAL REPENTANCE BREAKS THROUGH SATANIC OPPOSITION AND STRONGHOLDS

There is a second benefit to prayer involving identificational repentance for our families, churches, and nation. Daniel's example of identificational repentance in **Daniel 9** and **10** shows that identificational repentance breaks through the spiritual opposition of satanic principalities and powers. Repentance from sin smashes the work of the devil, because the devil and his forces work through sin in the world and in our lives (**I Jn. 3:7-9; Eph. 4:26-27** and context).

⁷² Dawson, [Healing America's Wounds](#), p. 95.

Daniel's identificational repentance led to spiritual breakthrough in **Dan. 9:20-22** when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. **Dan. 9:3** mentions that Daniel was praying and fasting when he confessed his people's sins on that occasion. **Dan 10:2-3, 12** show that Daniel was praying and fasting on a second occasion. Prayer and fasting were often associated with confessing sin in the Old Testament (**I Sam. 7:2-6; 2 Sam. 12:13, 16; Neh. 1:4-7; 9:1-2; Ps. 51:1ff.**). This fact and the thematic similarity of **Dan 9** and **10** suggests that in **Dan. 10** Daniel would have been praying a prayer similar to the one he prayed in **Dan. 9** including confessing his sins and the sins of his nation.

The result of Daniel's prayer, fasting, and identificational repentance was that the angel sent to him on the second occasion broke through the opposition of the demonic principalities of Persia and Greece (**Dan. 10:13, 20**). Because there was spiritual breakthrough, God's desire was fulfilled to open the way for Daniel's people to return to Jerusalem and to reveal to Daniel by the angel of God what God's redemptive plan was for Israel in world history--that the anointed Messiah of Israel would establish God's Kingdom over Israel and all nations (**Dan. 7:13-14, 26-27; 9:2ff., 25ff.; 12:1-3**). In fact, Daniel's intercession seems to have been answered by the Lord releasing the Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem from Babylonia, since **Ezra 1**, describing the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, and **Daniel 9**, describing Daniel's prayer and repentance, are both dated to the first year of Cyrus's rule, 539/38 B.C.⁷³

17. IDENTIFICATIONAL REPENTANCE AND REMITTING THE SINS OF THE NATIONS

Some claim that Christians can only seek and receive forgiveness for our own individual sins and that we cannot remit the sins of others—we cannot receive or apply God's forgiveness on a corporate level to the sins of others, whether families, corporate bodies, or nations from which we come or to which we belong. If it were true that the Bible teaches one cannot seek or receive God's forgiveness on a corporate level for the sins of others, one would have a hard time explaining why Moses did just that for Israel after their sin with the golden calf (**Exo. 32:9-14; 34:8-9; Deut. 9:18-29; 10:10-11; Ps. 106:23**). In **Exo. 34:8-9** Moses identifies himself with sins he did *not commit*, "Forgive *our* wickedness and *our* sin." In **Num. 14:13-20**, he asked for the Lord's mercy and

⁷³ Understanding with Shea that Darius the Mede was a vassal ruler of Babylon under Cyrus in Cyrus's accession year, 539/38 B.C.: W. H. Shea, "Darius the Mede," Andrews University Seminary Studies 20 (1982), pp. 229-247; see discussion in R. Dillard and T. Longman, An Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 336-337.

forgiveness for Israel's rebellious refusal to enter Canaan after the spies' bad report. As scholars who have studied prophetic intercession in the Hebrew Bible have noted,⁷⁴ Moses *received* forgiveness for Israel--**Num. 14:20** "The Lord replied, *I have forgiven them* as you asked." The Lord's intention to destroy Israel was abated because of Moses' intercession. Moses *did* remit the sins of Israel: he sought and received God's forgiveness for them. This did not absolve them of their *individual responsibility* to repent of their sins, but it released God's grace to them *so that they could repent* instead of being destroyed by God on the spot.

This kind of prophetic intercession was so basic to prophetic ministry from Moses onward,⁷⁵ that Samuel the prophet said it would be a sin for him *not* to pray for Israel regularly (**1 Sam. 12:23**). And this is precisely the kind of intercession the Lord looked for to avert His wrath and to extend forgiveness to His people according to **Ezek 22:29-30** ("I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and *stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land* so I would not have to destroy it.")

⁷⁴ Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, p. 278: "Moses' prayer of intercession in Num. 14:13-19, seeking God's forgiveness instead of the announced intention to 'strike them with pestilence and disinherit them,' *achieves that divine forgiveness*. . . . It anticipates later prayers in behalf of a sinful humanity ("Father, forgive them. . . ."--Luke 23:24)." [italics mine]; id., *Deuteronomy* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox, 1990), pp. 123-124; S. E. Balentine, "Prayer in the Wilderness Traditions: In Pursuit of Divine Justice," *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985): 53-74; D. N. Freedman, "Who Asks or Tells God to Repent?" *Bible Review* 1 (1985): 56-59; L. Perlitt, "Mose als Prophet," *Evangelische Theologie* 31 (1971), pp. 588-608; H. G. Reventlow, *Gebet im Alten Testament* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1986), pp. 230-237; W. Furst, "Moses as Intercessor," in C. Osiek and D. Senior, eds., *Scripture and Prayer* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), pp. 5-19; ; E. Aurelius, *Der Fürbitter Israels: Eine Studie zum Mosebild im alten Testament* (Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament 27; Stockholm: Almqvist Wiksell, 1988).

⁷⁵ All Old Testament prophets were also intercessors: **Gen. 18:16-26; 20:7, 17-18 [Ps. 105:5-15]; Exo. 8:28-32; 9:27-30; 10:16-18; 32:1-34; 34:8ff; Num. 11:2; 14:13-22; Deut. 9:8-12, 18-21, 25-29 [Ps. 196:19-23]; Jos. 5:13—6:1ff.; 1 Sam. 7:1-11; 12:23; 1 Kgs. 13:6; 17: 20-21; 18:1, 36-46 [Jas. 5:13-18]; 2 Kgs. 4:33-34; 19:3-4; Amos 7:18ff.; Hab. 1:2-4, 12-17; 3:2ff.; Jer. 14:7-9, 10-12, 13, 14-18, 20-22; 18:18-20; 27:16-18; 29:7; 37:1-10; 42:2ff; Ezek. 9:8; 11:13; 22:29-30; Dan. 2:17-19, 28; 6:10; 9:1-8; 10:1-6; On the function of prophets as intercessors see Y. Muffs, "Reflections on Prophetic Prayer in the Bible," *Eretz Israel* 14 (1978): 48-54 [Hebrew]; id., "Who Will Stand in the Breach?: A Study of Prophetic Intercession," in id., *Love and Joy: Law, Language, and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), pp. 9-48; R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), pp. 151, 156, 162-166, 178-179, 203-204, 238-241, 267, 283-284; S. E. Balentine, "The Prophet as Intercessor: A Reassessment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 161-173; "E. Jacob, "Prophetes et intercesseurs," in J. Dore, et al., eds., *De la Tôrah au Messie: Études . . . à Henri Cazelles* (Paris: Desclée, 1981), pp. 205-217; Reventlow, *Gebet im Alten Testament*, pp. 228-246.**

