

**BLUNTING THE TEETH OF THE NEXT GENERATION:
AN ANALYSIS OF HOW THE CHILDREN OF
SINNERS ARE TREATED IN MIDRASH**

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ABSTRACT

Blunting the Teeth of the Next Generation: An Analysis of How the Children of Sinners are Treated in Midrash explores midrashic literature on the topic of punishing children for the sins of their parents. Drawing from a wide variety of *midrashim* from the Tannaitic period through the 12th century, including specific textual examples of children whose parents have sinned, this thesis examines the Rabbinic theology regarding the punishment of sinners' children.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One discusses the relationships between, conflicts in meaning, and midrashic interpretations of the three Biblical texts that serve as the foundation for the Rabbinic theology on punishing sinners' children: Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 24:16, and Ezekiel 18:2-4. Chapter Two explores the punishments suffered by the children of sinners in Midrash, including the examples of Esau's children, Haman's children, and Canaan's children. Chapter Three argues that the children of sinners have the ability to repent for their parents' sins and thereby alter their punishments, as demonstrated by Korah's children and Pharaoh's daughter. Chapter Four examines the rewards given to the children of sinners who repent, as shown through the examples of Korah's children and Pharaoh's daughter.

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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago I spent some time in a class studying the writings of the prophet Ezekiel. During the course, we briefly covered the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel, in which the prophet protests against the punishment of children for their parents' sins. Ezekiel denounced a then popular proverb in the land, "When the parents eat sour grapes, their children's teeth are blunted." From the context of the chapter, it becomes clear that this obtuse proverb refers to the sins of the parent, and the subsequent punishment of the children. He then continues to instruct his Israelite audience that from that point forward, individuals would only be punished for their own individual sins.

I found myself intrigued by Ezekiel's claim that the message of this proverb, punishing the children for their parents' sins, was accepted in Israel. I wondered whether this attitude prevailed in later generations as well, or if Ezekiel's message had deterred the punishment of children. In order to discover an answer to my question, I began probing midrashic texts relating the Rabbis' attitude about the punishment of children whose parents had sinned in the Bible.

As my search began, I came to recognize that the question of punishing children for the sins of their parents actually belongs to a wider discussion of texts than just the passage in Ezekiel, chapter eighteen. I identified three key texts which shape the discussion of transgenerational sin – passing on the punishment for sin from parents to children: Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 24:16, and Ezekiel 18:2-4. Exodus 20:5 promotes the punishment of children, while the other two texts refute this theology. As I read *midrashim* which cited these texts, I found cross-references and arguments which often tried to resolve the perceived conflict between the messages of these texts.

One of the resources that helped guide my search toward additional Biblical and Rabbinic sources was an article by Reinhard Neudecker.¹ Writing for a non-Jewish audience, Neudecker explored the development of Rabbinic views concerning the statement of Exodus 20:5, that the sin of the parents will be "visited" upon later generations. To accomplish his goal, Neudecker traced a small number of *midrashim* over time to track the evolution of Rabbinic attitudes toward transgenerational sin. I used Neudecker's work as a starting point, as he provided some of the groundwork research on this area. Following his approach, I widened the scope of the research to gather a number of *midrashim* which interpreted the verses from Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Ezekiel.

The research technique used by Neudecker looked at the question of transgenerational sin from a theological vantage point. For the purpose of this thesis, I also felt it necessary to examine textual evidence of children who were punished for their parents' sins. This line of research would allow me to compare the theological stance of the Rabbis with their treatment in Rabbinic literature of children who were likely to suffer for their parents' sins. My textual evidence comes from analyzing material pertaining to the children of Esau, Korah, Pharaoh, and Haman in *Midrash*. Using several different anthologies, I tracked the children of these individuals in *Midrash*. Some resources that were particularly useful in my search were *Legends of the Jews*,² *Torah HaKethubah Vehamessurah*,³ and *Torah Sheleimah*.⁴ From these resources, I found numerous *midrashim* depicting the treatment of sinners' children.

¹ Reinhard Neudecker, "Does God Visit the Iniquity of the Fathers upon their Children?" *Gregorianum* 81, no. 1 (2000): 5-24.

² Louis Ginzburg, *Legends of the Jews*, Henrietta Szold, trans., 7 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909-1938).

³ Rabbi Aaron Hyman, *Torah HaKethubah Vehamessurah*, 2d ed. rev. and enl., 3 vols. (Tel-Aviv: Dvir Publishing Co., 1979).

An additional research tool was the CD-ROM collections of texts. The Bar-Ilan collection proved invaluable as a source to find difficult texts, and as a tool that enabled me to trace appearances of words, names, and phrases throughout the Midrash.⁵ Several of the texts used in this thesis were found only through this method of research, and did not appear in any of the anthologies consulted.

After I gathered the materials for this thesis, I set out to determine whether the Rabbis blunted the teeth of the next generation by promoting the punishment of the children of sinners. Chapter One starts with the Biblical source texts at the heart of this discussion. Breaking the texts down, I compare them to determine their meaning, context, and linguistic relationships. This chapter also presents the midrashic interpretations of these passages, and explores the resolution of apparent conflicts between the messages of these texts. The key issue is: Do the rejections of transgenerational sin in Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:2-4 trump the message of punishment for the children of sinners in Exodus 20:5?

Chapter Two explores the different punishments inflicted upon the children of parents who sin. What form does transgenerational punishment take in Midrash? The children of sinners were punished in some cases with death, and in others with dehumanizing punishments that demonized the descendants of sinners. Additional punishments reinforced the cyclical nature of sin, encouraging the children of those who sin to continue their parents' wicked ways. This chapter concludes with textual examples of individuals whose sins caused their descendants, and in one case even the sinners' parents, to suffer punishments for their sins.

⁴ Menachem Mendel Kasher, *Torah Sheleimah* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1934-).

⁵ Responsa Project: the Database for Jewish Studies Ver. 9.0. Bar-Ilan University.

While the children of some sinners are punished, Chapter Three examines whether these children can escape the path of sin. Acts of *teshuvah*, atonement, enable the children of sinners to repent for their parents' wicked actions. Such repentance offers hope for annulling the punishment decreed against later generations. The children of Korah and Pharaoh's daughter serve as role models for *teshuvah*.

In addition to annulling the punishment from their parents' sins, Chapter Four presents evidence that the children of sinners also have the opportunity to garner rewards for their *teshuvah* and meritorious acts. By rejecting their parents' sinful ways, the children of sinners earned acceptance within the Israelite community. They were also given Divine rewards that included protection from death, prophetic abilities, and even rewards in the afterworld.

These chapters provide the basis for understanding the midrashic treatment of the children of sinners. The Rabbinic attitude toward transgenerational punishment becomes clear through the exploration of these texts. In essence, we want to ascertain is: Do the Rabbis blunt the teeth of the next generation?

CHAPTER ONE:

**BIBLICAL AND RABBINIC SOURCES FOR PUNISHING
THE CHILDREN OF SINNERS**

A) INTRODUCTION

Uncovering the midrashic attitude toward transgenerational sin must begin with an examination of the Biblical sources. Three Biblical sources anchor the discussion of transgenerational sin: Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 24:16, and Ezekiel 18:2-4. These three texts undergird the rabbinic discussion regarding the passing of sin from parent to child and vice versa. This chapter begins with an examination of the meaning behind these verses within their Biblical contexts. While the texts appear to derive from different sources, the next step will demonstrate the shared characteristics that link these texts together. A brief look at the midrashic tradition's interpretation of the verses follows, with a concluding segment focusing on the resolution of conflict in meaning among these texts.

B) BIBLICAL SOURCE TEXTS

1. Exodus 20:5

The first reference to punishing children for the sins of their parents appears in Exodus 20:5:

לֹא-תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לָהֶם וְלֹא תַעֲבֹדֵם
כִּי אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֵל קַנָּא
פֶּקֶד עוֹן אָבֹת עַל-בָּנִים עַל-שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל-רִבְעִים לְשֹׂנְאִי⁶

You shall not bow down to [other gods] or serve them.
For I, *Adonai* your God, am a jealous God
Noting the sin of the parents on the children until the third or
fourth generation for those who reject me.

⁶ A repetition of this verse appears in Deuteronomy 5:9 as part of the retold version of the Ten Commandments. See also Exodus 34:6, Numbers 14:17-19.

This verse represents the second commandment of the Decalogue from God to Moses. The commandment forbids Moses and his people from worshipping other gods. The first line of the verse, "*lo tishtachaveh lahem v'lo ta'avdem*," "you shall not bow down to [other gods] or serve them," is concerned with worshipping other gods, while the last two lines describe the punishment brought by *Adonai* for such an offense. Line two provides the subject of the action, "*ki anochi Adonai Elohecha el kana*," which translates as, "For I, *Adonai* your God, am a jealous God." The last line contains the material relevant to this thesis, the punishment of children for the sins of their parents.

As every translation represents an interpretation, it is necessary to explain the reasoning behind the translation of this key phrase. I would translate, "*poked avon avot al banim al sheleishim v'al-ribel'im l'sonai*" as:

Noting the sin of the parents on the children until the third or fourth generation for those who reject me.

This translation requires an explanation of the key words *poked*, *banim* and *l'sonai*.

The first verb, *poked*, raises the question of whether this verse refers to the direct punishment of the children for the sin in question, or simply the remembering of the sin over time with respect to the children. In order to capture this definitional dichotomy, I translate *poked* as "noting."⁷ At least one other commentary translates the verb as "visiting."⁸ However, this latter translation incorporates a sense of action as a result of the sin in question, while the former leaves interpretative space for either immediate action or delayed action, which allows for *teshuvah*, repentance, and change.

⁷ This use of the verb root *pay-koof-dalet* corresponds with its usage in Genesis 21:1, "*Adonai* took note (*pakad*) of Sarah as promised, and *Adonai* did for Sarah as spoken." Here the verb corresponds to God's "noting" Sarah's condition of barrenness and subsequently making her fertile.

⁸ *JPS Hebrew-English Tanach: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 37.

A second key term, *banim*, also lends itself to multiple interpretations. Two primary possibilities are that of "son"⁹ and "member."¹⁰ The latter generally applies in situations that refer to members of large groups. The two primary examples from Biblical texts are "*b'nei Yisrael*" and "*b'nei nevi'im*," the "members of Israel" and the "members of the prophets" respectively. For these two examples, the phrase "*b'nei*" refers to a member of the group and not literally to a son of the group. In the verse from Exodus in question, *banim* should more likely be translated as "son" in the context of the group punished for the sin of *avot*, literally "fathers." Additionally, I choose to translate both *banim* and *avot* with the gender neutral English terms "children" and "parents."¹¹

L'sonai, the last word in the verse, potentially changes the meaning of the verse as a whole. Commonly translated as, "those who reject me,"¹² it is not immediately clear from the context of the verse whether this word applies to the parents or the children.¹³ In the first case, the children of all those who sin, and reject God, are punished until the third or fourth generation. The other possibility limits the punishment to only those children who reject God, and are the children of sinners. Many later *midrashim* make use of this ambiguity in attempts to mollify the harsh decree of this verse.

⁹ Francis Brown, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, with Charles Briggs and S. R. Driver (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), s.v. "ben."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Hebrew grammar lacks a gender neutral form. Instead, it follows the rule above which dictates that if one is referring to a group of ten girls and one boy, that the group is referred to as masculine based upon the one masculine member. The use of the masculine form in Hebrew is therefore inclusive, not exclusive, of the feminine. For the remainder of this thesis, I will continue to use these gender neutral translations.

¹² *JPS*, 115.

¹³ Nahum Sarna, ed., *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 110ff.

2. Deuteronomy 24:16

The second Biblical source text for the Rabbinic discussion of punishing children for their parents' sins is located in Deuteronomy:

לֹא-יָמוּתוּ אָבוֹת עַל-בְּנִים וּבָנִים לֹא-יָמוּתוּ עַל-אֲבוֹת
אִישׁ בְּחַטָּאתוֹ יָמוּתוּ¹⁴

Parents cannot be killed because of [the sins of] children, nor can children be killed because of their parents' [sins].

A person will die for his/her own sin.

This verse belongs to a collection of civil and criminal legal statements given to the people by Moses prior to his death. These statements distinguish between individual and communal responsibility with respect to crimes committed in the community.¹⁵ One can divide this verse into two halves. The first line, "*lo yum'tu avot al-banim u'vanim lo-yum'tu al avot*," "Parents cannot be killed because of children, nor can children be killed because of parents," directly addresses the question at hand in this paper, whether a child can be punished for the deed of a parent or vice versa.

From a surface reading of the text, it appears that neither a child nor a parent can be killed on account of the other's deed. The word, *al*, "because of," denotes in this case a sense of cause and effect. However, a sense of ambiguity exists with respect to the actions in question by the parent and child. It is not immediately clear from the first half of the verse what the parent or child may have done. This verse represents an example of a gapped verb, and requires the second line of the verse to provide the verb referred to in the first line.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 24:16.

¹⁵ W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981), 1492-1503.

Reading line two, one finds, “*ish b'cheto yumato*,” “A person will die for his/her own sin.” The use of the root for sin, *chet-tet-aleph*, provides a basis to interpret the first half of the verse as referring to the act of sinning. Thus, the message given by this verse states that a parent or child is responsible for his/her own sins and should not be punished for the sins of earlier or later generations.

3. Ezekiel 18:2-4, 20

A third text which relates to the question of transgenerational sin occurs in the book of Ezekiel:

במה־לכם אתם משלים את־המשל הזה על־אדמת
 ישראל לאמר אבות יאכלו בסר ושני הבנים יתקיינה
 ג חי־אני נאם אדני יהנה אם־יחיה לכם עוד משל
 המשל הזה בישראל: ד הן כל־הנפשות לי הנה פנפש
 האב ופנפש הבן ליהנה הנפש החטאת היא תמות:¹⁶

² What do you mean by quoting this proverb upon the soil of Israel, “When parents eat sour grapes, their children’s teeth will be blunted”? ³ As I live – declares *Adonai* God – this proverb shall no longer be current among you in Israel. ⁴ For all lives are mine, the life of the parent and the life of the child are both mine. The one who sins, that one will die.

These three verses in Ezekiel express the rejection of a proverb that had previously been held as true in the land of Israel. Ezekiel instructs the Israelites to no longer believe in the proverb, “*avot yochlu boser u'shinei ha'banim tik'heina*,”¹⁷ which translates as, “the parents will each sour grapes, and their children’s teeth will be blunted.” In order to

¹⁶ Ezekiel 18:2-4.

¹⁷ This proverb also appears in Jeremiah 31:29. Biblical scholar Hendrik Leene discusses the notion that the Jeremiah text borrowed this proverb from the earlier Ezekiel narrative for this proverb. For the details of the argument, see Hendrik Leene, “Unripe Fruit and Dull Teeth” in *Narrative and Comment: Contributions to Discourse Grammar and Biblical Hebrew*, edited by Eep Talstra (Amsterdam: Societas Hebraica Amstelodamensi, 1995), 82-98.

understand the meaning behind this proverb, one has to parse the three key terms: *boser*, *shinei*, and *tik'heina*.

A literal translation of *boser* yields the translation of "unripe grapes."¹⁸ It appears in only a few other biblical texts and in one of the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁹ In Job, the usage appears in the context of "the wicked man" who will drop his unripe fruit, *boser*, like a vine. In the Qumran text, one of the Temple Scrolls, the Israelites are instructed that they cannot eat *boser* until after they have atoned. These other passages seem to demonstrate a similar link between evil/sins and *boser*.

An examination of the term *shinei*, literally "teeth," requires a search for uses of the root *shen*, in a *smichut* form parallel to that of *shinei ha'banim*. Two examples resemble the text from Ezekiel, Psalm 3:8, and Job 4:10. Psalm 3:8 refers to the *shinei resha'im*, the teeth of the wicked, which the Psalmist calls for God to break. In Job, one finds the *shinei kefirim*, the teeth of the lion, being described as broken. Based upon the imagery in these other examples, the use of "teeth" appears to refer to the individual's source of power, or strength.

