

In the last decade of the Twentieth Century, scientists finally mapped the billions of DNA codes in the human genome. Without a doubt, this is one of the most stunning scientific feats in all of human history!

Family Roots through DNA

Millions of people are now having their DNA mapped to find their ancestral origins and find missing family members. It seems true that knowing who our ancestors were can tell more about who we are—why we look, think, and act like we do.

What Is Spiritual DNA?

“Spiritual DNA” acts in similar ways. It can be defined as the ways in which our family and non-family connections shape our character, thinking and actions.

Surprisingly, this concept seems firmly rooted in the Bible. The Bible clearly describes powerful, spiritual connections between us and our forefathers—*both family and non-family ancestors* to whom we are connected.

In a sense, we have always known that every person receives “spiritual DNA” from their family. “Like father, like son”; “He’s a chip off the old block”; and “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” are just three common ways we express the truth that parents pass some of their character, personality, and physical attributes to their children.

The older I get, the more I see how similar I am to my father emotionally, spiritually and morally—even though *I was not raised by him or even around him for most of my growing years.* His military career and my parents’ divorce unfortunately kept us apart after I turned eight. I saw him only a couple of times a year for 10 years, yet I seem to share many of dad’s strengths and weaknesses. Amazingly, I turned out a lot like my dad—for which I am very grateful: he is a great man in my eyes and, I believe, in God’s eyes. ¹

Even early Virginia settlers knew of these intergenerational connections:

Individuals in Virginia were stereotyped by traits that were thought to be hereditary in their extended families. Anglican Clergyman Jonathon Boucher (1738-1804) believed that ‘family character, both of body and mind, may be traced thro’ many generations; as for instance, every Fitzhugh has bad eyes; every Thorton hears badly; Winslow’s and Lees talk well; Carters are proud and imperious; and Taliaferro’s mean and avaricious; and Fowlkes cruel.’ Virginians often

pronounced these judgments on one another. The result was a set of family reputations which then acquired the social status of self-fulfilling prophecies.²

Note that *character traits* were passed down as well as physical traits. Don't we see this all the time? Goodness runs in some families and sinfulness runs in others from generation to generation. Alcoholism runs in my family. Persistent anger runs in other families. Fear often haunts generations of children in other families. These patterns are also seen in biblical families.

Spiritual DNA & Corporate Identities

In the Bible, God sees people primarily as individuals, then as families, churches, cities and nations. Amazingly, we see in the Bible that our family, church, city and nation has its own spiritual gifts, sins, bondages, guilt and callings! These groups can be called *corporate identities* that we each have by virtue of being affiliated with that group. It's who we are *corporately*.

Corporate Identity Blessings and Penalties

Truly, no man can be an island in God's sight. God pays close attention to what groups we belong to and to what groups our ancestors belonged. Our corporate identities can carry blessings and penalties into our lives that form part of our spiritual DNA.

The Jews

Most Christians and Jews would agree that Jews often enjoy a higher level of personal and corporate blessings mainly because of their national corporate spiritual identity as the nation of Israel, God's original chosen people. This national corporate identity is rooted in the covenant God made with the founding fathers of Israel at least 4000 years ago: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses: "He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them" (Deut. 4:31). The Old Testament describes this covenant. That covenant gave them great favor with God even when many generations violated God's laws, simply because they had that corporate identity as Jews!

The Seven Cities

All the people in the seven city-churches in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 1-3) were commended or corrected by Jesus according to their corporate identity as cities, even though

each person in each city may not have individually deserved that specific commendation or correction. Similar judgments were promised by Jesus on entire Jewish cities who had seen his miracles but still not believed (Matthew 11:20-24). "And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day" (Matthew 11:23).

Generational Blessings

Likewise, God's blessings on King David benefited his descendants in many ways, even mitigating God's condemnation of David's son Solomon for his repeated idolatry with many false gods. God was kinder to Solomon because he was a physical son of David!³

Contrast that penalty on the nation for sin, to the blessing on the nation of Judah under a wicked king named Jehoram because of the righteousness of a previous king named David! In 2 Kings 8: 18-19, Jehoram

...did evil in the sight of the LORD. However, the LORD was not willing to destroy Judah, *for the sake of David* His servant, since He had promised him to give a lamp to him through his sons always.

God withheld His judgment on each person in the nation of Judah due to each person's corporate identity connection to one of its past government leaders, King David!

These are just a few examples of blessings or curses that can come upon individuals just by being associated with certain groups or regions!

Not convinced? Read on.

Original Sin

The most profound example of a negative spiritual inheritance from a corporate identity is what some theologians call Original Sin. Original sin comes from Adam. As the ancestor of every person on earth, Adam's sin has influenced all humanity to sin. Romans 5:12-21 spells this out:

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...*For just as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were made sinners* (vs. 12,19).