Scriptural examples show us that prayer for God's mercy on a nation is not to be limited to God's people, as some suggest. After all, God has a concern for nations as nations to turn to Him through faith in Christ (compare **Gen. 12:3** and **Exo. 19:6** with **Isa. 19:21, 25; 56:7-8; Jonah 4:11; Rom. 15:9** [Greek, "that the nations may glorify God for his mercy"]; cf. **Ps. 22:27; 47:8-9; 86:9; 87:4-6; Isa. 19:18-25; 49:20-22; 56:7; Jer. 3:17; Zeph. 3:9ff.; Zech. 14:16-18; Rev. 22:2**). The book of **Jonah** shows us that God has a desire to show mercy to pagan cities and nations (Nineveh was the chief capital city of Assyria and also represents the nation in the book of **Jonah**), so they might turn to Him in faith (**Jon. 3:10; 4:11**). And in **Exodus 8-10** Moses prayed and asked God to have mercy on Pharaoh and on Egypt, who were thoroughly pagan, and to cut short several of the plagues that came on Egypt (**Exo. 8:28-30; 9:27-33; 10:16-18**). As a result of such prayer and the signs and wonders worked by God through Moses, many Egyptians came to fear the Lord and eventually left Egypt with the Israelites (**Exo. 9:20; 12:38**).

In **John 20:23** Jesus gives the disciples the authority to forgive the sins of others--to apply God's forgiveness to others. And Paul seems to expect the Corinthians to exercise such forgiveness toward a repentant member of the church in **2 Cor. 2:7-10**. Again, this seems to suggest a priestly function which reflects the fact that we are "royal priesthood" (**1 Pet. 2:9**) who can receive and apply and proclaim on the corporate level God's forgiveness to others we pray for and pray with.

In **Luke 23:34** Jesus, suffering on the cross, asks God the Father to forgive those who are crucifying him. The result of this prayer was that the centurion guarding him came to some level of faith according to **Lk. 23:47** ("The centurion, seeing what had happened, *praised God*. . . , 'Surely this was a righteous man") and **Mk. 15:39** ("Surely this man was the Son of God"). Certainly more than just the earthquake and the way Jesus died stirred the centurion to acknowledge Jesus' true identity. After all, the Jewish religious leaders and others who witnessed the same events apparently did not make the same confession of faith the centurion did. God seems to have answered Jesus' prayer that God forgive the soldiers who crucified Jesus in **Lk. 23:34**. And this seems to have extended God's mercy to the centurion so the latter could more freely see the true identity of Jesus and move toward personal repentance and faith.

Similarly, Ezra's identificational repentance in **Ezra 9:6-15** on behalf of the fifth century B.C. Jewish community of Jerusalem led, in **Ezra 10:1-4**, to the people being moved more freely to repent of their sins. Nehemiah's confessing his people's sins before God and asking God to forgive them on a corporate level in **Neh. 1:6** along with Ezra's identificational repentance in **Ezra 9:6-15** also seems to have released God's grace on a

corporate level to move the community to weep openly and repent of their sins in **Neh. 8:9-11** and **9:1-2**, when Ezra read the Law.

In the same way Moses' pleading with God to forgive the Israelites' refusal to enter Canaan in **Num. 14:17ff.** was followed by an expression of repentance on the part of the people in **Num. 14:39-40** ("They mourned bitterly . . . 'We have sinned'"). There appears to have been true remorse for their sin, even though their subsequent intention to enter Canaan was misplaced.

Thus, the cases of Moses, Ezra and Nehemiah, and Jesus on the cross show that on a corporate level, God's mercy and forgiveness can be sought and received for those one identifies with in prayer. Individuals are still responsible to repent personally of their individual sin (cf. **Exo. 32:33-34; Num. 14:21-35, 37**), but identificational repentance releases a measure of God's grace and forgiveness on the corporate level that helps move individuals to repentance and faith.

18. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND CORPORATE IDENTITY

The New Testament continues to assume and teach Old Testament categories of corporate identity, generational iniquity, and corporate repentance. A number of New Testament scholars point out that the notion of corporate identity and responsibility is found alongside individual identity and responsibility throughout the New Testament.⁷⁶ Ellis says, for example:

In the Old Testament the individual (male) person may be viewed as extending beyond himself to include those who 'belong' to him. Thus, the husband (at the family level) and the king (at the national level) both

⁷⁶ E. E. Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1991), pp. 110ff; id., *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 8-13; id., "Soma in First Corinthians," *Interpretation* 44 (1990), pp. 132-144; J. de Fraine, *Adam and the Family of Man*, New York: Alba House, 1965; R. P. Schedd, *Man in Community: A Study of St. Paul's Application of Old Testament and Early Jewish Conceptions of Human Solidarity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964; B. S. Rosner, "Ouchi mallon epenthesate: Corporate Responsibility in 1 Corinthians 5," *New Testament Studies* 38 (1992): 470-473; M. Honecker, "Individuelle Schuld und Kollektive Verantwortung: Können Kollektive Sündigen," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 990 (1993): 213-230; E. F. Leach, *The Hebrew Concept of Corporate Personality* (New York: Vantage, 1975), chapter 6 "Paul's Doctrine of the Church as the Body of Christ"; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 333 and n. 14.

have an individual and a corporate existence encompassing, respectively, the household and the nation. . . . *For Jesus and the New Testament writers this perception of man as a corporate being is determinative for the proper understanding of Scripture.*⁷⁷

Jesus addressed not only individuals but *cities* like Korazin, Bethsaida, and Jerusalem (**Mat. 11:21-24; Lk. 10:13-15; 19:41**; etc.) and *churches* (**Rev. 2-3**)--*corporate* bodies of people who, like individuals, are addressed and held accountable for their actions, both good and evil. As Wenham says, "The New Testament also seems to regard the principle of blessing and curse as applying to the Church, *individually and corporately*. . . . See Rev. 2-3."⁷⁸ [italics mine]

Paul wrote nine letters to *churches, bodies of believers*, and only four letters to individuals. All other NT epistles are written to *bodies of believers*, except for 2-3 John. In the letters addressed to corporate bodies of believers, statements and commands to the recipients are all formally *plural* in Greek (e.g., **Jas. 5:16** "*Confess* [imperative, 2nd plural] to one another"; **1 Jn. 1:9-2:1** "If *we* confess *our* sins. . . . I write this to *you* [2nd plural dative pronoun] so that *you* will not sin [2nd plural aorist subjunctive]") and therefore primarily address *the whole church or churches* to which the letter was sent. Certainly these commands and statements also apply to individual believers, but to suggest, as some do, that such passages only refer to individuals (or individual sins, individual confession, individual reconciliation) fails to account for the language and setting of the texts themselves. Half the evidence is thus ignored by such claims rather than carefully accounted for.

Paul calls the church the "one body" of Christ (**1 Cor 12:12-13; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4**), obviously a corporate identity including all believers and local churches. The writer of Hebrews says that "Levi was in the body" of Abraham, when Abraham paid the tithe to Melchizedek (**Heb. 7:10**).

In **Romans 15:9-12** Paul refers to God's heart to reach the nations with the gospel so that the nations might worship and glorify God through Christ—**Rom. 15:9**, Greek literally,

⁷⁷ Ellis, The Old Testament in Early Christianity, p. 110.

⁷⁸ Wenham, The Book of Leviticus, p. 333 and n. 14.