Finally, the term *tik'heina* requires explanation. Literally the root, *kuf-heh-heh*, indicates a blunting or dulling, and can be found in Ecclesiastes in regard to the dulling of iron.²⁰ Putting these terms together yields a proverb with an unclear meaning: "When parents eat unripe grapes, their children's teeth are blunted." Some commentators expound this verse to mean "weakening of teeth"²¹ or "teeth set on edge."²² However,

¹⁸ David J. A. Clines, *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 2, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew: Beth – Waw* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993-), s.v. "*boser*."

¹⁹ See Isaiah 18:5, Jeremiah 31:29, Isaiah 18:5, Job 15:33, and the Qumran scroll 11QT 217.

²⁰ See Ecclesiastes 10:10 for the "dulling" of iron.

²¹ Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, *Yechezkel* (New York: Mesorah Publications, 1977), 289.

the conclusion of verse 4 seems to indicate the meaning behind the proverb and the severity of the punishment described.

Verse 18:4 reads, "*hanefesh ha-chotet hi tamut*," "the one who sins, that one will die." This conclusion to the three verses makes clear the message of the proverb from verse 2. "Eating unripe grapes" refers to the action of sinning, and "blunting teeth" serves as a euphemism for punishment or death. The message of Ezekiel 18:4 is further clarified in a later verse:

הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחַטָּאת הִיא תָמוּת כִּי לֹא-יִשָּׂא אָב בְּעֲוֹן הָאָב וְאָב
לֹא יִשָּׂא בְעֲוֹן הַבֵּן צְדָקַת הַצַּדִּיק עָלָיו תִּהְיֶה וְרָשָׁעַת
רָשָׁע [הַרָשָׁע] עָלָיו תִּהְיֶה²³

The one who sins, that one will die. The child shall not bear the sin of the parent, nor shall the parent bear the sin of the child; the righteousness of a righteous person will fall on that one [alone], and the wickedness of a wicked person will fall on that one [alone].

Here the prophet clearly separates the sin of the parent from that of the child and vice versa. The exact repetition of the Hebrew from verse 4 is our clue that this second verse contains a related interpretation. Thus, Ezekiel 18:2-4 teaches that no longer will children be punished by death for the sins of their parents, but that only the individual who sins shall be held accountable for the sin.

C) THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THESE BIBLICAL TEXTS

Examining three texts from different sources, it becomes necessary to demonstrate the existence of possible links between the texts. The use of different synonyms for the act of transgression, and varying forms of punishment, may lead to

²² Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, "Ezekiel 18:25-32," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, Vol. 32:3 (July 1978): 295. See also *NJPS*.

²³ Ezekiel 18:20

doubts about comparisons between these texts. However, I believe that the consistent use of identical subjects, the preposition phrase *al* in two of the texts, and the rabbinic acknowledgement of a relationship between the texts all demonstrate the interconnection between these verses.

Looking at the chart below, it becomes clear that all three texts are concerned with the same subjects with respect to transgression and punishment:

	Exodus 20:5	Deuteronomy 24:16	Ezekiel 18:2-4
Subject	<i>Avot/banim</i>	<i>Avot/banim</i>	<i>Avot/Banim</i>
Sin	<i>Avon</i>	<i>Cheit</i>	<i>Yochlu boser</i>
Punishment Verb	<i>Poked</i>	<i>Yum'tu</i>	<i>Tik'heina</i>

All three texts share the common language of *avot* and *banim*, parents and children. In each case, the transgression of a parent relates to the acceptance or denial of punishment of that parent's child as a repercussion from the sin. Using identical subjects indicates a shared relationship between the texts.

Another link exists between Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 24:16 both of which employ the preposition *al*. Ramban notes that this preposition indicates a language of vengeance.²⁴ Vengeance fits the context of both verses. In Exodus 20:5, the text speaks of punishment as meted out by a "jealous God." And in Deuteronomy 24:16, the context involves the deliverance of laws that separate between personal and communal responsibility for sins. Surely that includes those individuals who would want to punish a murderer or sinner by killing not only the sinner, but also that sinner's family members. Choosing to employ the same prepositional phrase, with similar contextual meaning, indicates a conscious link between these verses.

²⁴ Ramban on Exodus 20:4.

Further connection between the three foci derives from Rabbinic acknowledgement of the interaction among these three texts. A number of *midrashim* address directly the relationship linking these texts. While these texts will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter,²⁵ the existence of such texts demonstrates acknowledgement in the Rabbinic mind of a connection between these three Biblical texts.

D) MIDRASHIC INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLICAL TEXTS

Expanding beyond the initial textual layer of these sources, one finds a myriad of midrashic interpretations for these texts. This section explores these midrashic traditions in order to present the basic understanding of transgenerational punishment by the Rabbis, as it derives from these three sources. In this next section, we examine *midrashim* which seek to resolve the conflict in meaning between these texts.

The Rabbis were long aware of the difficulty inherent in Exodus 20:5 as evidenced in their numerous and varied interpretations. In one late *midrash*, Exodus 20:5 even appears in a listing of the most difficult texts to interpret.²⁶ Other *midrashim* on this verse address both questions of ambiguity with respect to the words in the verse, and also the theological implications of punishing children for their parents' sins. One of the terms, *poked*, concerned the Rabbis because it was unclear in their minds whether *poked* directly implied punishment of the children or a remembrance of the sins from the past.

One of the oldest rabbinic texts, *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai*, offers two possible interpretations of Exodus 20:5. The *Mekhilta* text begins with two quotations:

²⁵ See section E) of this chapter, pp. 15-18.

²⁶ *Midrashei Chaser v'Yoter* in J. D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Midrashim: A Library of Two Hundred Minor Midrashim* (New York: Eisenstein, 1915), 1:194-199.

"Adonai remembered (*pakad*) Sarah,"²⁷ and, "I have surely remembered (*pakod pakadeti*) you."²⁸ The text then offers the interpretation of Rabbi Judah:

I first gather their sins into My hand and suspend [punishment for] them until your generations [when punishment shall occur], as in the case of Jehu, the son of Nimshi. Thus it says, "Your sons up to the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel" (2 Kings 15:12). And so it happened.²⁹

According to this reading, God withheld Jehu's punishment until the fourth generation. Remembering Jehu's sin, God inflicted punishment upon Zechariah, his grandson, who was assassinated and removed from the throne.³⁰

The second interpretation places emphasis on the status of the sinful generation:

If the parents were generally righteous, then God suspends [punishment] for them [in accordance with Exodus 20:5], otherwise God does not [suspend punishment in accordance with Ezekiel 18:20]. This is similar to a parable about a man who borrows a hundred *manehs*³¹ from a king, and then refuses to pay it back. Afterwards, his son comes and borrows a hundred *manehs*, and then refuses to pay it back. His grandson also comes to borrow a hundred *manehs* and then refused to pay it back. The king will simply not lend money to his great-grandson because his ancestors defaulted.³²

According to this interpretation, *pakad* refers only to a selective system of remembering. God suspends and remembers only the sins of those who appear "righteous." Others are left to be punished each for his own sin in accordance with Ezekiel 18:20, "The one who sins, only that one will die."

With this interpretation of Exodus 20:5, the Rabbis have also radically shifted the context of the verse. In Exodus, the message of, "Noting the sins of the parents upon the

²⁷ Genesis 21:1.

²⁸ Exodus 3:16.

²⁹ *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai*, to Exodus 20:5.

³⁰ 2 Kings 15:9.

³¹ A monetary denomination equal to one hundred common or fifty sacred shekels. See Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (Jerusalem: Horeb Publishers, 1903), s.v. "*maneh*."

³² *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai*, to Exodus 20:5.

children..." occurs within the context of the sin of idolatry. From the parable used to explain the two texts, the context of the sin in question appears far less significant. Reinhard Neudecker notes the gap between a sin of idol worship and the example in the parable, "A hundred *manehs* is a large sum of money but, if borrowed from a king, the damage that is done to him by not repaying it can be felt to a lesser degree. The interpretation does not consider the original context of Exodus 20:5, namely the very serious sin of idol worship."³³ Neudecker continues to suggest that the Rabbis viewed idolatry as a moot point in their time, and therefore wanted to find a new interpretation that would keep Exodus 20:5 relevant for them.³⁴ Therefore, the "sins of the parents" refers not only to idolatry, but to other types of iniquities.

In *Numbers Rabbah* we read an interpretation that links the word *poked* as a synonym for the root *zayin-chaf-resh*, to remember.³⁵ From this link, the interpretation of Exodus 20:5 comes to mean that God remembers the sins from one generation to the next. Memory, as opposed to other possible interpretations, does not necessarily entail an action on God's behalf. Rather, one imagines that the sins of prior generations hang over descendants in anticipation of potential consequences.³⁶

Other interpretations take for granted that *poked* implies some type of punishment for the children of the one who sins. A Talmudic text extends the punishment of the children of the wicked: "Woe unto the wicked! It is not enough that they render themselves liable, but they even render their children and their children's children

³³ Reinhard Neudecker, "Does God Visit the Iniquity of the Fathers upon their Children?" *Gregorianum* 81, no. 1 (2000): 11.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Numbers Rabbah* 9:44.

³⁶ *Sifre Badmidbar*, *pisqa* 112.

liable!"³⁷ The sin and its liability extend beyond the third and fourth generation to all descendants.

At the same time, a different interpretation also interprets "*poked*" as punishment, but clarifies when and how a child may be punished:

When one is less than [13 years and 1 day old], one is not punished in either the courts on earth or in the heavenly courts. If this is so, then no children would have to die. Why do children die? Because of the sins of their parents. This is what is meant by, "*poked avon avot al banim*" – at the time when they are in the domain of their parents.³⁸

This interpretation defines the punishment of parental sin as death for the child!

Poked now expresses not only punishment, but the ultimate punishment for a child whose parent sins. Furthermore, a child may suffer this punishment at any time prior to his or her turning thirteen, or reaching the age of responsibility in the community.³⁹ This last fact limited the time when the punishment could be applied to that literally of childhood, exempting adults whose parent's committed sins.

While Exodus 20:5 posed many difficulties for the Rabbis, Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:2-4 did not produce as many varied interpretations. *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* captures the straight literal meaning of Deuteronomy 24:16:

My Father in heaven, You wrote in Your Torah that, "a parent shall not die on account of a child, nor a child on account of a parent (Deut. 24:16)," and it says, "A child shall bear the sin of the parent, nor the parent bear the sin of the child (Ezekiel

³⁷ B.T. *Yoma* 78b. Translation from Schottenstein Edition, *Talmud Bavli: Tractate Yoma*, vol. 2 (Brooklyn: Artscroll Mesorah, 1998).

³⁸ *Midrash Tannaim 'al sefer Devarim* 24:16.

³⁹ Although not explicitly called *bar mitzvah* in the *midrash*, the age of 13 has long corresponded to the time when a male in the community became responsible for his own actions. Girls were not given such a precise age for responsibility primarily because they fell into the domain of the responsibility of either their father or husband.

18:20)," God forbid these were not true, for then your people Israel and your Torah would be extinct.⁴⁰

From this interpretation, it becomes clear that neither child, nor parent, should bear the sin of the other. This interpretation accords with a literal translation of Deuteronomy 24:16. Variations on this understanding only appear with respect to the potential conflict between this verse and Exodus 20:5, when the context of Deuteronomy 24:16 becomes limited to specific situations.

Most midrashic interpretations also follow the literal translation of Ezekiel 18:2-4, holding to the premise that only the one who sins should be punished. The Palestinian Talmud teaches:

They asked Wisdom, 'As to a sinner, what is his punishment?' She said to them, 'Evil pursues the evil' (Prov. 13:21). They asked Prophecy, 'As to a sinner, what is his punishment?' She said to them, 'The soul that sins shall die' (Ez. 18:4). They asked the Holy One, blessed be he, 'As to a sinner, what is his punishment?' He said to them, 'Let the sinner repent, and his sin will be forgiven him.'⁴¹

In this *midrash*, the verse from Ezekiel is applied literally, so that only the sinner shall be punished. At least one other text cites the passage from Ezekiel as proof that the sinner alone shall die.⁴²

E) RESOLVING TEXTUAL CONFLICTS THROUGH MIDRASH

In addition to interpreting these three Biblical texts, the Rabbis also sought to resolve the conflict between the surface meanings attached to these texts. The messages of Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:2-4 seem to conflict with the meaning of Exodus

⁴⁰ *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah*, 18. The verse is cited in the context of a plea for mercy before God.

⁴¹ P. T. *Makkot* 2:5. Translation from Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol. 31, *Sanhedrin and Makkot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). See also *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana*, *pisqa* 24, and *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 358.

⁴² *Leviticus Rabbah* 37:1.

20:5. Exodus teaches that the sin of the parents will be "noted" for the next two or three generations of children. Deuteronomy 24:16 can be interpreted as conflicting with the message of Exodus 20:5 in that it states that a person will only die for his or her sin. While this does not directly contradict the notion of "noting" the sins, it limits the degree to which the later generations can be punished because parents and children cannot be killed for the sins of the other.

Contradictions between Ezekiel 18:2-4 and Exodus 20:5 appear more pronounced in nature. Although not stated directly, the proverb in Ezekiel reflects the exact same message as that of Exodus 20:5. From the text of Ezekiel, it seems that Exodus 20:5 had long held sway over the attitude of the Israelites. The direct rejection of the proverb thus represents a direct rejection of the message in Exodus 20:5. Ezekiel 18:4, especially as amplified by Ezekiel 18:20, reiterates this message that only the person who sins shall die.

The midrashic tradition attempts to resolve the conflict between Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 24:16 in two ways. First, early texts differentiate between the two situations discussed by the texts. According to this argument, the Deuteronomy text does not apply in all situations:

From the rule, 'Parents cannot be killed on account of children' (Deut. 24:16), we learn that one is not able to testify against the other, because one is not allowed to testify on account of the other...⁴³

This means that the Deuteronomy text should not be seen to conflict with the meaning of Exodus 20:5, because it refers only to courtroom situations. Deuteronomy 24:16 prevents

⁴³ *Midrash Tannaim* 13:7. See also *Sifre Devarim*, *pisqa* 87, *B. T. Bava Kama* 88a, and *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 1290.

parents and children from testifying against one, so that they may not cause the death penalty to be to against each other.

The distinctions between these two texts in particular becomes clearer in the Talmudic version:

Our teachers taught, 'A parent cannot die on account of a child' (Deut. 24:16). What does the Talmud say? If this verse is supposed to teach that a parent cannot die for the sin of a child and a child for the sin of a parent, this has already been said, 'A person will die for his/her own sin' (Deut. 24:16). Rather, 'A parent cannot die on account of a child' – refers to the testimony of a child, and 'A child cannot die on account of a parent' – refers to the testimony of a parent. And a child cannot be punished for the sin of their parent? But it is written, 'Noting the sin of the parent upon the child' (Exodus 20:5)! This simply refers to children who hold onto the ways of their parents.⁴⁴

This explanation makes use of the potential duplication of the message in Deuteronomy 24:16 to explain how this verse differs from Exodus 20:5 and limits the power of Exodus 20:5. Instead of a repetition, the Rabbis use the first part to distinguish the Deuteronomy message as referring to cases of testimony. In addition, the other part of the Deuteronomy statement serves to distinguish Exodus 20:5 by its limitation to only those cases in which the child follows the evil path of the parent.

While this approach separates the two verses based upon the perceived circumstances of each, it still allows for the application of Exodus 20:5. As expressed above in B. T. *Sanhedrin* 27b, the Rabbinic approach still allows for the punishment of children for their parents' sins in cases where the children follow the wicked path of their fathers. In *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana*,⁴⁵ God explains to Moses the limitations of Exodus 20:5, that if one generation changes and the individual becomes a tzaddik, then the verse

⁴⁴ B. T. *Sanhedrin* 27b. See also B. T. *Berachot* 7a, B. T. *Bava Kama* 88a, *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 290, Vol. I, *remez* 395.

