

## What does the Bible say about hereditary spirits?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/hereditary-spirits.html>

Some “deliverance ministries” and Charismatic groups teach the existence of hereditary spirits, also called generational spirits or familial spirits. These entities are thought to be evil spirits that attach themselves to a particular family and harass them through multiple generations. They are demons inherited from one’s ancestors.

Those who teach the existence of hereditary spirits consider them the source of various sins such as pride, lust, perversion, anger, rebellion, fear, and addiction. Generational or hereditary spirits are blamed for “generational curses” that result in poverty, sickness, disease, confusion, failure, and even death. According to the concept of generational spirits, a man struggles with anger issues because he’s being influenced by an “anger demon”—the same demon who provoked his father and grandfather to anger. A woman who struggles with depression is being oppressed by a “depression demon” that was invited into the family by the sin of an ancestor—one who practiced witchcraft, perhaps. Once attached to the family, the demon causes trouble down the lineage.

Usually, deliverance ministries recommend that a person renounce the generational spirits and all the curses his or her family is under, “binding” and “rebuking” all the demons, ordering sickness away, etc. (This must be done out loud, so the demons can hear the rebuke.) The idea is that one must cast out all the demons and break all pacts with the devil made by ancestors. Only then is one free to grow spiritually in Christ.

The idea of hereditary spirits or generational spirits has more in common with paganism than it does with the Bible. Neo-pagans and Wiccans readily admit a belief in generational curses, demons that attach themselves to a certain family, and the idea that occult power can be passed down through one’s family line. In paganism, breaking a generational curse often involves working with one’s (dead) ancestors.

The teaching of generational spirits has no biblical foundation. Some try to defend a belief in generational spirits by pointing to passages such as Deuteronomy 5:9, “I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” However, it’s important to note that this passage (and others such as Exodus 20:5 and Numbers 14:18) does not mention any spirits. We might call God’s punishment here a “generational curse,” but the text references no generational or hereditary spirit. God was disciplining the rebellious in Israel, but demons are not said to be involved.

The effects of sin (specifically idolatry in Deuteronomy 5) are naturally passed down from one generation to the next. God’s punishment of someone’s children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren has nothing to do with familial demons and everything to do with the consequence of bad choices that affect others in the family. Any type of sinful choice can possibly impact several generations of one’s offspring and cause much suffering.

Further, when a father has a sinful lifestyle, his children are likely to practice the same sinful lifestyle. Implied in the warning of Exodus 20:5 is the fact that children will choose to repeat the sins of their fathers. God promises to punish sin to the third or fourth generation because those generations are committing the same sins their fathers did. But nothing in the Mosaic Law suggests a demon attaching itself to a family.

Also of note, God's warning to visit iniquity on future generations is part of the Old Testament Law, not New Testament grace. A generational curse was a consequence experienced by a specific nation (Israel) for a specific sin (idolatry). The history books of the Old Testament (especially Judges) contain the record of this divine punishment meted out.

The idea that every sin or problem today can be blamed on a generational curse is unbiblical. The idea of a generational spirit is even less biblical. It is unfortunate that some today are deceived by various notions borrowed from pagan practices, bundled with biblical truth and presented as proper for Christians.

For someone worried about a generational curse or a hereditary spirit, the answer is salvation in Jesus Christ. A Christian is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). How can a child of God be under God's curse (Romans 8:1)? Why should one redeemed by God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit fear any demon? "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Yes, God promised to visit Israel's sin upon the third and fourth generations, but we need to keep reading. In the very next verse, He promised that He would show "love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:6). In other words, God's grace lasts a thousand times longer than His wrath.

## **What does the Bible say about breaking generational curses?**

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The Bible mentions "generational curses" in several places (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9). God warns that He is "a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me."

It sounds unfair for God to punish children for the sins of their fathers. However, there is more to it than that. The effects of sin are naturally passed down from one generation to the next. When a father has a sinful lifestyle, his children are likely to practice the same sinful lifestyle. Implied in the warning of Exodus 20:5 is the fact that the children will choose to repeat the sins of their fathers. A Jewish Targum specifies that this passage refers to "ungodly fathers" and "rebellious children." So, it is not unjust for God to punish sin to the third or fourth generation – those generations are committing the same sins their ancestors did.

There is a trend in the church today to try to blame every sin and problem on some sort of generational curse. This is not biblical. God's warning to visit iniquity on future generations is part of the Old Testament Law. A generational curse was a consequence for a specific nation (Israel) for a specific sin (idolatry). The history books of the Old Testament (especially Judges) contain the record of this divine punishment meted out.

The cure for a generational curse has always been repentance. When Israel turned from idols to serve the living God, the "curse" was broken and God saved them (Judges 3:9, 15; 1 Samuel 12:10-11). Yes, God promised to visit Israel's sin upon the third and fourth generations, but in the very next verse He promised that He would show "love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments" (Exodus 20:6). In other words, God's grace lasts a thousand times longer than His wrath.

For someone worried about a generational curse, the answer is salvation through Jesus Christ. A Christian is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). How can a child of God still be under God's curse (Romans 8:1)? The cure for a "generational curse" is repentance of the sin in question, faith in Christ, and a life consecrated to the Lord (Romans 12:1-2).