“that the *nations*⁷⁹ may glorify God for his mercy.” As mentioned above, it is clear from a cursory look at the development of covenant theology in the Old Testament that God is not just concerned with individuals. God has a redemptive heart for nations as nations and not just as individuals. He wants to reach the nations and bring them into covenant relationship through Christ with Himself. God's redemptive purpose for nations is set forth in the Pentateuch (e.g., **Gen. 12:1-3; Exo. 19:6; Deut. 32:8, 43;** etc.) and developed in the Psalms (**Ps. 22:27; 47:8-9; 86:9; 87:4-6**) and the Prophets (**Isa. 19:18-25; 49:20-22; 56:7; Jer. 3:17; Jon. 3:10; 4:11; Zeph. 3:9ff.; Zech. 14:16-18;** cf. **Rev. 22:2**).

We must try, as scholars and students of the text, to deal seriously with the balance and tension found throughout Scripture between corporate identity and individual identity. God put both perspectives in the Old Testament and the New Testament for a reason, and I believe He wants us to find *His balance* in the tension between the two.

19. GENERATIONAL SIN AND CORPORATE GUILT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Is the confession of corporate sin—which includes generational sin and national sin—still a legitimate category of confession in New Testament faith, as it was in the Old Testament? First, it should be clear from the start that we are saved not by keeping Old Testament covenantal law but by faith in Christ and the atonement of His blood for our sins (**Rom. 6:14; Gal. 2:16; 5:6**). But this does not mean that the deeper principles of God's character mentioned in **Exo. 34:5-7** or the deeper principles of the Ten Commandments mentioned in **Exo. 20:3-17** and **Deut. 5:7-2** are nullified by faith in Christ. Paul emphatically teaches this: **Rom. 3:31**--"Do we, then, *nullify* the law by this faith? *Not at all!* Rather, we *uphold* the law." New Testament faith fulfills or establishes the deeper principles of Old Testament law embodied in the Ten Commandments, according to **Romans 8:4; 13:8**:

Rom. 13:8-10—“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your

⁷⁹ Greek *ethnos* primarily denotes “nation, people(-group)” and secondarily denotes individual “Gentile(s), pagan(s),” H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek English Lexicon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 480; Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, p.218.

neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."

19.1 Is Generational Sin the 'Curse of the Law' in Galatians 3:13? Some claim that the generational sin principle of **Exo 34:7, 20:5**, and their parallel passages, is part of the "curse of the law" that we are redeemed from according to **Gal. 3:13**. The "curse of the law" from which we are redeemed by Christ, according to **Gal. 3:13**, is, as Old Testament and New Testament scholars point out about this passage,⁸⁰ the covenant curse of drought, famine, pestilence, barrenness, defeat, and exile from the Promised Land (see **Lev. 26; Deut. 28**)—the Covenant curses which would come upon God's people for failing to keep *all* the Law in order to maintain covenant relationship with the Lord. Clearly **Gal. 3:13** does not mean that the deeper principles of God's character and the Ten Commandments, including the principle of generational sin and confession of corporate sin, are nullified by New Testament faith in Christ.

Furthermore, the Old Testament was the only Bible—the only Canon of authoritative Scripture—that the New Testament Church had before the New Testament documents began to be collected in the late first century A.D. Many New Testament scholars make this point:⁸¹

The Old Testament was the Bible of our Lord and His apostles, and its authority was fully acknowledged by them.⁸²

When we refer to the Christian Bible we invariably think of both the Old and the New Testament. . . . However, it is a historical fact that, for about a hundred years of its earliest history, the Christian Church shared its Bible with Judaism. Not until the middle of the second century do we

⁸⁰ See for example, R. Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 147; Hartley, *Leviticus*, p. 474.

⁸¹ See references in Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 81-82; M. Müller, *The First Bible of the Church. A Plea for the Septuagint*, JSOT supplement 206; Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996; H. F. von Campenhausen, *Die Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* (BHT, 39; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1968 [Engl. tr., *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (London: A. & C. Black, 1972)], chp. 4-5, espec. pp. 123-244.

⁸² Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments*, pp. 81.

find evidence of original Christian writings appearing as Scripture together with the Old Testament books.⁸³

When Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 3:16** "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching . . . and training in righteousness" he meant "All *the Old Testament* is God-breathed and is useful for teaching . . . and training in righteousness."

20. JESUS, PETER, AND PAUL MENTION GENERATIONAL INIQUITY AND CORPORATE GUILT

Jesus, Peter, and Paul explicitly mentioned the ongoing reality of corporate, generational iniquity. They all assumed the Old Testament concept of generational sin, according to the New Testament evidence: **Mat. 23:32-35**; **1 Thes. 2:14-16**; **1 Pet. 1:18**. In the first passage, **Mat. 23:32**, Jesus says that the Pharisees that are persecuting him are committing *the same sins as their ancestors, filling up the measure (of the sin) of their fathers*:

Mat. 23:31-32--"So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. *Fill up then the measure (of the sin) of your forefathers!*"

New Testament scholars like Mounce and Hillyer point to the assumption of generational sin in the charge that "the descendants (Grk. *hyioi* "sons") of those who murdered the prophets" (v. 31) are those who have "inherited their evil nature."⁸⁴ The obvious Old Testament background of **Mat. 23:32-35** (and its lexical and thematic parallel, **1 Thes. 2:14-16**), is the description in **Gen. 15:16** and **Lev. 18:25** of the iniquity of the Amorites reaching its full measure through the Lord visiting their iniquities upon their successive generations in the Land of Canaan.

⁸³ Müller, The First Bible of the Church. A Plea for the Septuagint, p. 1.

⁸⁴R. H. Mounce, Matthew (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), p. 218: "'Go on then' said Jesus, and 'finish off what your fathers began' (NEB). 'The descendants (Gk. *hyioi* "sons") of those who murdered the prophets' (v. 31) are those who have inherited their evil nature"; de Fraine, Adam and the Family of Man, p. 243;

N. Hillyer, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol 3, p. 1053: "The Pharisees of the day would soon complete the works of sin begun by those before them (**Matt. 23:32**) for sons inherit the character of their fathers."

T. H. Robinson, The Gospel of Matthew (Moffatt's New Testament Commentary; London: Harper & Bros., 1927), p. 191: "They [the Pharisees] inherit their [the forefathers'] character."

In **1 Thes. 2:14-16** Paul makes the same sort of statement about the generational sin of the Jewish leaders that Jesus does in **Mat. 23:32-35**. **1 Thes. 2:14-16**--"the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets . . . so as always to fill up (the measure of) their sin." Certain New Testament scholars point out that Paul is using the same imagery and expression Jesus used in **Mat. 23:32** of the Jewish leaders continuing in their fathers' sins.⁸⁵

Scholars have also pointed out that the use of such language in **Mat. 23:32** and **1 Thes. 2:16** teaches that the Pharisees inherited their forefathers' sinful nature and reflects the Old Testament metaphor used of the Amorites in **Gen. 15:16** when the Lord said to Abraham, "In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the *iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure* (Heb. literally, 'the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full').⁸⁶ **Gen. 15:16** is paralleled later by **Lev. 18:25** which says the Lord visited the iniquity of the Canaanites upon them and their land over the course of several generations, so that the land "vomited" them out.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Jesus says in **Mat. 23:35** that the guilt for shedding the blood of God's servants would come upon the Jewish leaders who fill up their fathers' sins by persecuting him and his followers.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ R. Shippers, New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 1, pp. 740-741: "In **Mat. 23:32** Jesus says expressly to the Jewish leaders: 'Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.' This implies that they sin just as much as their fathers, or that they fill out what was still lacking in sins. Paul also turns the expression against the Jews in **1 Thess. 2:16**."