⁴⁵ *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 25:5.

from Deuteronomy 24:16 applies, and the parent cannot die for the child, or vice versa. Moses accepts the limitations on the basis that no such wicked son of a wicked man exists in Israel. However, this still leaves open the possibility for applying this standard of transgenerational punishment for sin.

The other approach for reconciling the conflict between Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 24:16 claims that the latter supercedes the former. According to *Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas*:

Three statements were made by Moses to which God agreed. "Noting the sin of the parent on the children" (Ex. 20:5) and Moses said, "A father will not die because of [the sin of] children" (Deut. 24:16). And when did God agree to this? It is written, "But he did not put to death the children of the assassins, in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Teaching of Moses... 'A parent will not be put to death because of children...' (Deut. 24:16)" (2 Kings 14:6).⁴⁶

This solution to the conflict between the two biblical verses results in the annulment of Exodus 20:5.

In an attempt to resolve the conflict between Ezekiel 18:2-4 and Exodus 20:5, the Rabbis rely only upon the argument of supercession. We read in the Babylonian Talmud:

R. Yose bar Chanina said: Our teacher Moses enacted four decrees upon Israel, and four other prophets came and annulled them...(3) Moses said: 'Noting the sin of the parents upon the children' (Exodus 20:5). Ezekiel came and annulled this decree, 'The person who sins shall die' (Ezekiel 18:4).⁴⁷

Again, the passage claims that the one text annuls the statement in Exodus 20:5, rendering it void. This time Ezekiel cancels the decree of Moses, as opposed to the prior text in which Moses cancelled or changed the statement of God.

⁴⁶ *Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas*, *Shoftim* 19. See also *Numbers Rabbah* 19:33.

⁴⁷ B. T. *Makkot* 24a. See also *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 291, Vol. II, *remez* 313 and *D'rashat Rabbi Ban'ah* in J. D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Midrashim: A Library of Two Hundred Minor Midrashim* (New York: Eisenstein, 1915), 1:76-77.

Another resolution of the differences between the Ezekiel and Exodus texts occurs in *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai*.⁴⁸ According to this comparison between Exodus 20:5 and Ezekiel 18:20,⁴⁹ the two texts refer to two different perceived circumstances. The message of Exodus 20:5, "Noting the sins of the parents upon the children until the third or fourth generation," applies to situations in which the parents were "righteous."⁵⁰ In contrast, the passage in Ezekiel 18:20, "only the one who sins will die" applies only in those situations in which the parents are not "righteous." This distinction between circumstances resembles the arguments above that resolved conflict between Deuteronomy 24:16 and Exodus 20:5 by limiting the circumstances under which each could be applied.

F) CONCLUSION

Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 24:16, and Ezekiel 18:2-4 serve as the basis for the Rabbinic understanding of transgenerational sin. Related to one another linguistically, the Rabbis see these three as responding to one another. For the most part, the Rabbis try to mollify if not remove the idea of transgenerational sin presented in Exodus 20:5 from the tradition. They limit its application and in some places even claim that it has been overturned by other statements in Torah.

Yet, despite the existence of texts that claim the supercession of the Deuteronomy and Ezekiel texts over Exodus 20:5, other texts contend that it still applies in certain

⁴⁸ *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai*, to Exodus 20:5. See also Chapter 1, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁹ While Ezekiel 18:20 differs from Ezekiel 18:4, the former contains a repetition of the latter verse along with a more detailed explanation. Therefore, I felt it worthwhile to include this midrashic passage, even though it does not specifically cite the passage being examined for this thesis. See also section B) 3., page 8, for more information on the relationship between these two verses.

⁵⁰ *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai*, to Exodus 20:5.

situations. The lack of agreement over "*poked avon avot al banim*," "noting the sins of the parents upon the children," and its status, allows room for the Rabbis to punish the children of those who sin and still hold to their parents' sinful paths. In later chapters, it will become clear that the behavior of the children plays a significant role in determining their punishment for the sins of earlier generations.

CHAPTER TWO:

PUNISHMENTS INFLICTED UPON THE CHILDREN OF SINNERS

A) INTRODUCTION

Chapter One demonstrated the efforts made by the Rabbis to annul the principle of punishing children for their parent's sins. However, despite the numerous texts rejecting transgenerational sin, Chapter One also pointed out the loophole by which the Rabbis still accept punishing the children of sinners in situations where those children adhere to the wicked path of their parents. Recognizing that such punishment can occur, this chapter explores the types of punishments administered to children for the sins of their parents. The examination begins with a set of texts that advocate transgenerational punishment in general. Then we will examine a collection of *midrashim* which advocate punishing the children of sinners by direct punishment. Other texts suggest the indirect punishment of the children through dehumanizing and demonizing portrayals.

In addition to punishing the children, several texts describe how later descendants adhere to the path of sin and the rejection of Judaism. These individuals enter into a vicious cycle of sin and punishment that continues from generation to generation. The chapter then concludes with examples of particular sinners from the Bible whose children have been punished according to the midrashic tradition.

B) FORMS OF PUNISHMENT FOR PARENTAL SINS

1. The Rabbis Accept Transgenerational Punishment

In rejecting transgenerational sin, the prophet Ezekiel cited a proverb popular at his time in the land of Israel. The proverb states, "When parents eat sour grapes, their

children's teeth will be blunted."⁵¹ Although Ezekiel instructed the Israelites to discard this proverb, it remained current within the Jewish community. Two *midrashim* use this proverb to prove that children are punished for the sins of prior generations.

The Babylonian Talmud makes reference to parables told by Rabbi Meir which use the imagery of foxes and the proverb from Ezekiel 18:2.⁵² While the Talmudic text lacks the actual content of the parables, two later sources describe similar, yet different parables from Rabbi Meir with foxes and the sour grapes proverb. One account is given by Rashi and the other by a geonic source.

Rashi cites the following parable about the experiences of a wolf and a fox:

A fox once persuaded a wolf to enter a Jewish courtyard on a Friday afternoon to assist in the Sabbath preparations, promising him that he would then be allowed to share in the Sabbath meals. When the wolf entered the courtyard, he was beaten with clubs. The wolf was ready to kill the fox for having deceived him, but the fox explained that the wolf must have been beaten because his father had once helped with the Sabbath preparations, and then taken the best pieces of meat for himself. When the wolf complained that he should not have been punished for his father's wrongdoings, the fox cited the verse: "When parents eat sour grapes, their children's teeth will be blunted."⁵³

In this parable, Rashi expresses a literal understanding of the sour grapes proverb – children will be punished for the sins of their parents. Furthermore, he does not adhere to the differentiation made by other texts as to the behavior of the children. One might expect that the wolf, who was trying to help with Shabbat preparations, and thus was not explicitly following the wicked path of his father, would receive a warmer reception from the community. However, if the fox's version of past history was correct, then the people

⁵¹ Ezekiel 18:2.

⁵² B. T. *Sanhedrin* 38bff.

⁵³ Rashi on B. T. *Sanhedrin* 39a. Translation from Adin Steinsaltz, *The Talmud*, vol. 17, *Tractate Sanhedrin*, pt. 3 (New York: Random House, Inc., 1998). The parable includes two other verses cited by Rabbi Meir in the Talmudic discussion from *Massekhet Sanhedrin*. I have omitted that section of the parable because it lacks relevance in the current discussion.

in the community punished the wolf for his father's sins before he could even deviate from that wicked path.

In a similar parable, the Geonim present the sour grapes proverb through the tale of a lion and a fox:

A hungry lion asked a fox where he could find food. The fox pointed to a plump person engaged in prayer, who was standing behind a covered pit. The lion told the fox that he was afraid to attack the man while he was praying. The fox reassured him that there was nothing for him to worry about, for neither he nor his son would be punished for this deed, but only his grandson. The lion decided to attack, but fell into the pit. He called out to the fox, and asked him why he had fallen into the pit. The fox explained that it must have been on account of his fathers' wrongdoings. The lion then asked: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are blunted?" The fox answered, "Why did you not think about that before you decided to attack the innocent man?"⁵⁴

This parable seems to fit better with the Rabbinic differentiation made between children who also sin and children who do not. By attacking an innocent person, much less a person engaged in prayer, the lion became vulnerable to the punishment for the sins of his forefathers. One can also read this as a punishment for the children of the lion, in that any of his offspring now bear the same burden of sin as carried from one generation to the next.

Both of these texts demonstrate a propensity in the Rabbinic tradition to punish the children of those who have sinned, particularly those children who continue to sin. The next section examines the form of punishment inflicted upon the children. In some cases, that punishment involved death, while others employed less immediately drastic and more devastating dehumanizing punishments.

⁵⁴ Adin Steinsaltz, *The Talmud*, vol. 17, *Tractate Sanhedrin*, pt. 3 (New York: Random House, Inc., 1998), 89ff.

2. Punishing Children With Death

Middah k'neged middah, the principle of "measure for measure," surfaces in many texts concerned with punishing the children of sinners. This principle takes the form of inflicting punishment upon an individual equal to the crime that was committed. A good example of this principle as it applies in this context occurs with respect to the punishment of Haman's children as seen in Midrash.

The following *midrash* builds upon the story of Haman's children from the book of Esther:⁵⁵

Our Rabbi's taught that Haman had one hundred children. Ten of them were killed. Ten of them were hung. Ten of them were cut up and given to the dogs, and 70 of them they allowed to live for twelve months. At the end of that time, they were killed. But this teaches... rather that the punishment a man measures out for others, is measured out for him. Just as Haman declared he would kill and murder all the Jews and destroy them. so, too, was it done to him.⁵⁶

This story demonstrates the application of *middah k'neged middah* by enacting the same punishment decreed by Haman against the Jews, on Haman's children. Also, one notes the elaborate and exaggerated method in which the text applies this punishment for Haman's sins to his children.

3. Dehumanization of The Sinner's Children

Death represents the most radical punishment administered directly on the children of sinners. Other punishments may also be applied indirectly, such as altering the way in which the children are perceived by the community. This includes a change in

⁵⁵ In the *Book of Esther*, Haman had ten children, all of whom were killed when his plan backfired and King Ahasheurus ordered his death. While they were punished immediately for the sins of their father in the Bible, this paper focuses on their continued punishment in the Midrash and its ramifications for transgenerational sin.

⁵⁶ *Midrash Tehillim* 22:2.

the way in which a name is read publicly,⁵⁷ or the exaggeration of certain characteristics the individual possesses to the point of villainization.⁵⁸ How the Rabbis choose to describe an individual impacts upon the way in which later generations will perceive that person. By the same token, when the Midrash demonizes or dehumanizes certain children of sinners, then later generations will perceive the children from a biased point of view. The Midrash uses at least two techniques to dehumanize the children of Haman.

One way to diminish the perceived importance of an individual or group is to minimize their role when retelling the stories that involve them. The children of Haman suffer this fate each year at the reading of *Megillat Esther*. According to *Massechet Soferim*,⁵⁹ the names of Haman's ten sons must be read in the span of a single breath. By limiting the reader to such a short time span, this rule guarantees that the listener will be unable to distinguish between the different sons of Haman. As a result, the sons become a dehumanized and indistinguishable mass, and thus much easier to dismiss as wicked. This process makes it easy for the listener to accept the punishment inflicted upon them in *Tanach* for the sins of their father against the Jews.

In addition to the manner in which their names are read, tradition also dictates the manner in which their names are written. In the Palestinian Talmud, the Rabbis note the different manners in which texts can be written:

⁵⁷ The method for reading the names of Haman and Mordechai on Purim reflect such a change. When the name of Haman is read, all present boo, curse, and obliterate the sound of his name. But, when Mordechai's name is heard, those present cheer. As result, the villainous qualities of Haman are highlighted, as are the heroic attributes of Mordechai.

⁵⁸ A number of *midrashim* use such a technique in describing the wives of Esau. While he marries non-Jewish women in *Tanach*, the Midrash extends the description of these women as incense burning idolators. In one textual tradition the Rabbis blame the blindness of Isaac on the smoke from their idolatry.

⁵⁹ *Massekhet Soferim* 13:2. See also P. T. *Megillah* 74b, and *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 22, Vol. II, *remez* 1059, in addition to numerous halakhic texts on the proscribed manner for reading *Megillat Esther*.

The "Song of the Sea" and the "Song of Devorah" are written with a whole brick on a half brick and a half brick over a whole brick. [In contrast], the ten sons of Haman and the Kings of Canaan are written with whole bricks over whole bricks and half bricks over half bricks...⁶⁰

By this analogy, the Rabbis refer to the manner in which the names of the sons of Haman are written on the scroll itself. According to this tradition, the names are written one on top of the other, in contrast to the overlapping style used to write the "Song of the Sea" and the "Song of Devorah." The analogy relates to one of building, and in a later text the rest of the analogy is explained. A house built with overlapping bricks is much stronger, and will last for a long time, while a house built without overlapping bricks will only collapse from instability.⁶¹ Tradition writes the names of Haman's ten sons in this manner to symbolize their insignificance. The goal here also appears to be that of dehumanizing them and trying to convince the reader that the sons were destined to fail, and thus their deaths were meant to be.

4. Children Adhere to the Path of Sin

Another manner of inflicting punishment upon the latter generations of a sinful person is to cause his/her descendants to follow the same wicked ways as the early generations. This punishment emphasizes the cyclical nature of sin: the children will continue the wicked ways of the parents and doom the entire genealogical line to sin, thereby denying them any hope of a place in the world to come and future resurrection. Although this punishment may not occur in the present world, the later descendants doom themselves to eternal punishment by continuing to adhere to the path of transgression.

⁶⁰ P. T. *Megillah* 74b. See also *Massekhet Soferim*, 13:2, and *Yalkut Shimoni* Vol. II, *remez* 22, 1059.

⁶¹ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 1059.

The original sinner also suffers knowing that his or her sin cannot be redeemed by later generations, but will only be multiplied by their efforts.

For the Rabbis who adhered to this principle of cyclical sin, sinfulness represented a genetic trait that could be passed down from generation to generation. The following text demonstrates this principle:

"If a woman produces offspring, bears a male child, she shall be unclean seven days" (Lev. 12:1). What is written after this? – "When a man shall have on the skin of his flesh a rising..." Why are these two texts juxtaposed? R. Tanhum b. Hanilai taught: This may be compared to a she-ass that was sick and was cauterized, and her fetus emerged with a cauterization mark. What caused it to come out with the cauterization mark? The fact that its mother had been cauterized. Likewise, who causes a new-born child to be leprous? It's mother, who did not observe her period of separation...Likewise, if a man comes in to his wife during the period of her separation, he produces leprous children. R. Abin applied this to the verse, "When the parents eat sour grapes, their children's teeth are blunted" (Ezekiel 18:2)...⁶²

From this text, one learns that sinful actions resemble Lamarckian genetics – just as a newborn bears the same markings as its parents, so, too, will a sinful child bear the sins of its parents. This text also makes it clear that the sin is transmitted by both the male and female parent, who bear equal responsibility for their sin. Although leprosy may not appear as a sin, one need remember that the disease renders the carrier *tamei*, unclean, just as a sin would render one *tamei*.

Additional texts strengthen this understanding of sin being passed from generation to generation. The children of Esau seem particularly predisposed toward remaining on the path of sin. Several *midrashim* accentuate the familial relationships among Esau, Amalek, and Haman. In one text, the *midrash* simply informs the reader that, "When Israel exited from Egypt, Amalek, the descendant of Esau the wicked, came and did evil

⁶² *Leviticus Rabbah* 15:5.

unto Israel.”⁶³ While another *midrash* reminds the reader that just as Haman is a descendant of Amalek, he, too, belongs to the descendants of Esau.⁶⁴ These two *midrashim* emphasize the potential danger of children whose parents sin.