Clearly, all people inherited the propensity to sin from Adam, the “one man” mentioned above. All humanity has a *corporate identity* that comes from Adam. This is our most basic, negative spiritual DNA as human beings. Adam’s sin even carried with it curses from God that all humanity has inherited from their corporate identity from Adam:

Men would have to earn a living “by the sweat of [their] brow” instead of living in a fertile garden with abundant, readily available food resources (Gen.3:19).

“Cursed is the ground because of you.” The ground itself would be difficult to cultivate at times (Gen. 3:17-18).

Adam would physically die (Gen 3:19b). This is the most obvious universal effect of Original Sin that all humankind has inherited.

Eve’s part in the Original Sin caused all women to birth children with great pain (Gen.3:16).

This Adamic corporate identity that that leads everyone to sin can also be called *generational sin* because each generation tends to sin like the generations of their corporate identity before them. Understanding two effects of generational sin is crucial to grasping the significance of our spiritual DNA.

Propensity to Sin

Generational sins are sins that seem to be repeated from one generation to the next within an individual, family, group, region or nation. The *propensity to sin* in a particular way seems to run in families and affiliated groups. “*We have sinned even as our fathers did*” (Psalm 106:6).

For example, the sin of alcohol abuse run strongly on one side of my family tree. This is a part of my family’s spiritual DNA.

Violent feuds among Scottish-born settlers in colonial Appalachian America were probably more common than in other places in America. Just think of the vicious Hatfield and McCoy’s thirty-year feud. Why? Such families had roots in the clans of Scotland where feuding was legendary...and very sad.

Sexual promiscuity is very common among certain populations in America who are descendants of promiscuous cultures in other nations.

For generations, the Church in India has a persistent problem misappropriating money. It is a moral weakness in the Indian Church and nation.⁴

These are examples of sins that have rolled down from one generation to another affecting the spiritual makeup of many individuals and some sub-groups within the larger group. We inherit both good and bad spiritual traits from our ancestors: propensities to sin as they did, as well as propensities to do good.

This is what the New Testament means when it refers to the influence of our ancestors on the present generation: "...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your *futile way of life inherited from your forefathers...*" (1 Peter 1:18). This echoes passages such as II Kings 17:14, 22-23: "However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God."

Generational Sin in Abraham's Family

Abraham lied about his wife twice. He feared that men would kill him to steal his beautiful wife, Sarai, so he denied that she was his wife and said that she was his sister (Gen 12:13, 20:2). It was a half-truth. Sarai was his sister by another mother, but with the same father.

Issac told the same lie about his wife, Rebecca years later. Ironically, *he told the same King Abimelech the same lie that his father Abraham had told Abimelech* (Gen.26:7-8).

This sin of lying shows up in a more magnified way in his grandson, Jacob. Jacob connived with his mother to deceive his father, Isaac, in order to steal his older brother's birthright blessing as first-born (Gen 27:6-30). Jacob later deceived his crafty uncle Laban (Gen 31:30) by secretly fleeing from Laban, who previously deceived Jacob several times (Gen 29:21-27). While fleeing, Rebecca, lied to her uncle Laban about the theft of his household idols (Gen 31:34).

Simeon and Levi, two sons of Jacob, deceived and later murdered an entire village to take revenge on a man who raped their sister (Gen 34:13-31).

Another of Jacob's sons, Judah, lies to his daughter-in-law, Tamar, saying that he will give his last son to her in marriage (Gen 38:11, 14, 26). Tamar later deceives Judah, disguised as a prostitute.

Ten of Jacob's sons cruelly lied to him about Joseph's disappearance. They led their father to believe that a wild animal had killed Joseph, his favorite son (Gen 37:31-35).

Joseph also later deceived his brothers when they came to Egypt for food, but for good reasons: to reconcile with his brothers. Joseph actually seemed to break the family generational

sin of deception by his extremely honest and unselfish behavior. (See Gen 45:5-10). This is one of the key principles, as we will see later, in changing the spiritual DNA of a region: in order to break the power of that generational sin, the descendants have to walk in the opposite spirit of the generational sin. Joseph did that for his family. One Christian can do that for their family strongholds if that person is willing to break that pattern of sinful behavior in their own life.

Generational Sin in King David's Family

David is of the tribe of Judah, Jacob's son. Judah was a fornicator (Gen 38:18) yet God brought forth His Messiah, Jesus, from the Tribe of Judah (Gen 49:8-10). What a merciful God we serve!

David's great-great-grandmother, Rahab, was a prostitute (Joshua 2:1, Matt 1:5). David and Bathsheba committed adultery with each other (2 Sam. 11). Later, David's son Amnon, raped his half-sister, Tamar (2 Sam. 13). Then, Absalom had sex with David's concubines on the roof of a house (2 Sam. 16:22).

Solomon had a profound lust for women.