⁸⁶ W. Neil, The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians (Moffatt's New Testament Commentary; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950), pp. 53-54: "The same metaphor [filling up the sin of the forefathers] is used in the Old Testament of the Amorites in Abraham's **day (Gen. xv.16)** and of the Pharisees by our Lord in Matthew's Gospel (**Matt. xxiii.32**)";

Shippers, New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 1, p. 734, 740: "The Old Testament speaks about the filling up of sins. Here again there is the idea of a measure to be filled up. . . . Thus, **Gen. 15:16** speaks of the iniquity of the Amorites being not yet complete. . . . It was seen above that the filling up of the measure of sin in the Old Testament was applied to the Gentile nations. . . . But in **Mat. 23:32** Jesus says expressly to the Jewish leaders: 'Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.' This implies that they sin just as much as their fathers, or that they fill out what was still lacking in sins. Paul also turns the expression against the Jews in **1 Thess. 2:16**."

⁸⁷ B. A. Levine, Leviticus (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp. 123-124; N. M. Sarna, Genesis (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 117; G. von Rad, Genesis (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), p. 187.

⁸⁸ Joyce, Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel, pp. 84-85: "Strongly collective elements are to be found in the later Old Testament period (for example, **Dan. 6.24** . . . and **Esth. 9.7-10** . . .

Mat. 23:32-35--"Fill up, then, the measure (of the sin) of your forefathers! You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

Jesus' use of the metaphor "righteous blood" reflects the Old Testament metaphor of "blood-guilt" or "guilt. . . incurred through bloodshed"⁸⁹ The term "blood-guilt" (Heb. *dām, dāmîm*) is closely parallel and often synonymous in the Hebrew Bible with the term "iniquity, sin-guilt" (Heb. *‘āwôn*).⁹⁰ Thus, Jesus is clearly speaking of the guilt of the generational sin of shedding innocent blood coming upon the Jewish leaders of His day.

In **Acts 2:23**, on Pentecost, seven weeks after the death and resurrection of Jesus, Peter holds guilty for Jesus' crucifixion the crowd of Jewish people, who had come from many different nations to Jerusalem: **Acts 2:23** "YOU, with the help of wicked men, put him

.), and indeed in the New Testament (for example, **Mt. 23.35-36**, where punishment for all the righteous blood shed from Abel to Zechariah the son of Barachiah is to come upon the present generation of the scribes and the Pharisees)."

⁸⁹ M. Greenberg, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1, p. 449;

Mounce, *Matthew*, pp. 218-219: "They, like their forefathers, will persecute and kill the messengers of God. As a result, the *guilt for all the innocent blood* shed on earth will fall on them"; S. D. Sperling, "Bloodguilt in the Bible and in Ancient Near Eastern Sources," in R. Link-Salinger, ed., *Jewish Law in Our Time* (New York, 1982), pp. 19-25; H. Reventlow, "Sein Blut komme über sein Haupt," *Vetus Testamentum* 10 (1960): 311-327; K. Koch, "Der Spruch 'Sein Blut bleibe auf seinem Haupt' und die Israelitische Auffassung vom vergossenen Blut," *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (1962): 405-409; G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 279: "This point is underlined here [**Lev. 20:9**] by the phrase *his guilt is his own* [italics his], literally 'his blood is in him.' The phrase occurs only in **Ezek. 18:13; 33:5**;

On Hebrew *dām, dāmîm* "blood-guilt" see L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon*, vol. 1, p. 216; Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 197; Levine, *Leviticus*, p. 137.

⁹⁰ Shown by passages where both terms occur in synonymous parallelism: e.g., **Isa. 59:3; Ezek. 9:9**; elsewhere both terms occur in close association wherein "iniquity" denotes a broader range of sin-guilt and "blood-guilt" refers to guilt deserving the death penalty: cf. **Ezek. 3:18; 33:6, 8** (cf. J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* [Word Biblical Commentary, Waco: Word, 1987], p. 282).

[Jesus] to death by nailing him to the cross.” Similarly, in **Acts 3:13-15**, at an unspecified time after Pentecost, again Peter holds guilty for Jesus’ death the crowd of Jewish people in the Temple—certainly not all of whom were even in Jerusalem during the previous Passover crucifixion of Jesus:

Acts 3:13-15—“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. *YOU handed him over to be killed*, and *YOU disowned him before Pilate*, though he had decided to let him go. *YOU disowned the Holy and Righteous One* and asked that a murderer be released to you. *YOU killed the author of life*, but God raised him from the dead.”

In fact, most of the Jewish people in Jerusalem at the Passover in which Jesus was crucified actually supported Jesus, to the point that the religious leaders were “afraid of the people” (**Lk. 19:48** “*all the people hung on his words*”; **20:19** “The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, . . . but *they were afraid of the people*”; **John 11:48** “If we let him go on like this, *everyone will believe in him.*”) These passages show clearly that the *majority* of Jewish people in Jerusalem at the Passover *supported* Jesus. The crowd that arose early Passover morning to request Barabbas’ release did not even know Jesus’ name, according to **Luke 23:18-19**. The crowd did not say “Away with Jesus son of Joseph!” They said, “Away with *this man!*”:

Mk 15:6-8—“Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.”

Lk 23:4, 18—“Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, ‘I find no basis for a charge against this man.’ . . . With one voice they cried out, ‘Away with *this man!* Release Barabbas to us!’”

Clearly the crowd was dominated by Barabbas supporters, as several New Testament scholars have concluded,⁹¹ and most Jewish people in Jerusalem were caught off guard

⁹¹ W. L. Lane, The Gospel according to Mark (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), p. 554 and n. 29: “The fact that Barabbas is introduced prior to the reference to the petitioners in verse 8 suggests that the latter were supporters of the insurgent who came to the forum specifically to ask for his release”; See also P. L. Couchoud-R. Stahl, “Jesus Barabbas,” Hibbert Journal 25 (1927), pp. 26-42; H. A. Rigg, “Barabbas,”

by Jesus' early morning crucifixion according to **Luke 23:27**—“A *large number of people followed him*, including women who *mourned and wailed for him*. Jesus turned and said to them, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, “Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!”’”

The point is that in **Acts 2:23** and **Acts 3:13-15** Peter charged *all* the Jewish people with guilt for the sin of their religious leaders and the sin of the crowd of Barabbas supporters, even though the evidence from the Passion narratives cited above makes it clear that a majority of Jewish people *supported* Jesus and made the religious leaders fearful of arresting him. In **Acts 3:17-19** Peter tells *all* of the Jewish people in the crowd to repent of the sin of their religious leaders and of the Barabbas supporters:

Acts 3:17-19—“Now, brothers, I know that *YOU acted in ignorance, as did your leaders*. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. *Repent*, then, and turn to God, so that *YOUR sins* may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord”

This a clear New Testament case of horizontal corporate guilt—the guilt of the Jewish leaders and the Barabbas supporters being shared by the whole Jewish people, and the need for the Jewish people listening to Peter in **Acts 2:23** and **Acts 3:13-15** to repent of *personal* sins as well as *national* sins—the sins of their leaders and a restricted group of their people.