In addition to committing sins against the people of Israel, as did Haman and Amalek, the children of sinners also refuse revelation from God. The following *midrash* describes the children of Esau rejecting Torah:

When God revealed the Torah to Israel, God also went before all the nations of the world to offer them a chance to accept the Torah. But none of them wanted to receive it, as it is written, “God said from Sinai...” God came to reveal [Torah] to the children of Esau, the wicked. God said to them, “Will you accept the Torah?” The children of Esau said to God, “And what is written in it?” God said to them, “Thou shalt not murder” (Exodus 20:7). The children of Esau replied, “All of us belong to those people who you promised their fathers would [live by] the sword, as it is written, ‘Yet by your sword you shall live’ (Genesis 27:40). How could we accept this [Torah]?” And they did not accept the Torah.⁶⁵

The children of Esau rejected the Torah because it conflicted with the life they thought God promised them. On the one hand, they argue that God has given the “life of the sword” as the inheritance of the children of Esau, which demonstrates their acknowledge of God in their lives. However, when given a chance by God to accept Torah, divine revelation, they choose instead to retain their life of war and killing. By rejecting

⁶³ *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 25:5.

⁶⁴ *Yalkut Shimoni* Vol. I, *remez* 265. The *midrash* describes a list of different punishments that are applied to the descendants of Esau, singling out Haman and Amalek for their specific crimes by punishing them with a play on their crimes. Amalek is punished by *hilesh* (ballot), which is the same root as *halash* (weak), for his attacking the helpless members of Israel. Haman receives his punishment according to a play on the lots (*goral* and *pur*) which he drew to determine the destruction of the Israelites, yet actually predetermined his own date and time of death.

⁶⁵ *Midrash Tannaim 'al Sefer Devarim* 33:2. A variant of the story in *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Ishmael* (*Yitro* 5) refers to the “life of the sword” as their “inheritance” from God. The power of this story is further demonstrated by the number of repetitions within the tradition without much deviance, save the above reference to inheritance. See also *Sifre Devarim*, *pisqa* 343; *Lamentations Rabbah*, 3; *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer*, 40; *Midrash Tanhuma* Buber, *Devarim* 10; *Midrash Tanhuma HaNidpas*, *V'zot Ha'bracha* 3; *Pesikta Rabbati*, *pisqa* 21:3; *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 266.

revelation, these descendants show a desire to adhere to the sinful path of their forbearer and miss an opportunity to change. Once again the midrashic tradition demonstrates the inability of a sinner's child to break the cycle of sin.

C) PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF CHILDREN WHO WERE PUNISHED

Punishing children for the sins of their parents was not merely a theological statement on the part of the Rabbis. In some cases, they directly applied this rationale to the treatment of children whose parents had sinned in the Bible. The examples cited above demonstrated a few of the punishments given to the children of Esau and Haman. This section elaborates further upon the punishments applied to the children of those individuals, as well as the children of Saul and Canaan.

1. The Family of Esau

Esau's descendants suffered a number of punishments, which resulted from the sin of their ancestor. In Esau's case, not only were his children punished, but the repercussions of his actions actually had an impact upon his father and grandfather. According to one *midrash*, Abraham and Isaac suffered as a direct consequence of Esau's sins:

"May God remember the sins of his father..." (Psalms 109:14). If this is so, then the fathers of Esau were wicked men. But they were wholly righteous men, Abraham, his grandfather, and Isaac, his father. Rather, the phrase from Psalms refers to sins that were committed during the lifetime⁶⁶ his fathers. And what sins were committed during the lifetime of his fathers? Isaac lived even longer than Abraham. Isaac was 180 years old, and Abraham 175 years old. R. Yudan in the name of his father's rabbi, Rabbi Pinhas, in the name of Rabbi Levi, taught that

⁶⁶ Literally 'al' – on account of, because, or even before.

Abraham lost five years from his life because Esau committed two terrible sins during his life: he slept with an engaged woman and he murdered the man [she was engaged to]...And what did Esau's sins do to Isaac in his life? They caused his eyes to go blind. From this, they say that anyone who raises a wicked son or a wicked student, his eyes will go blind.⁶⁷

Esau shortened the life of his grandfather and caused his father's blindness. Because he committed these sins during their lifetimes, they, too, suffered for his misdeeds. While both Abraham and Isaac suffer for Esau's transgressions, it is interesting to note that neither of them directly transgressed. The tradition places the burden upon the older generations to influence their descendants. And yet, even though they are both responsible, the *midrash* explains their punishment with two different reasons.

Abraham's punishment occurred as a result of two specific transgressions committed by Esau, while Isaac's blindness occurred as the result of Esau's overall sinful character and nature.

Additionally, the two older generations suffer different consequences for Esau's sins. Blindness and shortened life span are not equal punishments. While it is difficult to quantitatively compare murder and rape with the raising of a wicked son, connections exist between the crimes and punishments. Although Abraham did not die immediately from the sins, his shorter life span coincides with the punishment of death attached to the crimes. Isaac's punishment of weak vision seems ironic given the accusation that he ignored or "turned a blind eye" toward his son's behavior and failed to turn him away from a path of wrongdoing.

The language at the beginning of the *midrash* also offers an insight into Rabbinic reasoning. According to the story, both fathers of Esau were "wicked men." But on the

⁶⁷ *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 3:1.

surface, the only wicked deed Abraham and Isaac committed was to suffer punishment for the sins of Esau. Reading further into the text, however, one realizes that Abraham and Isaac committed transgressions in their failure to raise Esau as an upstanding citizen. Because they failed to meet their parental obligations and responsibilities, Abraham and Isaac bear a portion of the burden for Esau's sins. The model of sin in this *midrash* explains that transgression impacts upon both earlier and later generations in a family. This serves as further evidence that the mindset of "noting the sins of the parents on children" remained influential in the midrashic tradition.

The many generations of Esau's children who followed him fared no better than did Esau's father and grandfather. In fact, they are liable to suffer divine punishment from God for the sins of Esau. A pair of *midrashim* relate the description of God's hands, providing roles for each finger in the great miracles that helped the Israelites. When describing the rest of the hand itself, i.e., the palm, these texts teach: "The rest of the hand will come along in the future to destroy the *b'nei Esau* for their sins, and to eradicate the *b'nei Yishmael*..."⁶⁸ While the fingers work miracles for the children of Israel, the children of Esau and Ishmael suffer death and destruction as inflicted by the rest of God's hands. The forward looking nature of these texts also indicates that the punishment of Esau's children will extend for numerous generations, beyond the third and fourth generations mentioned in Exodus 20:5.

A clear distinction is also made in Midrash between the children of Esau and the children of Jacob. One text, while retelling the tale of Balaam's curse over the people Israel, distinguished between the two on the basis of sin. The story explains the relationship as follows:

⁶⁸ *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer*, chap. 47. See also *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 553.

If [Balaam] had requested to curse the children of Abraham, the curse would have gone forth from them, because the children of Ishmael and the children of Keturah belong to this group. If he had requested to curse the children of Isaac, the curse would have half worked against the children of Esau. But the children of Jacob are without blemish and that is why the curse failed.⁶⁹

The children of Esau are tainted forever by his sins, while the children of Jacob are free from any such burden. As a result, the two groups must be separated from one another to prevent the prophet Balaam from cursing the Israelites for the sins of Esau.

Esau's descendants are further punished with exclusion from the covenant of Abraham. The Babylonian Talmud discusses the exact line of inheritance for the covenant of Abraham.⁷⁰ From the list of potential inheritors, the text eliminates the children of Esau as well as the children of Ishmael. One assumes that the goal of this text is to further punish the children of Esau by preventing any possibility for them to lay claim to the inheritance of Jacob's children, i.e., Israel. This exclusionary practice also continues to distance the children of Esau from the Israelite and Jewish community.

More punishments await the children of Esau in the coming days. According to one version of future events, the children of Esau are destined to be destroyed at the hands of the children of Jacob – their punishment for the “*tzarot*,” the pain they caused to the children of Jacob over the years. This punishment derives from the manner in which the two of them were born – Esau red and Jacob holding onto Esau's ankle. “From [their birth story], one learns that the children of Esau will not be destroyed until the remnant of

⁶⁹ *Numbers Rabbah* 20:14.

⁷⁰ B. T. *Sanhedrin* 59b.

Jacob cuts off their legs from Mt. Seir."⁷¹ The children of Esau will one day be destroyed at the hands of Jacob's children alone.

Another vision of the future ascribes the destruction of Esau's children as the punishment enacted by the children of Rachel against the children of Esau.⁷² Although the source of the punishment becomes more limited, it is clear that the two texts draw upon similar sources and vary only in the agency of punishment for the descendents of Esau. A third variant prophesizes the destruction of Esau's children only after the fulfillment of the promise made between the two brothers in Genesis.⁷³ According to this midrash, Esau's children will be destroyed. "When the remnant of Jacob comes to give [Esau's descendents] some of their lentils to eat and takes from them the authority, kingdom, and birthright -- that was acquired by Jacob in the promise."⁷⁴

In addition to suffering at the hands of the children of Jacob in this lifetime, the children of Esau will also receive their punishment at the end of days. While most texts describe the *olam ha-ba* as an idyllic scene, reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, the children of Esau will experience that time to come in a different manner. According to the following text:

Jacob said to the Master of the Universe. "I bend before the evil one (Esau) so that he will not kill me." From this, the Rabbis teach that one should bend before evil doers in this world to promote peaceful coexistence. Esau says, "I have much, for when the honor of Jacob was divided up, Scripture uses the language 'they divided Israel' which gives honor to the children of Esau, as it is written, 'You have skirted the hills [of Seir] for long enough' (Deuteronomy 2:3). The Holy, Blessed One, said to Jacob, "It is not enough that you made the holy profane [by bending to Esau], but also I said, 'And the older shall serve the younger' (Genesis 25:23). But you say to me, 'Thus spoke your

⁷¹ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 110.

⁷² *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana* 3:13.

⁷³ Genesis 25:27ff.

⁷⁴ *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer*, chap. 35.

servant Jacob.' It is enough that by your words [Esau] rules you in this world, for you will rule over Esau in the world to come."⁷⁵

Esau committed two crimes against his brother in this *midrash*. First, we learn that he caused Jacob to go astray under duress and threats of death. Second, he claimed a piece of Jacob's inheritance for his own children. As punishment for these two crimes in this world, Esau will now spend life in *olam ha-ba* as a servant to Jacob. Based upon the metonymic use by Esau of himself in place of his descendants as benefiting from their receiving Jacob's honor, so, too, can one assume that the punishment prescribed here also applies to Esau's children.

It is also possible to read this *midrash* as punishing Esau for a third crime which he committed during his life. In the last few lines, God chastises Jacob for not claiming his birthright of dominance over Esau. However, the fact that Esau continues to resist this prophecy indicates an attempt on his part to abrogate God's promise and profane the word of God. In essence, Esau's non-compliance with God's edict of servitude in this world leads to a punishment of eternally serving Jacob.

A different *midrash* ascribes the name *hevel*, "birth pangs," to the children of Esau.⁷⁶ The reason being that, "[The children of Esau] will be oppressed with birth pangs in the future with the coming of the fourth [Messianic] Kingdom, as it is written, 'The pangs of birth shall come to him.'"⁷⁷ According to aggadic stories, the arrival of the Messiah will be like birth pangs in the world.⁷⁸ This particular *midrash* interprets those pains as referring to the suffering that will be inflicted upon the children of Esau at the dawning of the Messianic Age. One assumes that these pains represent the punishment

⁷⁵ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 133.

⁷⁶ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 265.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ B. T. *Sanhedrin* 98b.

inflicted upon those who reject the arrival of the Messiah, who have sinned or who continue to sin, i.e., the children of Esau.

2. Haman's Children

As noted above,⁷⁹ the children of Haman suffered numerous punishments for the sins of their father against the Jewish people. Many of those above took the form of human retribution against Haman's children, inflicting horrible deaths upon them as a reversal of Haman's decree. The punishment of Haman's descendants extends beyond the level of human punishment to that of divine vengeance. In the following text, God lashes out at the children of Haman for the harm caused by their father:

The Talmud teaches that God will make war for [Israel] against Egypt (*Mitzrayim*). Not only will God make war against Egypt, but also against all who cause suffering (*ha-matzirim*) to [Israel] through all the generations. Just as it says in Psalms, "You beat back your foes" (Psalm 78:66), "It is they, my foes and my enemies who will stumble and fall" (Psalm 27:2), and, "Then I will subdue their enemies at once, strike their foes again and again" (Psalm 81:15). As God did, "The ten sons of Haman, son of Hammedatha, the foes of the Jews. But they did not lay their hands on the spoil (Esther 9:10)...⁸⁰

For the sins against Israel, God decrees punishment through all generations. Haman's sons fall into this category for the transgressions of their father against the Jewish people in Persia. This theology claims that God adheres to the message of "noting the sins of the father on children," but does not limit the punishment or memory of sin to the third or fourth generation. Instead, the punishment transcends all generations of descendants.

Haman's descendants are also here linked with the sins of Pharoah against the Israelites. The word play between *Mitzrayim*, "Egypt," and *matzirim*, "those who cause

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2, Section B), p. 25.

⁸⁰ *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai, Beshallah* 14:25. A parallel version exists in *Mekhilta d'Rebbe Ishmael, Beshallah* 5.

suffering," links the wrongdoers of all generations to the people of Egypt.⁸¹ Connecting the two groups leads one to imagine the punishments against the children of Haman as being similar to the plagues brought against Egypt.

3. The Children of Canaan

Families other than those of Esau and Haman suffered for the sins of earlier generations. One example is the descendents of Canaan. In the Biblical text, the descendents of Canaan are cursed with the burden of slavery.⁸² Rashi explains this punishment later as stemming from a sin committed by Canaan. Canaan sins by first seeing Noah's nakedness, and then telling his father Ham.⁸³

Although this punishment first appears in the Biblical text, the story remains relevant to the subject of this thesis on two accounts. First, according to the Bible, only Ham saw Noah's nakedness, and then he told his brothers, who covered up their father.⁸⁴ The link connecting Canaan to the story appears only in Midrash, as an attempt to reconcile the fact that the Biblical text then punishes only Canaan, Ham's son, and Canaan's descendents for the sin, without mentioning Ham. Therefore, the Midrash assumes that Canaan also committed the sin in the Bible, even though he is not specifically mentioned. And second, the Rabbis continue to uphold this punishment and use it as an example of punishing children for the sins of their parents. Note the following passage regarding both of these:

Woe unto the wicked! It is not enough that they render themselves liable [for punishment], but they also render their

⁸¹ The two Hebrew words share the common root of *tzaddik-resh-heh*.

⁸² Genesis 9:25.

⁸³ Rashi on Genesis 9:22.

⁸⁴ Genesis 9:22ff.

children, and their children's children liable [for punishment] to the end of all generations. Canaan had many sons who were fit to be rabbinically ordained, such as Tavi the slave of Rabban Gamliel,⁸⁵ but the sin of their father caused them [to lose this opportunity].⁸⁶

As punishment for Canaan's sin, his family is doomed to a life of servitude. Even those individuals who try to live lives of righteousness cannot break from this punishment.

This text conflicts with the Rabbinic acceptance of punishing the children of sinners in those instances in which the children continue to follow the path of sin. Canaan's children have no power to redeem themselves or their family from its fate.

Additionally, it seems that the Rabbis have added another punishment not decreed in the Biblical verse. When God condemns the descendants of Canaan to slavery, the Rabbis interpret this servitude to also mean exclusion from rabbinic ordination. Thus, the Rabbis increase the punishment of Canaan's children by withholding the possibility of ordination, and one expects also conversion, from those who even follow Jewish law and custom.

D) CONCLUSION

The actual treatment of the children of those who sin varies drastically from the theological statements made in Chapter One. While some elements in the midrashic tradition limit the application of Exodus 20:5 to only those situations in which the descendants follow a path of sin, others clearly accept the notion of punishment for the children of sinners. As late as the 11th century, Rabbis cited and wrote *midrashim* which

⁸⁵ Tavi was a Canaanite slave who served Rabban Gamliel. He was also a Torah scholar (B. T. *Sukkot* 20b) and observant of the *mitzvot*. However, another text makes it clear that he never received ordination (B. T. *Berachot* 16b).

⁸⁶ B. T. *Yoma* 87a.

upheld the principle message behind "*poked avon avot al banim*" in Exodus 20:5 and the sour grapes proverb in Ezekiel.