He had 1000 wives and concubines. Solomon's lust was so strong that he even married foreign women who worshipped other gods—this despite *two powerful visions* Solomon had from God (1 Kings 11:9). He “loved many foreign women” (1 Kings 11:1) who eventually turned his heart from the Lord (1 Kings 11:4).

This brought God's wrath on the nation and eventually split the nation into two parts (1 Kings 11:1-14, 12:24).

We Can Inherit Penalties Due to Generational Sin

Consider these passages:

Ps. 79:8: “Do not remember the iniquities of our forefathers against us”?

Even more dramatic is Leviticus 26:39:

So those of you who may be left will rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies; and **also because of the iniquities of their forefathers** they will rot away with them.

These earthly, God-given penalties are from the guilt of generational sins: descendants are being penalized for the sins of their forefathers.

But only for earthly penalties. We are NOT held spiritually responsible for the sins of our forefathers. Each person answers to God for their own sins.

The sins of our corporate identities can involve us in God-given penalties on their sins.

The clearest example of this is seen in the first of the Ten Commandments:

I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods before me...You shall not make for yourself an idol ...for I am a jealous God, *punishing the children for the sins of the fathers* to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me... (Ex.20:2-6)

In the experience of many Christian ministers, sins of idolatry always seem to always carry a generational penalty on the family descendants.

Idolatry can be participation in false religions, Freemasonry (a false religion embedded with rites honoring multiple pagan gods), spiritism and all forms of the occult.

Seeking supernatural information from sources other than God (horoscopes, Ouija boards, seances, etc.) can also be considered idolatrous to God.

Heinous sins committed by our ancestors (perhaps also up to the third generation) like premeditated murder, incest and rape can also impose earthly penalties on their descendants.

Thank God that *through Jesus, those penalties can be broken* as we shall see later!

Examples from the Bible

In these biblical accounts, one man's sin brought a God-given penalty on the entire nation—and also on his family—two of his corporate identities.

Achan

Joshua reminded the Israelites of their bloody defeat in the battle for the city of Ai due to one man's sin (Joshua 7:1) at Jericho “Did not Achan the son of Zerah act unfaithfully in the things under the ban, and wrath fall on all the congregation of Israel? And that man did not perish alone in his iniquity.”⁵ Note that Achan's entire family was executed by Israel's leaders because of the father's sin even though it is unlikely that all the children were even aware of the father's sin.

Rueben

As the first-born son of Jacob, Rueben should have received double-honor above his brothers. Instead, Jacob prophesied that Rueben was penalized because of his sexual sin. “Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed. Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch” (Gen 49:4). *Those God-given penalties on Rueben affected every generation of that tribe!*

While Rueben was still included among the twelve tribes of Israel, eminent Bible commentator Albert Barnes notes: “...this blessing is abated and modified by his past conduct. His tribe has its seat on the east of the Jordan, and never comes to any eminence in the commonwealth of Israel.”⁶

Ahab

God cursed every male descendant of King Ahab, King of Israel, for the sins of his wife Jezebel,⁷ who was a witch.⁸ As a result, God assigned an assassin named Jehu to kill all the males in that family. Jehu killed King Joram, son of Ahab and Jezebel, on the very spot of ground where Jezebel had Naboth murdered to satisfy Ahab's greed.⁹

In similar fashion, all the male descendants of wicked King Jeroboam (even the slaves) were *cursed by God* and assigned to be killed by God's command.¹⁰ Wicked King Baasha's household was also condemned to die by God due to the sins of the king.¹¹ The sins of those two fathers brought physical destruction from God on their households.

The Exodus of the Jews

The entire younger generation of Israel was cursed to spend 40 years in the desert due to *the sins of their parents*. “Your sons...will suffer for your unfaithfulness until your corpses lie in the wilderness.”¹²

Caleb's obedience, however, during that same time resulted in his children receiving a great inheritance from God.¹³ This is an example of a **generational blessing**.

Manasseh

King Manasseh's gross sins brought God's judgment on Israel generations later (II Kings 24: 1-4): God sent the enemies of Israel against Israel under King Jehoiakim partly for the sins of Manasseh—**four kings earlier!**

Dr. Gary Greig, Old Testament professor and an expert on this topic, writes:

Spiritual oppression [that I call curses] may result from generational sin, as is taught explicitly in such passages as Hosea 4:12-13 and implicitly in the context of Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9. Both the latter passages comprise the second of the Ten Commandments and set the generational sin cycling principle of God's character in the framework of the sin of idolatry.

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A Profoundly Clear Example

In II Samuel 21:1-14, King Saul's past sin brings famine on all Israel under a new king. This vivid example of generational sin also shows how a righteous king broke God's curse on the nation for the past sin of King Saul.

There was a famine in the days of David for three years.
David inquired of the Lord and the LORD answered, 'It is for Saul,
and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.