Another clear case of horizontal corporate guilt is found in Paul's words to Timothy in **1 Timothy 5:22**—“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and *do not share in the sins of others*.” Timothy would “share in the sins of others” if he laid hands on men to ordain them as elders, while their lives were full of sin. This is exactly the same theme of horizontal corporate guilt spoken of in **Leviticus 19:17**—“Rebuke your neighbor frankly *so you will not share in his guilt* (Heb. literally ‘so that you will not incur sin because of him’).”

Journal of Biblical Literature 64 (1945), pp. 428-432; R. Dunkerley, “Was Barabbas also Called Jesus?” Expository Times 74 (1963), pp. 126-127.

1 Peter 1:18-19 clearly refers to the Old Testament concept of generational sin when it says the blood of Christ redeems us from "the empty way of life handed down to us from our forefathers."

1 Pet. 1:18-19--"For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the *empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers*, but with the *precious blood of Christ*, a lamb without blemish or defect."

The word in **1 Peter 1:18-19** translated "way of life" is Greek *anastrophē* meaning "behavior, conduct."⁹² "Empty behavior" connotes sin, in this case ancestral sin.

"First, it [the former way of life] was 'empty' or 'futile,' a common characterization of pagan religion among both Jews and Christians (e.g., **Jer. 2:5; 8:19; Esth. 4:17b; 3 Macc. 6:11; Acts 14:15; cf. Rom 1:21; Eph. 4:17**). Second, it was '*inherited*'; . . . *patroparadotos* represents instead the *heritage of Greco-Roman paganism*."⁹³ [italics mine]

Brownlee relates **1 Pet. 1:18-19** to the Old Testament pattern of corporately confessing the sins of the fathers along with one's personal sins.⁹⁴ Certain scholars commenting on the passage point out that the language refers to pagan idolatry,⁹⁵ which reminds one of **Exo. 20:5** and **Deut. 5:9**, the second commandment against idolatry that teaches the generational sin principle.

It is important to remember in connection with **1 Pet. 1:18-19** that the blood of Christ redeeming us at conversion does *not* dispense with our need to *continue* to confess sin and be cleansed by Christ's blood *after* putting our faith in Christ, as **1 John 1:7-9** teaches, a passage written to *believers*:

⁹² Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 61.

⁹³ J. R. Michaels, *1 Peter* (Word Biblical Commentary, Waco: Word, 1988), p. 64.

⁹⁴ Brownlee, *Ezekiel 1-19*, p. 291: "Repentance in later Judaism took the form of confessing one's own sins and also the sins of the fathers. . . . (**Ezra 9:7; Neh. 9:2; Dan. 9:16**; and the Qumran Rule of the Community [Manual of Discipline] i, 25-ii, 1; cf. **1 Pet. 1:18-19**)."

⁹⁵ Michaels, *1 Peter*, p. 64; W. C. van Unnik, "The Critique of Paganism in 1 Peter 1:18," in E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox, eds., *Neotestamentica et Semitica* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), pp. 129-142.

I Jn 1:7, 9--"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the *blood of Jesus*, his Son, *purifies* (Greek *katharízei* present indicative "is purifying" or "keeps on purifying")⁹⁶ *us from all sin*. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. . . . If we *confess our sins*, he is faithful and just and will *forgive us our sins* and *purify us* from all unrighteousness."

21. DID JESUS ABOLISH THE GENERATIONAL SIN PRINCIPLE IN JOHN 9?

Jesus states in **John 9:3** that the blindness of the man who was born blind was not caused by the man's sin or by his parent's sin. Many claim that this pronouncement of Jesus signals an end to the Old Testament principle of generational sin being visited upon later generations. But this is simply not true. Jesus simply asserts that *in this case* generational sin and personal sin are not the cause of the blindness.

John 9:2-3--"His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'"

Note that Jesus *did not* say that the man *could not have been blind* because of his parent's sin or his own sin. He only said the man's condition came from another cause. The important point here is that Jesus does not refute the *basic principle* of generational sin which he assumes in **Mat. 23:32-35**. The language of the passage does *not* deny the possibility that one can be affected by the sins of one's parents or ancestors. Rather, as certain Old Testament and New Testament scholars suggest,⁹⁷ Jesus simply asserts that *in this case* generational sin and personal sin are not the cause.

⁹⁶ F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), § 318, (2), (3); A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), p. 879; J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), p. 119.

⁹⁷ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), p. 676; Kaminsky, , *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 173: "Even as late as **John 9.2** we find the principle of trans-generational retribution assumed by most people, and it is not clear whether Jesus is here presented as denying its validity in general, or only in this specific case."

They [the disciples] must not consider every serious affliction the penalty for some . . . sin. . . . Jesus *does not attempt enlightenment on this wide and intricate subject*, either here or elsewhere. Instead, he opens up an entirely *new view in connection with the particular case* before him.⁹⁸ [italics mine]

Jesus could hardly be denying the general principle of generational sin in **John 9:2-3**, since he clearly assumes it in **Mat. 23:32-35** and two of his most devoted followers, Paul and Peter are likewise seen to be assuming the generational sin principle and the horizontal corporate guilt principle in **Acts 2:23, 3:13-15, 1 Thes. 2:16, 1 Tim. 5:22, and 1 Pet. 1:18**.

22. CONFESSION OF SIN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Since the Old Testament was the Bible of the early church portrayed in Acts, this means that the Old Testament's view of sin and the Old Testament's model of confession was the only scriptural view of sin and the only scriptural model of confession that the New Testament church had.

The New Testament has no new view of sin and confession apart from that found in the Old Testament. Many Old Testament and New Testament scholars have pointed out that the New Testament concept of sin and the New Testament framework of public confession of personal and corporate sin pictured in such passages as **Mat. 6:12, 1 Jn. 1:9, and Jas. 5:16** is entirely shaped by the Old Testament concept of sin and confession.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Lenski, St. John's Gospel, p. 676.

⁹⁹ See in addition to the references cited in the following notes, O. Michel, "Kirche und Bekenntnis," Evangelisches Westfalen 11 (1934): 307-308; id., "Biblisches Bekennen und Bezeugen: *homologeïn* und *martyrein* im biblischen Sprachgebrauch," Evangelische Theologie 2 (1935): 231-245; D. Fürst, "Confess," in C. Brown, ed. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 346-347; E. Käsemann, Das wandernde Gottesvolk: eine Untersuchung zum Hebräerbrief (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939), pp. 105-110; O. Procksch, Das Bekenntnis im Alten Testament (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1936); H. Gunkel and J. Begrich, Einleitung in die Psalmen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1933), pp. 27-31; C. Westermann and E. Kamlah, "Bekenntnis," in K. Galling et al., eds., Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1957-1963), vol. 1, pp. 988ff; P. H. Davids, Commentary on the Epistle of James (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 195; E. Stauffer, Die Theologie des Neuen Testaments (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1947; Eng. tr., New Testament Theology, translated by

The OT pattern of liturgical confession provides the framework of NT usage. The three basic elements recur: confession of sin, proclamation of divine deliverance, and thankful praise.¹⁰⁰