Punishment of the children took many forms, from the immediate death of Haman's sons to the eternal servitude of Esau's children. It became clear that the punishments inflicted on the children of these two individuals related directly to the Biblical verses linked to their stories. Haman's children suffered the fate he ordered against the Jews. And Esau's children were bound to be defeated by the descendants of Jacob and serve them as a fulfillment of the prophecy in Genesis. Haman's children suffered the additional fate of dehumanization through the demonization of their father and themselves.

Canaan's story teaches that the Rabbis did not apply this principle only to the children of Haman and Esau. For these Rabbinic writers, any individual who sinned in the Bible was likely to incur punishment upon his or her children for that sin. In Canaan's case, the *midrash* even magnifies the Biblical punishment, preventing Canaan's descendants from escaping the decree.

In the end we are left with a message that no sin goes unpunished, whether against Israel or God. These transgressions demanded retribution in the Rabbinic mind, and in accordance with Exodus 20:5, the children bore that punishment. Those who were condemned to such fate appear to have no recourse but to suffer. Additionally, we see a Rabbinic prejudice against those whose parents have sinned, as they seem predisposed to follow the path of their parents and continue the cycle of sin and punishment.

CHAPTER THREE:

**CAN CHILDREN CHANGE OR ALTER PUNISHMENTS DECREED AGAINST
THEM FOR THEIR PARENTS' SINS?**

A) INTRODUCTION

According to the texts presented in Chapter Two, the Rabbis establish that the children of those who sin can be punished for the sins of their parents. From many of the scenarios presented, it appears that the children remain locked into the punishment inflicted for the actions of their parents. This chapter explores the truth of that assumption that the Rabbis believe that children can alter their punishments.

While it may seem that children have no recourse, several *midrashim* provide evidence that disproves the assumption of punishment. First, children can differ from the path of their parents and follow a life without sin, thereby breaking the cycle of generational punishment. Turning away from their parents' sinful ways represents the first steps in altering their punishment. Returning to the correct path, making *teshuvah* for the sins of parents, and performing righteous acts represent three ways to nullify punishment for the sins of parents.

B) CHILDREN CAN CHANGE

Arguments in Chapter One and Chapter Two demonstrated that the Rabbis believe that those children who follow their parents' sinful paths will be punished. From these arguments, one concludes that children who change from their parents' sins can avoid such punishment. Now it is necessary to determine whether the Rabbis believe it is possible for such a child to change. Can a righteous person have a wicked child? Can a wicked person have a righteous child? If both of these possibilities are true, then a child can choose not to follow the path of a parent, leaving open the possibility for change. The following text demonstrates this principle:

Moses said to the Master of the Universe, "How is it possible that there can be a righteous person for whom things are good, a righteous person for whom things are bad, a wicked person for whom things are good, and a wicked person for whom things are bad?" God replied to Moses, "A righteous person for whom things are good is a righteous person, the child of a righteous person, whereas a righteous person for whom things are bad is a righteous person, the child of a wicked person. A wicked person for whom things are good is a wicked person, the child of a righteous person, whereas a wicked person for whom things are bad is a wicked person, the child of a wicked person."⁸⁷

From this text, we see that it is possible for a righteous person to have wicked children, and a wicked person to have righteous children. But, while the children can change, this section of the *midrash* argues that a person cannot escape the punishment incurred for the transgressions of his/her parents. A righteous person will still suffer in life, because of the sins committed by his/her parents. Additionally, a wicked person will receive favorable outcomes in life, based upon the righteous behavior of a parent.

The ability of a child to change becomes more important as the Talmud challenges the idea of transgenerational reward and punishment. The *midrash* above continues with the conflict between Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 24:16:

Is it so [that a person's fortune rests upon the actions of a parent]? In one place it is written, "Noting the sins of the parent upon the children" (Ex. 20:5), and elsewhere it is written, "Children shall not be killed because of their parents" (Deut. 24:16). And we pointed out a contradiction between these two verses, and we answered that there is no difficulty. [Exodus 20:5] refers to situations where the children retain their parents' sinful practices. And [Deut. 24:16] refers to situations where the children do not retain their parents' sinful practices.⁸⁸

Clearly, this text rejects the notion that punishment for parental sins applies to all children. This text reaffirms that children can change and that only those who continue to

⁸⁷ B. T. *Berakhot* 7a. See also *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 395.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* See also B. T. *Sanhedrin* 27b.

follow paths of sin will be punished. This message emphasizes the individual's actions over those of prior generations.

Once we have established the acceptance in the tradition of the possibility that the children of sinners can change, the next step is to examine the potential impact of such change. When a child leaves the path of a wicked parent, the *midrash* in *Massekhet Berakhot* opens up the possibility that the child alters punishment decreed upon him/herself. Additional potential also exists for changing the punishment already decreed against earlier generations as well:

And from where do we learn that one can save the older generations up to the fourth generation? As it is written, "Noting the sins of the parents upon the children" (Exodus 20:5). One cannot say that if a parent is wicked and the children are righteous that God notes the wickedness of the father upon [the children], because this would not be a measure of justice. One can also not say that the person is caught in a parent's obligation, for that would not be a measure of compassion. What is a measure of compassion? Holding the sin of the parent over the children for up to four generations, that if one person from those generations is a righteous person, then the parent is saved. But if there is not a righteous person, then all four generations are liable for [the parent's] actions...⁸⁹

This *midrash* turns the entire system of punishment for the sins of parents on its head.

Not only can a child avert the punishment against themselves, but also annul the punishment of the person who sinned. "*Poked*" in this *midrash* indicates that God remembers the sin, not only for the purposes of punishment, but also redemption. By exiting from the sinful path of parents, children can redeem their parents. Descendents, up until the fourth generation, possess the theoretical potential to redeem the original transgressor. At the same time, however, if no one should step forth from those

⁸⁹ *Midrash Hashkem*, in J. D. Eisenstein, *Ozar Midrashim: A Library of Two Hundred Minor Midrashim* (New York: Eisenstein, 1915), 1:138-144.

generations as a righteous individual, then all generations bear the punishment originally decreed.

An additional layer to this interpretation is the extension of the time allotted for later generations to change. In the text of *Massekhet Berakhot* above, Exodus 20:5 is interpreted to mean that God will punish each generation, up to the fourth, for following the sinful path of the parents. This late *midrash* changes the meaning of Exodus 20:5 to emphasize that God will punish all four generations, but only after the four generations have the opportunity to change their ways. If the first and second generations fail to change, they will not be punished until all the generations have failed to produce a righteous individual.

The midrashic interpretation extends the redemptive potential of the four generations. The ability to redeem does not refer only to the generation who sinned, but to the eventual fate of all four generations involved. Again, the thread is picked up:

It is the language of compassion that God holds the sin of the parents over four generations, that if one person from the generations is a righteous person, then all [the generations] are saved from the punishment of *Gehinom*.⁹⁰

Early generations benefit greatly if only one member of the family becomes a righteous person. Later generations certainly have the ability to change, and their change will significantly impact themselves as well as their ancestors.

This new scenario presents an interesting dilemma for Rabbinic thinking: If a person can be redeemed for sin by a child, what about individuals who have no children? While the earlier pieces of text seem to lean toward a more compassionate understanding

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

of sin, in this area the lenience ends. Those who don't have children are left without the possibility of redemption:

Behold, Nadav and Abihu died. And what does Scripture say of them, "And they had no children" (Numbers 3:4). That if they had had righteous children, then they could have been redeemed based upon the merit [of their children].⁹¹

Because they died without children, Nadav and Abihu were unable to receive redemption from their sins. This reading emphasizes the role of children in the redemption of parents. One concludes that not only can children redeem their parents, but they are expected to redeem their parents from their sins, because once the parents have died, then only their children can save them.

C) TURNING AWAY FROM A SINFUL PARENT

One way in which children can leave a path of sin is to turn away from the sins committed by their parents. This form of rebellion begins with rejecting specific sinful behaviors displayed by their parents. Two Biblical exemplars reject the sins of their parents: Bityah bat Pharaoh and the children of Korah. These individuals chose to turn away from the path of transgression to find another way.

Pharaoh's daughter, named Bityah by the midrashic tradition,⁹² rebelled against her father's path in two different ways: she rejected his religion of idol worshipping, and she ignored the decree set by her father against the children of the Jews. These two acts of rebellion turned her from a path of transgression toward a path of *teshuvah*.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² This name for Pharaoh's daughter links her to an individual mentioned in 1 Chronicles. An explanation for the derivation of the name appears in Chapter 4, p.9, where her new name is discussed as a reward for her treatment of Moses in Egypt.

Bityah first appears in the Biblical narrative in the book of Exodus. She is the daughter of Pharaoh who reaches into the water to draw out a Hebrew baby, who she later renames Moses.⁹³ In the midrashic tradition, the Rabbis question what brought her down to the river's edge at that time. According to one version of the story, Bityah went to the water to cleanse herself from idol worship:

"And his Judaen wife bore Jered, father of Gedor, Heber, father of Soco, and Jekuthiel, father of Zanoah. These were the sons of Bityah, daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered married" (1 Chronicles 4:18). How can it call her Judaen – because she had renounced her idol worship, as it is written, "And the daughter of Pharaoh went down to bathe in the Nile" (Exodus 2:6). Rabbi Yohanan teaches: She went down to wash off from the idols at her father's house.⁹⁴

Bityah rejects the idolatrous practices in her father's house in two ways. First, she travels down to the water in order to renounce and atone for the idolatrous practices of her father's house. A word play occurs in this *midrash* based on the use of the verb root *kaf-pey-resh* to describe Bityah's actions at the river. This verb can be understood to mean that she renounces the idols of her father's house, and also to mean that she atones for the idol worship that she might have performed in her father's house. Both meanings underscore Bityah's rejection of her father's idolatrous practices.

Furthermore, Bityah also uses the trip to the water as an opportunity to cleanse herself from the idols in her father's house. The Rabbis imagine Bityah acting as one who has impure, or *tamei*, status, and therefore is in need a ritual cleansing. In this story, the river Nile serves as a ritual body of water, a *mikveh*, where she can go to cleanse and purify herself from the taint of idolatry.

⁹³ Exodus 2:6-10.

⁹⁴ B. T. *Megilah* 13a. See also *Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas*, *Shemot* 7; *Midrash Aggadah*, *Shemot* 2; and *Yalkut Shimoni* Vol. II, *remez* 1052.

In addition to rejecting the religion and idolatry of her father, Bityah also directly contradicts Pharaoh's decrees. From the story in Exodus, Pharaoh decrees the death of all male Israelite children.⁹⁵ Moses' mother hid her son for as long as she could before she tried to send him away down the Nile in a basket.⁹⁶ When Bityah bent down to pick up the child from the water, she only assumes that the baby is a Hebrew child.⁹⁷ The text is ambiguous as to whether Pharaoh's daughter actually knew for certain the nationality of the child, or for that matter her father's decree against the Hebrew children.

Other texts remove any ambiguity from Bityah's actions along the riverbank. According to several *midrashim*, she fully realized that her actions contradicted the decree of her father. As she went to lift the baby up from the river, her attendants reminded her:

"Mistress! It is the custom in the world, that when a king of flesh and blood declares a decree, that if there is no one in the world to uphold [the decree], then at least the king's sons and daughters uphold [the decree]. But you are transgressing against the declaration of your father!"⁹⁸

Bityah was aware of her father's decree against the Israelites living in Egypt. By lifting up the basket from the water, she intentionally rebelled against his strict oppression. This rebellious act demonstrated Bityah's resistance to the transgressions of her father. Instead of obeying his order to kill the male children, she performed the exact opposite act – Bityah saved a Hebrew child who would have surely died if left to float along the Nile into the sea.

⁹⁵ Exodus 1:22.

⁹⁶ Exodus 2:1ff.

⁹⁷ Exodus 2:6.

⁹⁸ B. T. *Sotah* 12b. See also *Midrash Aggadah*, *Shemot* 2; and *Yalkut Shimoni* Vol. II, *remez* 166.

The children of Korah also chose to leave the path of sin laid down by their father. In the Book of Numbers, a disagreement erupts in the Israelite camp between Korah, his followers, and Moses.⁹⁹ While Korah and his company were defeated and sent into *Sheol*,¹⁰⁰ the nether world, a verse appears later in Torah claiming that the *b'nei Korah*, the children of Korah, had not been swallowed by the earth.¹⁰¹ Additionally, several psalms begin with an ascription crediting their authorship to the children of Korah, *b'nei Korah*. Several stories within the midrashic tradition attempt to reconcile this apparent conflict and explain the survival of Korah's children.

One conclusion reached by many *midrashim* is that the children of Korah deviated from the path of sin taken by their father. In one *midrash*, the children of Korah ignore their father's advice:

"Happy is the one who has not followed the counsel of the wicked" (Psalms 1:1). This refers to the children of Korah, who did not follow the advice of their father, as it is written, "Stand back from the tents of these wicked people" (Numbers 16:26).¹⁰²

The children of Korah chose not to heed the advice of their father in the confrontation with Moses. When he gathered his company and followers around his tents, Korah's children removed themselves from the group. The children listened to the advice of Moses, who instructed everyone to stand away from Korah's tents to avoid the punishment and wrath of God. The children of Korah demonstrate the ability to ignore the decree of their father at a critical moment, thus leaving behind the path of transgression against God and Moses. Their actions parallel the decision of Bityah, when she decided to ignore the decree of her father with respect to the Israelite babies. By

⁹⁹ Numbers 16:1-17:5.

¹⁰⁰ Numbers 16:31-33.

¹⁰¹ Numbers 26:11.

¹⁰² *Midrash Tehillim* 1:15.

removing themselves from Korah's company, the children prevented themselves from suffering the punishment decreed upon their father.

In another *midrash*, the children of Korah are described as acting better than their father. "You are fairer than all people" (Psalms 45:3), this refers to the children of Korah. For their actions were fairer than those of Korah and his company."¹⁰³ While this *midrash* does not specify the deeds done by the children of Korah, the text continues to affirm their decision to deviate from the path of their father. Here we see that not only did they choose to leave their father's path, but to choose a quantitatively better path. Choosing a better path serves as the explanation for the survival of Korah's children after his death.

While these texts on the children of Korah inform us that they differed from his path, they do not provide the specifics of their actions. One Rabbinic *midrash* explains that the children of Korah provided a different sacrifice for God than the other members of Korah's company:

"For the leader (*l'menazeach*); upon Shoshanim, the children of Korah. Maschil. A song of loves" (Ps. 45:1). The word "*shoshanim*" is to be considered in the light of the verse, "My Beloved is gone down to the garden...to gather lilies (*shoshanim*)" (Song of Songs 6:2). When lilies in the garden are not recognized, whoever sees them says that they are thorns. Why? Because they grow among thorns. And what becomes of thorns? They go into the fire, as is said, "As thorns are cut down, shall they be burned in the fire" (Isa. 33:12); and also "If fire goes forth, and catches in thorns" (Ex. 22:5); and again, "And fire came forth from *Adonai*, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men that offered the incense" (Num. 16:35). But the children of Korah, who were lilies, were gathered from among the thorns, that they might not be consumed with the

¹⁰³ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:6. This translation and all that follow from chapters 45 and 46 of *Midrash Tehillim* are based upon the translation of William Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, trans. William G. Braude, vol. 13, *Yale Judaica Series*, ed. Leon Nemoy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959). For the purpose of this work, I edited the language to reflect the gender neutrality found throughout this work.

thorns: the Holy One, blessed be God, came down swiftly and saved them.¹⁰⁴

In this section, the *midrash* teaches that the children of Korah were able to distinguish themselves from the rest of Korah's company. They were perceived as lilies, *shoshanim*, among the thorns, i.e., Korah. Furthermore, the text indicates that their distinction as lilies was not necessarily apparent to all individuals. The early description of lilies growing among thorns indicates that the former can be mistaken for the latter in many cases. With this message of the lilies' subtle nature, the author of this *midrash* also tries to inform the reader that not all people are capable of perceiving the positive attributes of *b'nei Korah*. Fortunately for the children of Korah, God recognized their status as lilies among thorns, and dissociated them from the punishment inflicted upon the rest of Korah's company.