Saul and his followers had broken a godly covenant that Joshua had made with the tricky pagan Gibeonites hundreds of years earlier (Joshua 9:16). When the deception was discovered, the Jews wanted to kill the Gibeonites, but Joshua wisely replied, "This we will do to them, even let them live, so that wrath will not be upon us for the oath which we swore to them" (Joshua 9:20).

When King David understood that God had brought the curse of a famine on the entire nation because of what King Saul had done, he went to the pagan Gibeonites and asked them what he needed to do to make things right between them and Israel. Seven of Saul's grandchildren had to die to appease the Gibeonites. After that, the Bible says, "...*after that God was moved by prayer for the land*" (2Samuel 21:14).

God's wrath came upon the entire nation because a former king broke a treaty with a pagan people! The famine affected everyone in David's kingdom even though some of those people may not have even been alive when Saul's sin was committed. *Just being Jewish made them liable* to that guilt penalty from an earlier generation.

Generational Guilt Penalties in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, even the Apostles believed in the concept of children being punished for the sins of their parents:

'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?' Jesus responded, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.' (John 9:1-3)

In his response, Jesus did not deny the principle of guilt's effect passing down the generations. After all, *it was part of the 10 Commandments!* He just said that the principle did not apply in this situation.

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Breaking Sin Penalties By Identificational Repentance

According to Old Testament scholar, Dr. Gary Greig, "identificational repentance is a person or group identifying with the sins of others, past or present, and repenting to God for those sins so that the God-given penalties (which the devil will exploit) are broken off of those repenting and off of those connected to the people repenting." See Chapter 17 for his scholarly discussion of this biblical truth.

The Bible has several striking examples of how to break God's penalties on a nation caused by the guilt of that nation's forefathers. Read Lev. 26:39-42 on p.viii about confessing the sins of Israel's ancestors

Nehemiah and Ezra (Ezra 9:6) led the Jews to do just that as Jerusalem was being restored after the Babylonian captivity. Nehemiah called on God, "confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against You; *I and my father's house have sinned*" (Nehemiah 1:6). He also wrote, "Our fathers sinned, and are no more. *It is we who have borne their iniquities*" (Lamentations 5:7,16). The Jews were quite aware that God destroyed Jerusalem because of their sins and the sins of their ancestors! That is why they deeply repented of both their sins and the sins of their ancestors as they were rededicating the rebuilt city in Nehemiah 9 & 10.

Righteous King Josiah admitted that “great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, *because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book*, to do according to all that is written concerning us.”¹⁵ 2 Kings 23 details the special temple service of repentance and the practical deeds of repentance that King Josiah did to cement his commitment to leading Judah in obedience to God’s word.

Daniel recognized the need to confess and repent for the current and historic corporate sins of Israel in order to appease God’s wrath on Israel: “O Lord, in accordance with all Your righteous acts, let now Your anger and Your wrath turn away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; for *because of our sins and the iniquities of our fathers*, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all those around us.” (Daniel 9:16)

What Daniel and Nehemiah have modeled for us in the above passages is now called identificational repentance by many Christian leaders like George Otis, Peter Wagner, Cindy Jacobs, John Dawson, Jim Goll, Dutch Sheets and others. Each of these leaders would say that *repenting for the current and past sins of groups is crucial for the glory of God to break out over regions and over nations*. This is essentially what II Chronicles 7:14 is asking the Church to do.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to show how “spiritual DNA” is a good metaphor for understanding how the soul of America is impacted by blessings and penalties that come from America’s corporate identities’ history—just as a person’s physical DNA is influenced for better or for worse by that person’s ancestors.

According to II Chronicles 7:14, only the Church has the authority to correct the “defective genes” in the spiritual DNA of America through repentance in word and deed--- much like scientists can modify defective genes in an organism by rearranging its DNA code.

May God give the American Church much grace to break the penalties of ancestral sins and maximize the God-given blessings we have inherited from those how have gone before us.

1 By the way, if you want to know what kind of wife or husband someone will make? *Get to know their parents! My years of counseling couples has proven that true many times.*

2 David Hackett Fisher, *Albion’s Seed*, (Oxford University Press, 1989) 275 quoting Jonathon Boucher, ed., *Reminiscences of an America Loyalist* (Boston, 1925), 61.

3 I Kings 11:11-13

4 Told to the author by two prominent Christian leaders in India.

5 Joshua 22:20

6 Albert Barnes, *Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible*, citation on this verse from the electronic version found at <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/bnb/genesis-49.html> (19-March 2021)

7 II Kings 9:7-8

8 II Kings 9:22

9 II Kings 9:24-26

10 I Kings 14:10

11 I Kings 16:3

12 Numbers 14:33

13 Numbers 14:24

14 Gary Greig, "Class Notes on Identificational Repentance" (Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA.: 1996).

15 2 Kings 22:13