The Septuagint, too [I Kgs. 8:33, 35; Neh. 9:3; Dan. 9:4, 20; Ezr. 10:11], presupposes that sin is publicly confessed before the congregation. . . . Note should be taken of 1 Jn. 1:9: "If we confess our sins." In the first instance this "confessing" is the opposite of the contesting of sin in 1:8. We admit that we are sinners and disclose specific sins in confession; . . . We are thus *in a distinctive tradition shaped by the Old Testament and Septuagint*.¹⁰¹ [italics mine]

The presence and the problem of sin are just as much a part of the NT as of the OT. . . . *All the old terms and concepts are here in the NT. . . .*¹⁰² [italics mine]

Jesus, according to the Synoptic writers, offered no statement on the nature of sin. . . . It may be assumed that his idea of the nature of sin was *entirely Hebraic*. This represented a *return to the deep inward conceptions of parts of the OT*.¹⁰³ [italics mine]

It appears that the NT takes at least as dark a view of sin's nature and effects as the OT does; indeed, it *assumes all that the OT has said about sin*, but makes it even more explicit and pointed.¹⁰⁴ [italics mine]

The OT speaks much of the necessity of confession for those who are well, as a private or as a *public or national act of repentance*. . . . The

J. Marsh; N.Y.: MacMillian, 1955), pp. 212-216; K. Fiedler, Bekennen und Bekenntnis. Hinweise für wahrhaftes Bekennen im Sinne des Evangeliums (Religiose Gegenwartsfragen, Heft 9/10; Bern: P. Haupt, 1943).

¹⁰⁰ W. A. Quanbeck, "Confession," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 1, p. 667.

¹⁰¹ Michel, in G. Kittel, ed., TDNT, vol. 5, pp. 204, 207.

¹⁰² De Vries, "Sin, Sinner," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 4, p. 370.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

NT Church, as is shown by 1 John 1:9 and this passage in James [James 5:16], *continued the practice. . .*¹⁰⁵ [italics mine]

The practice of *public confession* was *important to Judaism and the early church* (see Davids,¹⁰⁶ 195; cf. Michel, *TDNT* 5:202-20). (The main sources are Pss 37:5-7, 19 [= 38:4-6i, 18; 39:13 [40:12]; 40:5 [41:4]; 50:5-10 [51:3-8]; Prov 20:9; 28:13; Pss. Sol. 9.6; 1QS [Manual of Discipline] 1.23-2.1; CD [Cairo Genizah Damascus Document] 20.28ff.; Bar 1:15-2:10; Tob 3:1-6, 11-15; 3 Macc 2:2-20; 6:2-15. For rabbinic data see Str-B,¹⁰⁷ 1:113. For the early church cf. *Did.* [The Didache] 4.4; 14.1. . . . The present verse [Jas 5:16 "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed"] suggests a *corporate setting* for the prayer for healing.¹⁰⁸ [italics mine]

No passage in the New Testament states that the Old Testament cycling of generational sin and bondage is nullified automatically by faith in Christ without specific confession and intention to repent of such sins. Nor does any New Testament passage state that the Old Testament model of confessing not only personal but also parental, ancestral and national sin is nullified by faith in Christ.

Instead, the Ten Commandments, in which the principle of generational sin is found (and by implication the *corollary* concept of corporate confession), are *upheld* by Paul in the New Testament as the deeper principles of the law still in effect in New Testament faith. Paul considers clean and unclean categories of the Law to be "disputable" (**Rom. 14:1ff**) but reaffirms the Ten Commandments as the foundational principles of the law, which *are still in force in New Testament faith* (**Rom. 13:8-10; Eph. 6:1-3; cf. Jas. 2:11; 1 Pet. 1:16**) and whose principles are fulfilled by "faith [in Christ] expressing itself in love" (**Gal. 5:6; cf. 2:16; 5:14; Rom. 6:14**).

New Testament passages which explicitly teach about confessing sin, **Matt. 6:12** (the Lord's Prayer), **James 5:16** and **1 John 1:9**, are written against the background of the

¹⁰⁵ J. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 199.

¹⁰⁶ P. H. Davids, *Commentary on the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 195.

¹⁰⁷ H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 6 vols, München: Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1922-1961.

¹⁰⁸ R. P. Martin, *James* (Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 48; Waco: Word, 1988), pp. 210-211.

Old Testament's concept of sin and confession. We need to understand that the New Testament offers no new framework of sin and confession apart from that found in the Old Testament. The only fundamental modification in the New Testament is that Christ is now the eternal sacrifice for all sin in place of all Old Testament sacrifices for sin (**Mat. 26:28; Mk. 14:24; Lk. 22:20; Jn. 1:9; Heb. 9-10** esp. **10:10-14; 1 Jn. 2:2**).¹⁰⁹ Many Old Testament and New Testament scholars, some of whom are quoted above, have pointed out that the New Testament concept of sin and the New Testament framework of public confession of personal and corporate sin pictured in such passages as **1 Jn. 1:9** and **Jas. 5:16** are entirely shaped by the Old Testament concept of sin and confession.

This should not be surprising, since, the Old Testament was the Bible of the New Testament Church and offered the only scriptural model of sin and confession available to the Early Church. As was mentioned earlier, references from intertestamental Jewish religious literature (**Baruch 1:15-3:8; Tobit 3:1-17; 1 Esdras 8:74-90; Qumran Manual of Discipline 1.23-26**; etc.) indicate that the Jewish community of Jesus' day, out of which the Early Church was born, continued to follow the Old Testament model of confessing personal as well as generational and national sins, as the fifth century B.C. Jewish community of Jerusalem had done before them in **Neh. 9:2**.

Luke 19:8-9 and **Acts 19:18-19** both show the distinct Old Testament pattern of open, public confession and repentance.¹¹⁰

Lk. 19:8-9--"But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, 'Look Lord! Here and now *I give half of my possessions to the poor*, and if I have *cheated* anybody out of anything, *I will pay back four times* the amount.' Jesus said to him, 'Today *salvation has come to this house*, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham."

The picture of outdoor public confession by Ephesian believers in **Acts 19:18-19** looks like a conscious imitation of the outdoor confession of the Jewish community in fifth century B. C. Jerusalem confessing personal, parental, and national sin in **Neh. 9:2**. The act of burning scrolls of sorcery publicly illustrates the fruit of repentance:

¹⁰⁹ For discussion of Jesus as the supreme sacrificial lamb and it's OT background, see F. F. Bruce, New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 96, 110, 112-113.

¹¹⁰ Fürst, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 1, p. 346.

Acts 19:18-19--"Many of those who *had believed* (Grk perfect active participle, showing that they had been believers for some time) now came and *openly confessed their evil deeds*. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and *burned them publicly*.

Neh. 9:2-3--"They stood in their places and *confessed their sins* and *the iniquities of their fathers*. They stood where they were and read from the book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day, and *spent another quarter in confession* and in worshiping the Lord their God."

The evidence suggests, then, that the New Testament assumes all that the Old Testament does about sin¹¹¹ and that it also assumes the Old Testament model of confessing sin, just as the Jewish community of the same period did.

23. CORPORATE LANGUAGE IN NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES THAT TEACH CONFESSION OF SIN

Confessing individual sin and confessing corporate sin were *both* the practice of ancient Israel and the later Jewish community whose Bible was the Old Testament, as was established above.