The text then continues to explain how the children of Korah identified themselves as lilies amongst the thorns:

A parable of a king who entered a city: when the men of the city came forth to crown the king with a crown of gold studded with precious pearls and stones, they were met and told: "The king requires nothing from you except a crown of lilies." Forthwith, the men of the city rejoiced. So it was with Korah and his assembly. They said: "The Holy One, blessed be God, requires of you censers of gold," but the Holy One, blessed be God, replied: "What good are censers of gold to Me? 'Mine is the silver, and mine the gold!' (Haggai 2:8). And so, too, the incense – 'Incense is an abomination unto Me' (Isa. 1:13). But what do I require? Lillies!" Thereupon, the children of Korah said: "We are lilies." The Holy One, blessed be God, answered: "You will be victorious," as it said, "For the One who gives victory (*l'menazeach*)¹⁰⁵ to the sons of Korah because they are *Shoshanim*" (Ps. 45:1).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:1.

¹⁰⁵ This is a word play in the *midrash* based upon the word root *nun-tzaddik-chet*. In the first line, the *midrash* uses the word as it is cited in Psalm 45:1 to mean "leader." Now, at the end of the *midrash*, the same word appears with the meaning of "victory." The word play indicates the

Now the separation between the two groups becomes clear. While the earlier text above hinted at a physical separation, i.e., their stepping away from Korah's company, this *midrash* indicates that Korah's children distinguished themselves by their actions. The *b'nei Korah* understood God's request, and brought the appropriate sacrifice. Korah tried to bring sacrificial pans made of gold, on the assumption that God desired the sacrifice of valuable objects. However, unlike their father, the children of Korah recognized that God wants the sacrifice of the self to be like "lillies," not sacrifices of gold. The children of Korah manage to turn from the path of incorrect sacrifice to God, and thus save their lives.

Moreover, the authors ascribe to the children of Korah an understanding of how to worship God that often escapes the understanding even of the Israelites under Moses. The God of the Israelites differs from the other deities whom they have seen worshipped. While other gods require objects of value to be sacrificed – such as silver or gold, the God of the Israelites wants the people to dedicate themselves to God. This difference in worship styles eludes the Israelites as demonstrated in the Golden Calf incident.¹⁰⁷ The ability of the children of Korah to comprehend this distinction indicates their closeness to God in the Rabbinic mind.

D) REPENTANCE FOR THE SINS OF PARENTS

Leaving the sinful path of their parents is the first step for the children of sinners to alter their punishment. Besides differentiating themselves from the sins of parents,

connection in the *midrash* between the leader, the children of Korah, and "victory" as achieved through proper worship of God.

¹⁰⁶ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:1.

¹⁰⁷ Exodus 32.

children must also attempt to do *teshuvah*. Children have the power to perform acts of *teshuvah*, acts that atone for the sins committed by earlier generations. These acts of *teshuvah* can further mitigate the punishment incurred by the parental generation.

The Rabbinic tradition has long acknowledged the power of *teshuvah* to repent for sin. In the Palestinian Talmud it is taught:

Said R. Phineas: " 'Good and upright [is *Adonai*; therefore, He instructs sinners in the way]' (Ps. 25:8). Why is He good? Because He is upright. And why is He upright? Because He is good. 'Therefore, He instructs sinners in the way' – that is, He teaches them the way to repentance (*teshuvah*)." They asked Wisdom, "As to a sinner, what is his punishment?" She said to them, "Evil pursues the evil" (Prov. 13:21). They asked Prophecy, "As to a sinner, what is his punishment?" She said to them, "The soul that sins shall die" (Ex. 18:4). They asked the Holy One, blessed be God, "As to a sinner, what is his punishment?" He said to them, "Let the sinner repent, and his sin will be forgiven him." This is in line with the following verse of Scripture: "Therefore, He instructs sinners in the way" (Ps. 25:8). "He shows the sinners the way to repentance (*teshuvah*)."¹⁰⁸

This text promotes the idea that God and Judaism accept repentance, *teshuvah*, in lieu of punishment for sins that have been committed. In the first half of the *midrash*, the Rabbis describe good individuals as those people who lead others toward the path of repentance. By this definition, an individual who encourages others to repent is an "upright" person.

Additionally, this *midrash* emphasizes the evolving nature of the punishment for sin. Within the text, the first answers promoted the punishment of the individual for sin. But the last answer given in the story advocates an alternative approach of repentance. One learns from the repeated questions about sin and punishment that the Rabbis wanted to distinguish between the nature of sin from the Bible, and the understanding of sin that

¹⁰⁸ P. T. *Makkot* 2:5, 74b. Translation based upon the translations of Jacob Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel*, vol. 31, *Sanhedrin and Makkot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984). See also *Pesikta d'Rav Kahana*, *pisqa* 24:7; *Yalkut Shimoni* Vol. II, *remez* 358 for parallels to this story.

the Rabbis accepted. The use of the name, "The Holy One, Blessed be God" indicates a Rabbinic understanding, post-Biblical, as opposed to the two responses from wisdom literature and prophetic books located in the Bible.

For the discussion at hand regarding the actions of children, this *midrash* teaches that *teshuvah* serves as a way for children to mitigate the punishment for sin. The *midrash* even describes God as advising individuals who sin, or are burdened with sin, to follow the path to repentance. By doing so, an alternative appears for children to alter their fates.

Not only does God encourage individuals to take the path of *teshuvah*, but God also actively listens to the hearts of individuals for intentions of *teshuvah*:

The verse, "My heart overflows with goodly matter" (Ps. 45:2) is meant to teach you that even when people are unable to confess with their mouths, but their hearts are overflowing with repentance, the Holy One, blessed be God, receives them...Indeed, the children of Korah could not utter a song with their mouths before the Holy One, blessed be God. But when their hearts overflowed with repentance, forthwith God received them. And why could the children of Korah not utter a song? Because the pit was open beneath them, and a fire burned above them, as Scripture says, "And the earth opened up her mouth...So they and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit" (Num. 16:32-33); and again it says, "A fire came forth from *Adonai*, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men" (ibid. 16:35); and also, "The earth... swallowed them up" (ibid. 16:32); and again, "A fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked" (Ps. 106:18). Thus, when the children of Korah saw the pit open beneath them on one side, and the fire burning on the other side, in that instant, though they could not confess with their mouths, yet their hearts overflowed with repentance.¹⁰⁹

By setting the standard for *teshuvah* at the level of intent, not action, the Rabbis provide the widest possible opportunity for an individual to repent for his/her sins. An individual need only have a change of heart leading toward a path of righteousness to be credited

¹⁰⁹ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:4. See also *Midrash Tehillim* 45:3.

with *teshuvah*. This broad standard gave the Rabbis further leeway to avoid applying the sins of their parents to later generations. Any semblance of *teshuvah* by a later generation could be used to nullify the application of "*poked avon avot al banim*."¹¹⁰

Moreover, this text specifically addresses the question of children whose parents' sins hang over them. From this story, it appears that those children have the ability to make *teshuvah* for their parents' sins. While the *b'nei Korah* were unable to speak, the unspoken *teshuvah* in their hearts reached God and nullified their punishment.

According to some texts, repentance requires more than just *teshuvah*. *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* claims that those whose ancestors sinned can repent for those sins through atonement, study of Torah, and the recitation of Mishnah.¹¹¹ This *midrash* places the emphasis upon learning the tools necessary to lead a righteous life. Studying Torah and Mishnah would give one the knowledge of *mitzvot* needed to not only turn away from a path of sin, but to lead the life of a *tzaddik*.

By placing these two learning processes on the same plane as *teshuvah*, the Rabbis accomplish several goals. First, they assure themselves of repentance for their own sins as the group of individuals most closely involved in the study of Jewish law and its surrounding literature. Second, they place an emphasis upon the learning characteristic of repentance. While it is good to turn away from sin, it is better to know the right ways to act and positive acts to perform. These categories also give a Jewish individual, who may have more extensive knowledge of the tradition, a greater opportunity for repentance.

¹¹⁰ Exodus 20:5

¹¹¹ *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* 5.

Finally, it would seem that this system sets up a stricter guideline for an individual to repent. In contrast to the example of the *b'nei Korah* and God listening to their heart, here the requirement includes study as well as *teshuvah*. This strict standard applies in the case of Canaan's descendents discussed in Chapter Two.¹¹² According to that *midrash*, even though Canaan had several descendents who were knowledgeable enough to be ordained, they were not eligible because of their family punishment for Canaan's sins. Perhaps his descendants, while knowledgeable, were unwilling or unaware of their need to perform *teshuvah* to complete the repentance for Canaan's sin.

E) THE CHILDREN OF KORAH AS MODELS FOR REPENTANCE

While Canaan's descendents continue to suffer for his sin, the children of Korah serve as models for repentance. The children of Korah performed *teshuvah* in order to annul the punishment decreed against them for their father's sin. There are several *midrashim* which chronicle the efforts of Korah's children to perform *teshuvah*. In one text, the directive to perform *teshuvah* comes from God:

The children of Israel said to the Holy One, Blessed be God: "Master of the universe, when wilt Thou redeem us?" and God answered: "When you have gone down to the very bottom of the pit, in that hour, I shall redeem you, as is said, 'The children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together...and shall rise up from earth' (Hos. 2:2)." So, too, the children of Korah said: We are at the very bottom of the pit, as it is said, "For our soul is sunk deep in the dust" (Ps. 24:26); and what did they go on to say? "Arise for our help" (ibid. 24:27). The Holy One, Blessed be God, answered: Your help shall be all your own. As the lily blossoms when its heart is turned upward, so will you when you repent before Me.¹¹³

¹¹² See Chapter Two, pp. 36-37.

¹¹³ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:3.

In the conversation between God and the children of Korah, God gives them the explicit instruction that in order to lift up their souls from *Sheol*, they must perform *teshuvah*.

The fact that God directly speaks with the children of Korah and tells them to perform *teshuvah* indicates a relationship between God and Korah's children. This relationship fits into the schematic of the Rabbis' explanation for how the children of Korah came to author a number of the Psalms.¹¹⁴

Additionally, this text demonstrates that the children of Korah understood the role of *teshuvah* in repentance. By repenting before God, their souls would be lifted upward from their punishment in *Sheol*. However, it is not clear from this text alone if the children of Korah are required to repent for their own sins committed while following their father's path, or for Korah's sins.

A different version of the *b'nei Korah* repenting removes God from the equation. The following text demonstrates that the children of Korah performed acts of *teshuvah* without any prompting from an outside source:

Another comment on "For the leader; upon *shoshanim*" (Ps. 45:1) by way of a parable: A Roman lady who saw three men being taken out to be crucified, redeemed them forthwith. After some days, she saw that they had been made ensigns and were carrying the royal standards. So it was with the children of Korah who followed their father's ways; the earth swallowed Korah, but his children, who repented, were made prophets, *Shoshanim*.¹¹⁵

In this *midrash*, the author directly refers to the necessity for the children of Korah to atone for their father's sin. From this it becomes clear that the Rabbis imagined Korah's children suffering the punishment for Korah's sins. Only through the agency of *teshuvah*

¹¹⁴ See Chapter Four, p. 83ff.

¹¹⁵ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:5. See also Rashi's commentary to Psalm 42:1 where he credits the children of Korah with saving themselves through repentance.

could they repeal the sentence and free themselves from this transgenerational punishment.

Both of these *midrashim* presuppose the ability of Korah's children to repent for their father's sin, even while in *Sheol*. From theological standpoint, this view seems challenging given the emphasis in the tradition upon repenting before the time that one dies. In the *midrash* from *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* mentioned above,¹¹⁶ the text specifies that the actions of *teshuvah* and study must be performed before the time that the individual dies.

One possible resolution for the conflict lies in the Rabbinic understanding of Korah's punishment. Most individuals reach *Sheol* through the path of death. Korah's company, however, went to *Sheol* without dying: "[Korah and company] went down alive into *Sheol*."¹¹⁷ Thus, the children of Korah were alive, not dead, during their punishment in *Sheol*. Therefore, they still retained the opportunity to repent for their father's sin.

F) BAT PHARAOH: ALTERING PUNISHMENT THROUGH ACTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Whereas the children of Korah performed their acts of repentance by turning away from their father in *Sheol*, Pharaoh's daughter performed her acts of repentance in this world. For her acts of kindness toward Moses, Bityah bat Pharaoh merited reward and nullified the punishment for her father's sins. This midrashic tradition stems from Bityah's willingness to adopt Moses as her own son.

When Bat Pharaoh decided to lift Moses from the river, she could have abandoned him or given Moses away to another woman. Instead, Bityah chose to adopt

¹¹⁶ *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* 5.

¹¹⁷ Numbers 16:33.

Moses as her own son. The Biblical text tells of her naming him Moses, and securing a wetnurse for her new son. Many *midrashim* extend this story to describe the actions of Bityah in terms of adoption, even though he was not her son, she cared for him as if he was.¹¹⁸

Bityah also nurtured and cared for Moses during the time that he was with her.

She demonstrated her affection by sheltering him from the outside world:

Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, kissed [Moses], hugged him, and loved him. And she would not let him leave the palace of the Pharaoh. For he was so beautiful that everyone wanted to see him.¹¹⁹

Bityah cared for Moses as would a mother, showering him with affection every day of his life. She also protected him, knowing the attention that he garnered, and tried to shield him by keeping him at home. Her actions demonstrate that his adopted status did not impact upon her feelings toward Moses as her son.

These acts of kindness did not go unnoticed. Bityah earned several rewards for her efforts from God and the Israelite community.¹²⁰ Additionally, she received protection from the sins of her father against God and the Israelites. A *midrash* on the "ten plagues" in Egypt extends the tenth plague to include the death of all first-born Egyptian children, male or female. For her actions, Bityah was spared this punishment:

The first-born female children, they, too, all died, with the exception of Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, who was protected by an intercessor for good; this was Moses, as it says, "And she saw him, that he was good" (Exodus 2:2).¹²¹

¹¹⁸ *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3.

¹¹⁹ *Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas, Shemot* 8.

¹²⁰ See Chapter 4 for a detailed account of the rewards given to Bityah bat Pharaoh, as well as to the children of Korah, for their turning from paths of sin toward righteousness.

¹²¹ *Exodus Rabbah* 18:3.

As a result of her saving Moses, he served as her good luck charm, protecting her later from the punishment that would have been inflicted upon her for her father's transgression.

In another version of the story, Moses actively prayed to God in order to save Bityah:

R. Abin, in the name of R. Judah, the son of Pazi taught: Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, was a first born child. Why did she merit saving? Because of Moses' prayers, as it is written, "Her candle never goes out at night" (Prov. 31:18).¹²²

According to this story, Moses actively prayed to save Bityah from the punishment of death. One can only assume that his prayers for her salvation stem from the relationship they had as mother and adopted son.

G) CONCLUSION

From the material presented in this chapter, it becomes clear that the children of sinful parents can change their paths in life. They have the potential to leave the transgressions of early generations behind in favor of turning toward a path of righteousness. In addition, these children have the ability to alter the punishment proscribed against them for their parents' sins. In fact, one text even taught that the children possess the power and ability to nullify the decree made not only against themselves, but earlier generations as well. This places a heavy burden of expectation upon later generations to atone for the mistakes made by their predecessors.

In order to accomplish such repentance, the children of sinners must make *teshuvah* and turn to the right path. This turning need not be an overt physical act, indeed

¹²² *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 166.

the children of Korah demonstrated that one need only have a change of heart in order to repent for the sins of parents. For those capable of more than change of heart, Bityah bat Pharaoh demonstrates the power of good deeds. Helping those in need, such as an orphan, merits both the nullification of punishment and the promise of future reward.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE REWARDS FOR LEAVING A PARENTS' PATH OF SIN

A) INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, it became evident that the children of those who sin possess the power and ability to change from the sinful paths of their parents. Such actions of *teshuvah*, repentance for the sins of their parents, can nullify the punishment decreed against the children. While redemption from punishment for themselves, and even their parents represents significant gains, additional rewards are also bestowed upon those children who reject their parents' sins.

Chapter Three demonstrated that the children of Korah and Pharaoh's daughter serve as role models in *midrashic* literature for children who reject and atone for the sins of earlier generations. An examination of their treatment in Rabbinic literature yields further understanding into the rewards garnered by those who turn from sin. This chapter explores the rewards given to these children as exemplars of change. For their efforts, the children of Korah and Pharaoh's daughter merited rewards from the Israelite community and from God.

B) COMMUNITY REWARDS

The members of the Israelite community bestowed upon the children of sinners rewards for turning away from the path of sin. There were two basic forms of reward given by the community to these individuals, and the rewards depended upon the background of the individual in question. For those who were Israelite, the community granted them forgiveness and acceptance. And those who were outside the community became members of the Israelite people.

Korah's children belonged to the Israelite community as a whole. When their father transgressed against God and Moses, they, too, could have followed Korah's path. Instead, they took another direction and made *teshuvah* for the sins of their father. In a *midrash*, the children of Korah question how long they will bear the punishment of the children of Israel for the sins of their father.¹²³ At first, the Israelites resist the call for acceptance back into the community on the basis that the individuals need to fully return to the path of good. But the text concludes with God instructing both the Israelites and the children of Korah, "[The children of Korah] do not have to return completely, and [the Israelites] do not have to turn themselves completely, rather you turn together toward each other."¹²⁴ Thus, the Israelites are compelled to accept those, who like the children of Korah, turn at least part way back toward the community.

From this text it becomes apparent that the people of Israel were obligated to welcome back all who turned from paths of sin in some degree. Additionally, this *midrash* emphasizes that an individual does not need to perform complete *teshuvah* in order to return to the community. The children of Korah are expected to turn away from Korah's sins, but they are not the only actors. The Israelite community must also take steps toward accepting those who have sinned, i.e., Korah's children. As members of the Israelite people, the children of Korah receive greater leeway to repent and return.

Non-Israelites who bear the burden of parental sin and turn from their parents' paths, are rewarded in a similar fashion. Since they begin outside the community, inclusion for them means that these individuals are given the opportunity to join the Jewish people. In the specific case of Pharaoh's daughter, she entered into the

¹²³ *Midrash Tehillim* 85:3.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

community in two different ways due to her acts of *teshuvah*. Bityah's rebellion against Pharaoh made her worthy of an Israelite husband, and her *teshuvah* also earned her the title of Judaen woman, or Jewess.

One verse in the Bible that troubled the Rabbis dealt with the marriage of Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh. This verse reads, "And his Judahite (or Jewish) wife bore Jered, father of Gedore, Heber, father of Soco, and Jukutheil, father of Zanoah. These were the sons of Bityah, daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered married."¹²⁵ This verse appears in the context of Caleb's descendants, and so the *midrashim* on this text connect the name Mered, which means rebel, with Caleb. The rational behind the link derives from Caleb's rebellion against the other spies earlier in the Bible.¹²⁶ Thus, one dilemma emerging from this text relates to the marriage of Caleb to the daughter of Pharaoh. A second problem stems from the juxtaposition in the verse of a Jewish or Judahite wife with the daughter of Pharaoh.

Solving the first problem proves easier than the second. From the Rabbinic viewpoint, the intermarriage of a Jew with an Egyptian is not impossible, as demonstrated by the marriage of King Solomon to the daughter of Pharaoh in his time.¹²⁷ The Rabbis further reason that these two individuals are perfect for each other in that they have similar personalities. The *midrash* explains:

"And these are the children of Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, whom Mered married" (1 Chronicles 4:18). And why does it say his name was Mered, when his name was really Caleb? Only because the Holy One, blessed be God, said, Caleb, who rebelled

¹²⁵ 1 Chronicles 4:18.

¹²⁶ Numbers 13:1ff.

¹²⁷ 1 Kings 3:1.

against the spies, will come and marry Bityah, who rebelled against the idols of her father's house.¹²⁸

From the Rabbinic view of this *midrash*, their rebellious natures make Pharaoh's daughter and Caleb a perfect couple. Their match was ordained by none other than God.

One *midrashic* explanation for the identification of Pharaoh's daughter as a Judaen wife explains that she earned the title for her rebellion against her father. According to this text, "She is called Judaen or Jewess because she atoned for the idol worshipping, as it is written, 'And Pharaoh's daughter went down to the water' (Exodus 2:5)."¹²⁹ Here the Rabbis interpret Bat Pharaoh's trip to the water as effort to cleanse herself from idolatry. Bat Pharaoh earns the title of Jewess because she has foresworn the idolatry of her father. By rejecting idols, Pharaoh's daughter merited entrance into the community of Israel.

A late text lists Bat Pharaoh as one of nine righteous women who converted. According to this text, "There are women of kindness who converted: Hagar, Osnat, Zipporah, Shifrah, Puah, Bat Pharaoh, Rahav, Ruth, and Ya'el, the wife of Hever the Canaanite."¹³⁰ While none of these women explicitly converted to Judaism, one infers from this text that their acts of kindness served as their conversion ceremony. Therefore Bat Pharaoh earned a place in the Israelite community for her kind treatment of Moses.

¹²⁸ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 1074. See also B. T. *Sanhedrin* 19b; B. T. *Sotah* 12b; and *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3.

¹²⁹ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 1052. See also *Numbers Rabbah* 14; *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 9, *remez* 129, and *remez* 1074.

¹³⁰ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 9.

C) GOD REWARDS THE CHILDREN WHO REJECT SIN

Turning from the sinful path of their parents can merit rewards beyond the realm of community acceptance. Such actions can, in some cases, merit the children rewards directly from God. These rewards include Divine protection, being drawn close to the Divine, the power of prophecy, and eternal life in the world to come. God rewards the children of Korah and Pharaoh with these gifts in return for their rejection of their parents' sins.

1. Divine Protection

The children of Korah and Pharaoh received divine protection for their acts of *teshuvah*. This protection kept them from suffering the punishment of death decreed for their parents' sins. In addition, they were protected from punishment administered by human agencies, and even safeguarded against illness.

The children of Korah were threatened with death for the sins of their parent. Korah's entire group was swallowed as the earth opened up underneath them. However, they survived because of the protection extended to them by God. According to one text, the explanation for the survival of the children of Korah relates to a place that was created for them in Gehinom. "The children of Korah, as it is written, 'The children of Korah did not die' (Numbers 26:11). Our teachers taught from this: a place was erected in Gehinom and they stood upon it."¹³¹ Instead of falling into the abyss of Sheol, they stood on a shelf erected for the purpose of protected them.

Rashi adds to this *midrash* in his commentary to Psalms. According to his interpretation, God miraculously saved the children of Korah by erecting a shelf to catch

¹³¹ B. T. *Megillah* 14a.

them as the earth opened up.¹³² This interpretation clarifies the origin of the shelf described in *Massekhet Megillah* above. God created the shelf with the intention of preserving the children of Korah. God's act saved them from death and preserved them from the punishment of Sheol.

A third version of God protecting the children of Korah from death alters the vehicle of their salvation. According to this version, the children of Korah recount their miraculous deliverance as follows:

"The Lord of Hosts is with us" (Ps. 46:8). The children of Korah said to the righteous: "Fear not. We saw all the miracles which God wrought for us," as it is said, "And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households" (Num. 16:32). "And where were we in that hour? Aloft in space," as it is written, "The children of Korah did not die" (Num. 26:11). According to R. Nehemiah, at the time the earth opened and the two hundred and fifty men were swallowed up, the Holy One, blessed be God, made it possible for the children of Korah to stand like a mast: They stood as a sign, for it is said, "When the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men, and they became a sign" (Num. 26:10).¹³³

In this variant, God grants the children of Korah the ability to float, and not sink into the depths of Sheol. This miraculous ability protects the children of Korah from death, as did the shelf in the other two stories.

Bat Pharaoh also earned the protection of God in her life. As mentioned in Chapter Three, because she adopted Moses, he served as a "*paraklit tov*," a good advocate, protecting her from death during the tenth plague.¹³⁴ Additionally, a different *midrash* credited her salvation from the plague to Moses' intercessory prayer to God on

¹³² Rashi on Psalm 42:1.

¹³³ *Midrash Tehillim* 46:3.

¹³⁴ *Exodus Rabbah* 18:3.

her behalf.¹³⁵ While Moses played a role in her protection, God made the final decision in each instance to grant her protection for her treatment of Moses.

Bityah also benefited from divine protection in other instances in her life. When she was standing alongside the Nile and first saw the basket, Bityah's handmaids counsel her against lifting up the basket for it violates the Pharaoh's decree.¹³⁶ Seeing that the handmaids may try to stop her, or even punish her for defying the Pharaoh's order, God sends one of the ministering angels to her rescue: "Gabriel came and struck them down to the earth."¹³⁷ The angel Gabriel protected Bityah from potential harm and enabled her to follow through on her act of kindness toward Moses.

In another version of Bityah's rescuing Moses, she originally traveled down to the river to rid herself of illness.¹³⁸ According to this story, Bityah suffered from *tza'ra'at* (a skin disease):

Our Rabbis teach that the daughter of Pharaoh (bat Pharaoh) was suffering from *tza'ra'at*. Therefore, she went down to the water to cleanse herself. When she made contact with the basket, she was healed.¹³⁹

When Bat Pharaoh reached out to defy her father's decree, she was healed from her terrible illness. Although the text does not ascribe the healing directly to God, the reader infers from the text that the miraculous healing ability of the basket stemmed from a Divine source. Thus, God heals Bityah's illness for her act of resisting the path of sin set down by her father.

¹³⁵ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 186.

¹³⁶ B.T. *Sotah* 12b. See also *Shemot Rabbah* 1:23; and *Midrash Aggadah, Shemot* 2.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ This is not an uncommon practice in the Bible. In 2 Kings 5, when Elisha is approached by Naaman seeking aid for his skin disease, *tza'ra'at*, Elisha sends him to the river to cleanse himself.

¹³⁹ *Shemot Rabbah* 1:23. See also *Midrash Tanhuma, Shemot* 7; and *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 166.

2. The Children Who Repent Are Drawn Close To God

Another divine reward for the children of sinners who repent is the honor of being drawn close to God. A sense of the close relationship between God and the children of Korah appears in the texts in Chapter Three describing their acts of *teshuvah*.¹⁴⁰ God speaks directly to the children of Korah, even encouraging them to repent. Other *midrashim* flesh out the relationship in more specific terms. In one *midrash*, God says of the children of Korah that, "They are all beloved (*y'didot*) before me."¹⁴¹ *Y'didot*, as a plural verb, corresponds to the multiple members of the *b'nei Korah*. The honor inherent in the term *y'didot* becomes clear in the second half of the *midrash* where Moses and Aaron are described as the "beloved" (*y'didot*) of God. Thus, the connection between the children of Korah and God is a rare closeness felt only by select individuals.

Pharaoh's daughter also drew closer to God as a reward for her actions. As an honor for her adoption of Moses, God adopted Bat Pharaoh:

Rabbi Joshua of Sikhnin, in the name of Rabbi Levi, taught: the Holy One, blessed be God, said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Moses was not your son, but you called him your son. Therefore, even though you are not my daughter, I will call you my daughter (*biti*)," as it is written, "These are the children of Bityah" (1 Chronicles 4:18), the daughter of God (*bat yah*).¹⁴²

The background for this *midrash* develops through other *midrashim* in which Pharaoh's daughter not only draws Moses from the water, but she also cares for him as her own

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter Three, section E), pp. 54-56.

¹⁴¹ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:2. Braude offers a different reading of this *midrash*. According to his translation, "The songs of each and every one of them is beloved by Me." It is not clear from the Hebrew text how Braude makes this distinction, because the *midrash* does not explicitly state that God is referring to the psalms, and not the authors of the psalms, the children of Korah. Even with this variant translation, one still gains the sense of closeness achieved by the children of Korah that God would speak to them and ascribe such high standing to their works.

¹⁴² *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3. See also *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 1074.

son.¹⁴³ Because she cared for Moses as if he were her own son, God promises to treat Bat Pharaoh as His own daughter.

Additionally, the text uses the idea of adoption to explain the name Bityah. The name actually breaks down into two words, *bat* (daughter), and *yah* (a name for God). Combined together, they make the name Bityah, the daughter of God. The name change completes the adoption procedure as Pharaoh's daughter now possesses a Jewish name. It is also parallel to her naming the baby "Moses" as she lifts him from the water.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, this connects to her entrance into the Israelite community as the naming ceremony often marks one of the last rituals in the conversion process.

The relationship between God and Bityah also influences God's relationship with Moses. As mentioned earlier, Pharaoh's daughter gave the name Moses to the baby she found floating in the Nile River. According to tradition, of the many names given to Moses, God only called him by "Moses:"

Moses was called by 10 different names: Yered, Chever, Yekutheil, Avigdor, Avi Socho, Avi Zanoach...Toviah...Shamiyah Ben Natanel...Halevi...and Moses is the tenth. The Holy One, blessed be God, said to Moses, "By your life! From all of these names I will only call you by the name that Bityah, the daughter of Pharaoh, called you." And God called him Moses, "And God called to Moses" (Leviticus 1:1).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ See Chapter Three, section F), pp. 56-58.

¹⁴⁴ Exodus 2:10. Many modern scholars now understand that the name Moses was originally an Egyptian name, related to the ruling families, and as seen in the name Ramoses and others. The Biblical text tries to mask the Egyptian nature of the name with an explanation in the Exodus text relating to her drawing him out of the water. However, scholars note that the incorrect tense and odd form are actually evidence that the name explanation derives from a later editorial attempt to reconcile the Egyptian name with Moses' Jewish identity. For more information, see Nahum Sarna, *Exodus: The traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation* (New York: JPS, 1991).

¹⁴⁵ *Leviticus Rabbah* 1:3. See also *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 428, and *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 1074.

God called the savior of Israel only by the name that Bityah gave to him when she found him in the water. This decision follows God's adoption of Bityah in *Leviticus Rabbah* as a reward for her adopting Moses as her own son.

In another text we find a slightly different reason for God using Bityah's name for Moses. According to this text, it was not for adopting Moses, but for her acts of loving-kindness:

And his name will be called Moses. From here we learn the reward for those who perform acts of loving kindness. Despite the fact that there are many names for Moses, the only name that remained fixed in all of Torah was the name he was called by Bityah the daughter of Pharaoh. And the Holy One, blessed be God, did not call him by another name.¹⁴⁶

Torah uses the name Moses as a reward for the acts of loving-kindness performed by Bityah toward Moses. These acts included not only adopting the child, but lifting him from the water and sparing his life in opposition to the strict decree of Pharaoh.

3. Children Who Repent Become Divine Messengers

Another aspect of the close relationship between God and the children who repent is their description as prophets. Prophecy requires God to communicate with an individual on a personal level. The individual then serves as the messenger of God, following God's instructions, often delivering a message to an individual or group. Several different stories describe the children of Korah in this regard. Some of these texts explicitly call the repentant children by a form of the root *nun-bet-alef*, which means to prophecy. A few additional texts describe the children of Korah as fulfilling prophetic functions without employing the Hebrew root for prophecy.

¹⁴⁶ *Exodus Rabbah* 1:25.

Three texts use the root *nun-bet-alef* to describe the *b'nei Korah* as prophets. In one *midrash*, the children of Korah prophesied the final location of the First Temple. According to this story, the different tribes of Israel warred with one another over where Solomon would build the Temple.¹⁴⁷ God settles the disagreement by deciding to put the Temple in the land belonging to Benjamin. This decision makes the children of Korah into prophets:

Thus you find that four hundred and seventy years before [this time] the children of Korah prophesized (*mitnavim*) [that the Temple] would be built in the land belonging to Benjamin. As it is written, "How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts" (Psalm 84).¹⁴⁸

While this text does not clarify how these particular words from the children of Korah foretold the location of the Temple, the Rabbis clearly use the root *nun-bat-alef* to describe their actions.