New Testament passages that explicitly teach about confessing sins—**Matt. 6:12** (**Lk. 11:4**), **1 John 1:9**, and **James 5:16**—teach on confession of sin with *plural* pronouns and *plural* verbal constructions, which denote the *corporate* nature of New Testament confession of sin.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus taught us to pray with *corporate language*: **Matt. 6:12** (and its parallel **Lk. 11:4**)—"Forgive us *OUR* debts, as *WE* also have forgiven *OUR* debtors." **1 John 1:9** says "if *WE* confess *OUR* sins, he . . . will forgive *US OUR* sins and purify *US* from all unrighteousness." And **Jas. 5:16** says "Confess [Grk *plural* imperative] (your) sins to *one another*." The plural verb forms and the plural pronouns "one another," "we," "our," and "us" remind us that **1 Jn. 1:9** and **Jas. 5:16** were written to *corporate*

¹¹¹ De Vries, "Sin, sinners," *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, p. 375: "It appears that the NT takes at least as dark a view of sin's nature and effects as the OT does; indeed, it assumes all that the OT has said about sin, but makes it even more explicit and pointed."

bodies. In the words of Dr. Ralph Martin, who was Professor of New Testament at the University of Sheffield, England,

The present verse [**Jas 5:16** "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another that you may be healed"] suggests a *corporate setting* for the prayer for healing¹¹² [italics mine]

There is no good reason to assume that "our debt" in **Matt. 6:12**, "our sin" in **1 John 1:9** excludes confessing corporate, generational, or national sin. Such a conclusion flies in the face of all the evidence enumerated above.

Matt. 6:12 "Forgive us our debts," **Jas. 5:16** "Confess (your) sins to one another," and **1 Jn. 1:9** "if we confess our sins" easily describe what is depicted of the fifth century B.C. Jewish community in Jerusalem publicly confessing their sins to one another in **Neh 9:2** "They stood in their places and confessed *their sins* and *the iniquities of their fathers*."

Some may claim, without clear supporting evidence from either passage, that **1 Jn. 1:9** and **Jas. 5:16** do not refer to confessing corporate sins but only refer to confessing individual, personal sins. But the texts themselves simply don't say this. The pronouns and verb forms in both passages are in the first person *plural* and second person *plural*, showing that the statements address *corporate bodies of believers*. The language of **1 Jn. 1:9** and **Jas. 5:16** does not say "Confess (your) *personal, individual* sins to one another" and "If we confess our *personal, individual* sins." Both passages simply speak of the body of believers confessing their sins, and both passages use language that is non-specific and non-exclusive enough to include confessing *parental, ancestral and national* sins *as well as* confessing individual, personal sins.

1 Jn. 1:9 "if we confess our sins" cannot be explained as referring to confessing only individual, personal sins by suggesting the verse uses the Greek literary plural, as some have claimed. The Greek literary plural was used by a writer to refer to *himself* with plural verb forms and plural pronouns¹¹³ (e.g., **1 Jn. 1:4** "We write this to make our joy complete"--a true case of the literary plural which is restated in **1 Jn. 2:1** "I write this to you"; **2 Cor. 10:10-11** "For some say, 'His letters are weighty. . . . Such people should

¹¹² Martin, James, p. 211.

¹¹³ Robertson, Grammar of the Greek New Testament, pp. 406-407; Blass, Debrunner, Funk, Grammar of the New Testament, § 280.

realized that what *we* are in *our* letters. . . "). But in **1 Jn. 1:9**, John is not referring to himself with the literary plural, unless we want to understand **1 Jn. 1:9** to say "If *I* (John) confess *my* sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive *me* (*my*) sins."

No, in **1 Jn. 1:9**, John is clearly speaking of himself *and the body of believers*, as is clear from the immediate context of **1 John 1-2: 1 Jn. 1:3** "*you* [2nd plural] also may have fellowship with *us*," **1 Jn. 2:1** "If *anyone* sins [i.e. not just John but also his readers], *we* have an advocate." John is not speaking of himself alone in these instances with the literary plural, but he is speaking of himself and the body of believers whom he addresses in the letter.

Therefore, **1 Jn. 1:9** refers to John *and* the corporate body he addresses confessing their sins. The language in the passage is shown by no internal evidence to be limited in reference only to, or even primarily to individual, personal sins. And this fact shows that the phrase "if *we* confess *our* sins" can refer to confessing *both* corporate generational sins *and* individual sins according to the practice of ancient Israel, the post-exilic Jewish community of Nehemiah's day, and the practice of the later Jewish community of Jesus' and John's day.

24. JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION—CONFESSING OUR SINS AT CONVERSION AND AFTER CONVERSION

In his recent book, *Systematic Theology*,¹¹⁴ Dr. Wayne Grudem has described the time we receive Christ and are converted with terms like "regeneration"—God imparting new life to us—"adoption"—God making us members of His family—and "justification"—God giving us right legal standing before Him. The ensuing process of "sanctification" involves "the application of redemption that is a progressive work that continues throughout our earthly lives."¹¹⁵

Confessing our sins is something the New Testament shows is involved in conversion (receiving justification through Christ) and also in sanctification, as we grow to become mature in Christ and more and more free from sin in our daily lives. Some Christians claim that they do not have to confess any pre-Christian sins—whether personal sins, corporate sins, or generational sins. They think that because all their past sins are

¹¹⁴ W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 746.

“covered in the blood of Jesus,” they no longer need to confess them or cooperate with God to overcome their past sins or the consequences of their past sins. But the New Testament shows a completely different picture of confession of sin as part of the process of sanctification. Regularly confessing our sins after conversion is the undisputed command of Jesus to His followers in the Lord’s Prayer in **Matt. 6:12** and **Lk. 11:4**. Regular confession of sin is also commanded of all Christians in **James 5:16** and **1 John 1:9**, showing that confessing our sins and cooperating with the Holy Spirit to turn away from them is essential to the process of sanctification and growing to become like Christ.

Both **Lk. 19:8-9** (Zacchaeus’s faith and repentance) and **Acts 19:18-19** (the Ephesian believers public confession of pre-Christian sins), which were quoted above, show that the normal New Testament model of conversion included expressing faith in Christ accompanied by confessing specific sins and showing the fruit of repentance. **Acts 8:22-23** shows that if we fail specifically to apply the blood of Christ to pre-Christian sins by confessing them and repenting of them, we may remain captive to sin as Simon the converted sorcerer was. Simon is a sad reminder that this is so. We may not often ponder the fact that Simon was a *baptized believer* who had *put his faith in Jesus Christ*:

Acts 8:13, 18, 20-23--"Simon himself *believed* and was baptized. . . . When Simon saw that the Spirit was given at the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money. . . .Peter answered: 'May your money perish with you. . . . Your heart is not right before God. *Repent of this wickedness* and pray to the Lord. . . .For I see that you are full of bitterness and *captive to sin.*"

1 John 1:7, 9 shows that the way we receive redemption through the blood of Christ and the way our sins are forgiven by the blood of Christ is by our confessing our sins *at* conversion and in an ongoing way *after* conversion. Without the shedding of Christ's blood there is no forgiveness (**Heb. 9:22**), and confessing our sins (with the intention to repent)¹¹⁶ is the New Testament way of being forgiven and cleansed of sin:

1 Jn 1:7, 9--"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the *blood of Jesus*, his Son, *purifies* (Greek *katharízei* present indicative "is purifying" or "keeps on

¹¹⁶ Fürst, The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 1, p. 346:
"Confession is a sign of repentance."

purifying")¹¹⁷ *us from all sin*. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves. . . . If we *confess our sins*, he is faithful and just and will *forgive us our sins* and *purify us* from all unrighteousness."

25. CONCLUSION

The Church needs to learn to confess sin the Bible's way, which is also the Lord's way. We need to learn to confess not only personal sin but also parental, ancestral and national sin. We need to confess parental, ancestral and national sin that the Holy Spirit shows us, so that we do not unwittingly walk in those sins. As the examples of Moses (**Exo. 34:9; Num. 14:17-19**), Jeremiah (**Jer. 14:20**), Daniel (**Dan. 9:8, 20**), and Nehemiah (**Neh. 1:6**) show us, we can always identify with the roots of any given sin even if we ourselves have not committed it. I may not have committed hate crimes against African Americans, but I can identify with the sinful attitudes at the root of racism--pride, intolerance, fear, control, divisiveness, isolationism, and self-preservation. Moses and Jeremiah were not idolaters, but they confessed the sin of idolatry on behalf of God's people, asking the Lord to forgive their sin (**Exo. 34:9; Num. 14:17-19; Jer. 14:20**).

The Lord did not preserve the deeper truths of the Old Testament for ancient Israel alone, but for New Testament believers also. Rather, He intends that the church use the Old Testament to equip believers "for every good work" (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**) to advance His Kingdom throughout the world:

Deut. 29:29--"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever."

¹¹⁷ Blass, Debrunner, Funk, Grammar of the New Testament, § 318, (2), (3); Robertson, Grammar of the Greek New Testament, p. 879; Moulton, Grammar of New Testament Greek, vol 1, p. 119.

26. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE BIBLE ABOUT IDENTIFICATIONAL REPENTANCE

Question 1. Isn't it a heavy burden for someone to have to be responsible to confess not only their own sins but also to wade through and confess the sins of their parents and grandparents or their church or their nation?

First, Scripture indicates that when we confess sins, we are *not* on our own supposed to wade through any list of sins, whether our own personal sins or corporate and generational sins. **Phillipians 3:12-15**, in which Paul says that God will reveal to the Phillipians any incorrect thinking or attitudes in their lives, suggests it is God who enables the process of sanctification in our lives. **Psalm 139:23-24** "Search me, O God. . ." suggests that we, like David, need to ask God's Spirit to search us and show us our sins (**Ps. 19:12-13**). **1 John 1:7-9** shows us that it is as we walk in the light of God's presence, exposing everything to Him, that His light will expose our sins so that we can be cleansed (**Jn. 3:20-21**). Because **1 John 1:7-9**'s picture of walking in the light and confessing our sins to the Lord on an ongoing basis is written to believers, this shows us that God may not deal with *all* of our sins at once. Instead the passage suggests that God will continually reveal to us sins in our lives, whether past or present, which we need to confess and be cleansed of.

The Lord is the one who we should depend on to search us and test our hearts. We need to ask Him to show us those sins He wants us to confess and repent of at any given time. God only dealt with Peter's fear of man at the time of Christ's death and resurrection (**Mk. 14:66-72; Jn. 21:15ff.**). Only later did He deal with Peter's prejudice against Gentiles (**Acts 10; Gal. 2:11-14**).

Secondly, confessing the sins of one's parents and grandparents under the guidance of God's Spirit is *not* an additional burden. In my own life and in my experience of praying with and for others such prayer often is an additional way from God to *unburden* oneself or one's church or ministry from personal and corporate guilt, oppression, and stubbornly entrenched sin patterns.

Question 2. Isn't identificational repentance for past sins the same as praying for the dead? Doesn't identificational repentance attempt to absolve someone else of their personal responsibility to repent and confess their personal guilt and sin?

No, identificational repentance is not praying for the dead to undergo some purgatory-like cleansing from past sin. Nor does identificational repentance absolve others in the past or present of their personal responsibility to confess their own individual sin. Identificational repentance is a means of receiving God's grace toward the one who is praying to be freed from any consequences of the sin by others, whether past or present, to which the person praying is linked in some way. Jeremiah, who declared his own commitment to the Lord and confessed his people's sins in **Jer. 3:25; 14:7, 20**, was spared along with his servant, Baruch, from the captivity which resulted from his people's sin (**Jer. 40:1-6; 45:2-5**). In **Deuteronomy 21:7-9** the Israelite elders of surrounding towns would be freed from the guilt of shedding blood in the case of an unsolved murder by renouncing before the Lord any complicity in the murder and asking the Lord to forgive by means of a sacrifice the guilt of the bloodshed in their territory. They did not commit the crime but were held responsible by the Lord to confess and remit the guilt.

Identificational repentance is also a means of releasing God's grace on a corporate level to others which may move them to repent more freely of their personal sins and turn to Christ. Scripture shows us examples of this in the accounts of Jesus' prayer for his persecutors on the cross, and the prayers of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Moses for God's people and for pagans (see below discussion on remitting the corporate sins of others).

Question 3. Is identificational repentance really biblical? Does the New Testament teach us to follow the Old Testament model of confessing corporate sin, generational sin, and national sin in addition to personal sin?

The question is really the following: Is the confession of corporate sin--which includes generational sin and national sin--still a legitimate category of confession in New Testament faith, as it was in the Old Testament? The answer is "yes." **See sections 19-24 above for discussion.**

Question 4. Don't Ezekiel 18:20 and Jeremiah 31:29-30 teach that we no longer share the iniquity of our parents and that generational sin no longer affects children?

The answer is "no." **See sections 13, 13.1—13.5 above for discussion.**

Question 5. Why should we take responsibility for past sins in our family lines or the sins of our nation which we have not committed?

First, **1 Peter 2:9** says that we are a "royal priesthood," and there is a priestly aspect to biblical examples of identificational repentance prayer. Even in cases where we have not personally committed the corporate sins we are confessing before God, we can all identify with the roots of any given sin. We may not have had an abortion, but we can identify with the lust, the love of comfort, the love of money, the rejection, and the unbelief which are the sinful root attitudes leading to abortion. **See section 12, the latter part of the discussion in section 13.5, and section 15 above for discussion.**

Question 6. Doesn't the Bible show that we can only seek and receive forgiveness for our own individual sin and that we cannot remit the sins of others--we cannot receive God's forgiveness or apply God's forgiveness to the sins of others, whether families, corporate bodies, or nations from which we come or to which we belong?

The answer is "no." **See section 17 above for discussion.**

Question 7. Isn't the Old Testament idea of generational sin and confessing generational and national sin foreign to the New Testament?

The answer is "no." **See sections 19-24 above for discussion.**

Question 8. Once we put our faith in Christ aren't we forgiven and our past sins automatically covered by the blood of Christ? Doesn't this mean we don't have to confess or repent of any specific former sins?

The answer is "no." **See sections 22 and 24 above for discussion.**

Question 9. Isn't the effect of generational sin part of the Old Testament curse of the law from which Christ redeemed us according to Galatians 3:13? If so, why do we need to confess sin as Old Testament Israel did? Aren't we under grace not law?

See sections 19, 22-24 above for discussion.