The children of Korah also prophesized the reaction of later generations toward God. In this *midrash*, their words in Psalms anticipate a sense of frustration with God:

Rather, [the words of the children of Korah] prophesized (*mitnavim*) for the generations who would say before God, "Master of the Universe, for our fathers You did wonderful things, but for us You don't do [wondrous things]."¹⁴⁹

Their powers of prophecy allowed the children of Korah the foresight necessary to see the future concerns facing the Israelite community. They realized that later generations would compare their own current situations to those of their predecessors. While they could not prevent this reaction, they were able to anticipate it and provide words of hope through Psalms.

¹⁴⁷ *Genesis Rabbah* 99:1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Midrash Tehillim* 44:1.

A third text ascribes to the children of Korah the ability to predict the future. This *midrash* interprets a verse from Psalm 45 to prove this point:

Another explanation, "My heart overflows" (Ps. 45:2) with prophecy. For the children of Korah prophesized the future. Thus, when Hannah said, "*Adonai* kills and makes alive; God brings down to the grave, and brings back up" (1 Sam. 2:6), she was referring to the children of Korah who went down until their feet touched the bottom of the pit, then they came back up. Therefore, Hannah said, "[God] brings down to the grave, and brings back up" (*ibid*).¹⁵⁰

One concludes from this *midrash* that the children of Korah foresaw their own salvation before the ground opened up under them. They already knew that God would bring them back up from their fall into *Sheol*. Hannah's quote serves as a description of what happened to the *b'nei Korah*, not a prophecy of their redemption.

A few additional texts describe the children of Korah fulfilling prophetic roles, without using the Hebrew root *nun-bet-alef*. In these texts, Korah's children serve as the messengers of God, delivering Divine or Divinely inspired messages to other individuals. These messages are delivered verbally, as well as their actions.

One series of repeated texts depicts the children of Korah as instructing Jonah in the power of *teshuvah*. In this thread of *midrash*, Jonah encounters the *b'nei Korah* while travelling in the whale, so far under the water that they are underneath the Temple:

They saw then a fixed *Even Shtiyah* in the depths underneath the Temple (lit., Hall of God). And the children of Korah were standing around it and praying. The children of Korah said to Jonah, "Jonah, if you stand under the Temple and pray, then you will be answered..."¹⁵¹

The *b'nei Korah* serve as models for Jonah to learn how he should communicate with God. A manuscript variant of the *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer* text changes the story to read,

¹⁵⁰ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:4.

¹⁵¹ *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer*, chap. 10. See also *Midrash Tanhuma ha-Nidpas*, *Vayikra* 8, and *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 550.

"*Amar lo ha-dag*," "the fish said to Jonah," instead of, "*Amru lo v'nei Korah*," "the children of Korah said to Jonah."¹⁵² This change alters the speaker, and thereby decreases the vocal prophetic role of Korah's children. In either version, the children of Korah demonstrate the Divine message of the power of prayer. While the text does not recount God's instruction to the *b'nei Korah*, God controls their location in Sheol.

In addition to delivering messages to Jonah, the children of Korah also deliver messages of hope to the righteous and punishment to the wicked. Korah's children were shown the paths of both the righteous and the wicked:

In another comment, the phrase, "Upon *Alamot*" (Ps. 46:1) is read, "Upon worlds (*olamot*)," and is taken to mean that the children of Korah said: "We have seen two worlds: the world of the righteous and the world of the wicked." For their eyes had seen the punishment of those who trusted in their wealth and in their riches, of whom it is said, "They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches" (Ps. 49:7). In the hour of their punishment what can such men do? Their riches will not sustain them, as Scripture says, "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them" (Zeph. 1:18).¹⁵³

The children of Korah have seen the punishments inflicted upon those individuals who chose paths of wickedness. For concerning themselves with only material possessions in this world, those individuals will suffer when they reach the place where the children of Korah dwell.

For the righteous, they provide a message of hope in the future:

"The Lord of hosts is with us" (Ps. 46:8). The children of Korah say to the righteous: "Fear not. We saw all the miracles which God wrought for us," as it is said, "And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their households" (Num. 16:32)... Thus, the children of Korah said: "Righteous ones, fear not the terror of the day of judgement, for you will not be taken with the wicked, even as we were not taken with them." Hence,

¹⁵² *Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer*, chap. 10. Venice Edition and *Midrash Jonah*.

¹⁵³ *Midrash Tehillim* 46:1. See also *Midrash Tehillim* 46:2.

it is said, "Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed" (Ps. 46:3)...¹⁵⁴

Just as the children of Korah survived alongside the wicked members of Korah's company, so, too, can other righteous individuals survive when surrounded by the wicked. This message teaches the righteous to remain faithful to God even in the darkest times, for God will provide help to the righteous at the time of reckoning.

The children of Korah furthered their role as messengers of the Divine through their authorship of several psalms. Several psalms begin with an ascription to the children of Korah.¹⁵⁵ In Midrash, the Rabbis list the children of Korah as part of the list of authors who helped King David, "David wrote the Book of Psalms with the help of ten elders: with the help of the first man (*Adam rishon*), the help of Malkhitzedek, with the help of Abraham, with the help of Moses, with the help of the three children of Korah..."¹⁵⁶ The Rabbis thus understand the ascription as an attribution of authorship or at least contribution to the final work.

In addition to writing sections of the Book of Psalms, the *b'nei Korah* also performed these works before audiences of Israelites. We learn this from a text where they read their writings before Moses and Aaron:

How do we know that Moses and Aaron and all the great ones assembled to hear the song of the children of Korah? Because in the words, "For the leader; upon *Shoshanim*, the children of Korah, *Maskil*, a song for the beloved (*yedidot*)" (Ps. 45:1), the

¹⁵⁴ *Midrash Tehillim* 46:3.

¹⁵⁵ Psalms 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 84, 85, 87, 88.

¹⁵⁶ B. T. *Bava Batra* 14b-15a. A pair of variant texts, *Kohelet Rabbah* (7:4) and *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* (4:1), produce different lists of Psalm authors, but continue to include the *b'nei Korah*. The texts begin with the announcement of a list of ten authors, but then actually produces only five of the authors. These abbreviated lists omit the children of Korah as authors. However, it then becomes clear that there are two schools of thought on the second group of five authors. Both versions include the *b'nei Korah*, but differ as to the other members of the ten. Since the *b'nei Korah* appear on all three lists, one can infer that the Rabbis did not question their roles in authoring or co-authoring Psalms.

word *yedidot*, being plural, implies that those beloved of the Holy One, blessed be God, were there assembled. Therefore, "A song for the beloved (*yedidot*)" (*Ibid.*).¹⁵⁷

We learn from this text that the children of Korah performed before Moses, Aaron and other members of the Israelite community. Thus, with these psalms, the *b'nei Korah* fulfilled the prophetic role of glorifying God and teaching others about God's magnificence.

4. Granted the Gift of Eternal Life

Divine protection, drawing closer to God, and prophecy are rewards that children who leave their parents' evil ways earn in this world. God also grants the children of Korah and Bityah bat Pharaoh with rewards for the afterlife. The children of Korah and Bityah avoid death in this world, and Bityah receives eternal life and a place in *olam ha-ba*.

From one of the only *midrashim* to mention both the children of Korah and Bityah bat Pharaoh together, we learn that they shared a reward in common:

There were thirteen people who did not taste death, and these are them: Hanoah; Eliezer, the servant of Abraham; Methuselah; Hiram, King of Tzur; Eved, King of the Cushites; Bityah, daughter of Pharaoh; Serach, daughter of Asher; the three children of Korah; Eliyahu, may his memory be for a blessing; the Messiah; and Rabbi Joshua ben Levi.¹⁵⁸

The children of Korah and Bityah share a rare honor in Jewish tradition. Although they were both spared the "taste of death," Bityah receives additional merits.

¹⁵⁷ *Midrash Tehillim* 45:2.

¹⁵⁸ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 367.

The *midrash* in *Yalkut Shimoni* continues with a list culled from an earlier text of those individuals who entered into paradise alive. Bityah's name appears on this list as well:

Nine people entered into paradise (*Gan Eden*) alive, and these are them: Hanoah; Eliyahu; the Messiah (*Mashiach*); Eliezer, the servant of Abraham; Eved, King of the Cushites; Hiram, King of Tzur; Ya'abatz, the grandson of Judah haNasi; Serach, daughter of Asher; and Bityah, daughter of Pharaoh. And there are those who say that instead of Hiram, King of Tzur, that Rabbi Joshua ben Levi entered in his place.¹⁵⁹

This second reward distinguishes Bityah from the children of Korah. While the *b'nei Korah* do not die, they are not granted entrance into paradise. A second text clarifies the direct correlation between Bityah's reward and her actions to save Moses. Bityah's eternal life stems from her extending the life of Israel's savior, by lifting him from the river.¹⁶⁰

Bityah's treatment of Moses also earns her a place in the world to come, "Any one who sustains one life, it is as if that person sustained a whole world. Therefore [Bityah] merits life in the world to come (*olam ha-ba*)."¹⁶¹ This text follows a principle that appears in another *midrash* on the creation of the world.¹⁶² The latter *midrash* equates the value of a single human life with the rest of the world. Therefore, Bityah receives the invaluable award of a place in *olam ha-ba* for her saving Moses from the river.

¹⁵⁹ *Massekhet Derech Eretz* 1:18. Refer also to *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. II, *remez* 367 for an identical copy of this list. See also *Midrash Mishlei* 31.

¹⁶⁰ *Massekhet Kallah Rabbati* 3:23. This text limits the number of individuals granted entrance into *Gan Eden*, paradise, without death to only seven.

¹⁶¹ *Yalkut Shimoni*, Vol. I, *remez* 166.

¹⁶² *M. Sanhedrin* 4:5.

D) CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates the many potential rewards that await the children of sinners who chose to leave the path of sin. If they were members of the Israelite community, then they are welcomed back into the group. For those who are strangers, their efforts can result in their joining Israel. God draws these individuals closer to the Divine presence and shelters them from harm, illness, attack from others, and even death.

Of the rewards bestowed upon these repentant children, the two most interesting are the ability to prophecy and a place in paradise. The Midrash accentuates the prophetic talents of Korah's children, repeatedly using the key root of *nun-bet-aleph* to describe their abilities. Biblical prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, and others, classically serve as societal critics, condemning the Israelites for straying from the correct path of righteousness. Given this task, it is surprising to note the different audience of and goal for the prophecy of the children of Korah. Located in the nether world, albeit protected by God, they speak to the righteous words of hope for the future. As individuals once punished for sin, Korah's children have the unique vantage point of repentant sinners who can use their own experience to comfort the righteous who suffer in this world.

At the same time, Korah's children send two messages to those who are wicked in the world. On the one hand, their prophecies and vision of the future bode ill for those who remain on paths of sin. However, for those who wish to leave such paths, they send a message of hope that God will reward individuals who chose righteousness over their parents' sins.

Bityah's entrance into eternal paradise also merits further attention. Being sent alive into paradise places Bityah in very unique company within Jewish tradition. As a symbol, she reminds all who are Jewish and non-Jewish of the potential power inherent in repentance. Furthermore, she reminds those in Israel that even their foes and the children of their foes can turn away from sinful behavior. Those who were once strangers to the community have the potential to one day join it.

CONCLUSION

It is now time to return to the question that began this thesis: Are the children of sinners from the Bible punished in the Midrash? Three Biblical texts allow for different answers to this question. From both the theological and textual examples, it seems that the Rabbis limited punishment of children for their parents' sins. However, they did not completely eliminate this possibility, and in fact applied this punishment to the children of select sinners in the Bible.

The Rabbis recognized the conflict in meaning between Exodus 20:5, which promotes the punishment of children for their parents' sins, and Deuteronomy 24:16, and Ezekiel 18:2-4, which reject this type of transgenerational punishment. Through the art of midrashic interpretation, these conflicts became the grounds for limiting the punishment of children to only those children who generation after generation remained on the path of sin.

Such a limitation made the possibility of transgenerational sin nearly, but not entirely, impossible. It was still possible for the Rabbis to inflict such a punishment upon those select individuals who they deemed beyond redemption, and whose children were also beyond hope. The textual example of Canaan's children, who were bound to remain slaves despite their efforts to follow *mitzvot* and study Torah, demonstrate this loophole.

One family suffered more from this type of punishment than any other, the family of Esau. As a punishment for Esau's sins, his grandfather and father suffered during their lives. His children were doomed to destruction at the hands of his brother's children, and then to serve Jacob's descendants throughout the afterlife. Esau's descendants also included the children of Haman who were punished, in some of the cruelest methods

imaginable, for their father's sin against the Jews. No descendant of Esau could escape the punishment decreed for his sins.

Although Esau's children suffered, other children were given the opportunity to reject their parents' sins and repent. For their repentance, these children save not only themselves, but also their parents and grandparents for the sins of earlier generations. God accepts even the intent to repent, looking into the hearts of sinners for their intentions, and not merely judging them by their actions. For example, the children of Korah and Pharaoh's daughter Bityah demonstrated the ability of children to atone for their parents' sins.

The children who chose to reject their parents' sins also benefited from their choices. Once condemned to punishment for their parents' sins, they now were welcomed back into the community. From the examples of Korah's children and Pharaoh's daughter, the list of rewards seems astounding: the ability to prophecy, salvation from death, and drawing closer to God. And the ultimate reward was that these children were given the gift of eternal life – passing into the afterlife without tasting death.

While this thesis has begun to answer the question that shaped this effort, there are several other directions which were not probed within this paper. One direction is an examination of more modern Jewish texts and legal codes. I would suggest tracing citations of the Biblical source texts through some of the legal codes such as the *Mishneh Torah*, the *Tur* and the *Shulchan Aruch*. This research would then allow for a comparison between the halakhic interpretation of transgenerational sin and the midrashic

interpretation. Furthermore, this line of research may also demonstrate a rejection or an acceptance of the Rabbinic theology toward transgenerational punishment.

Moving forward in time to the modern period, additional research could focus on the writings of modern Jewish writers. Do more contemporary Jewish writers continue to resonate with the Rabbis' decision to limit, but not eliminate the punishment of children for their parents' sins? It would be particularly interesting to examine the writings of Jewish authors on the subjects of the Arab/Israeli conflict and the Holocaust. Do the same attitudes toward transgenerational punishment apply to Jew and non-Jew alike? This line of research may reveal the strong connection between attitudes toward punishing children for their parents' sins and vengeance. Chapter One alluded to this point briefly in a note from Ramban on the use of "*al*" in Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 24:16.

Further research into modern writers could focus on the writings of Jewish theologians such as Hermann Cohen, Martin Buber, and Franz Rosenzweig. Comparisons between modern theological interpretations and midrashic interpretations of punishing children for their parents' sins would test the applicability of the Rabbinic theology. Do the theologians of today still accept transgenerational punishment in limited cases? The area of Holocaust theology may have the most significant to offer in such a comparison. I would look at modern theologians who continue to accept the punishment of children for their parents' sins to reconcile this view with the Holocaust as well as other community tragedies.

Another direction extends into the field of interfaith dialogue. This research would focus upon the Muslim and Christian interpretations of the Biblical source texts at

the heart of this thesis. A comparison between the treatments of children whose parents have sinned in the literature of these two religions and the Rabbinic texts may teach us a great deal.

From my work on this thesis, I have come to a greater appreciation of the vast library of Rabbinic literature. When I began my research, I had hoped to find a definitive answer to my question regarding the children of parents who sin. I realized that the answer might change or evolve over time, but I was not prepared for the lack of a singular response. My preconceived understanding of Midrash began to change and I came to understand that different textual traditions, regardless of time, were either not always aware of one another or existed in different rabbinic quarters. Therefore, an answer or apparent interpretation of the texts might vary from text to text, regardless of time.

As a result of this research, my familiarity with texts has increased dramatically, as well as my understanding of parallel traditions. I was fascinated to watch how certain stories, in some cases word for word, were repeated in parallel texts as well as in later collections. These repetitions epitomized for me the phrase "sacred chain of tradition." My only regret was the limited amount of time allotted for this thesis. I would have liked to thoroughly explore the chain of tradition as it reached to modern writers, to look for hints of these passages as they continue the midrashic interpretive tradition forward into today.

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