

DYNAMICS OF DIVINELY GRANTED CORPORATE AMNESTY

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Introduction.

This study first considers two cases of corporate amnesty that God granted to the Israelite nation, then the amnesty that He granted to the entire human race at the Fall into sin. The reason for this order is to be able to closely examine the amnesty at the Fall in light of comparison with dynamics revealed in the narratives regarding Israel.

I. God's amnesty for the Israelites after they worshiped the golden calf (Exod 32:1-6).

- By disloyally worshiping another “god” as a corporate group (whether or not there were any dissenters), the entire Israelite nation deserved to be destroyed and replaced (by Moses’ descendants) for violating the covenant stipulations, “the way that I commanded them” (vv. 7-10). The covenant ratification ritual had made plain to the Israelites the life-and-death consequences of entering a “bond in blood” covenant relationship with the Lord (24:6-8). So they were without excuse.
- Amnesty for Israel required intercession (32:11-13—Moses’ speech to God, referring to God’s reputation and covenant promise to Israel’s ancestors).
- In response to the intercession, the Lord relented from *immediately* destroying all Israel (v. 14), which gave some time.
- God’s representative (Moses) confronted the people with their crime (vv. 19-24).
- God’s representative (Moses) called for those loyal to God, who responded (vv. 25-26—Levites).
- Disloyal Israelites were destroyed, in this case by the loyal ones (vv. 27-28).
- The loyal ones were promised an ongoing reward of blessing involving a close connection to God (v. 29).
- Further intercession was necessary to atone (*kipper*) for the corporate sin, with the intercessor (Moses) petitioning God to forgive the sin and identifying with his people to the extent of willingness to give up his own salvation if God would not forgive his people (vv. 30-32).
- God responded by saying that only sinners would lose salvation (be blotted out of his book), and Moses was to lead the people to the Promised Land (without God), but God would still punish them when the time came (vv. 33-34).
- God punished the people with a plague (v. 35), but it didn’t destroy the nation. We aren’t told if any died or, if so, how many died.
- God told the Israelites to go to Canaan, but he would not accompany them lest he destroy them for rebellion if he were in close proximity to them (33:1-3). Thus the Lord cancelled the plan for the tabernacle, in which he could dwell among his covenant people (chaps. 25-31).
- The Israelites expressed repentance by mourning and taking off their ornaments (33:4-6).

- Further intercession was necessary (by Moses) to petition God to accompany his people to Canaan (vv. 12-16).
- On the basis of God's close positive relationship to the intercessor, he granted the request to go with his people (v. 17).
- As a sign of God's favor, the intercessor (Moses) asked that God show him his glory, which God promised to do (vv. 18-23).
- The Lord remade the covenant with Israel, including giving a replacement set of stipulations (Ten Commandments plus additional laws), but this time he only showed his glory to the intercessor (Moses) as the representative of the covenant people (chap. 34). They did not witness a glorious manifestation of divine power and glory or hear the Ten Commandments proclaimed, as they had before the golden calf episode; they only saw the reflected glory on Moses' face (34:29-35).

Summary: Corporate amnesty after a capital corporate crime was a difficult and complicated process, involving successive stages of restoration accomplished through repeated intercession with God. Amnesty for the group was an act of pure grace, but it required elimination of the most disloyal and did not prevent some punishment of the rest of the group, without destroying them. So while forgiveness allowed the group to continue its existence, it did not erase all negative consequences of the crime. Restoration of the group in terms of a new covenant relationship with God was through the relationship between God and the intercessor, who represented his people.

II. God's amnesty for the Israelites after they refused to enter Canaan and were about to stone the two faithful scouts (Num 13:31-14:10a).

- The Lord interrupted the Israelites by revealing his glory at the sanctuary (v. 10b).
- God announced that he would destroy and replace them (with Moses' descendants) because of their disloyal faithlessness (vv. 11-12).
- Amnesty for Israel required intercession (vv. 13-19—Moses' speech to God, referring to God's reputation and character).
- In response to the intercession, the Lord forgave in the sense that he would not *immediately* destroy all Israel (v. 20).
- God added the caveat that none of the Israelites who left Egypt would see Canaan except for faithful Caleb (vv. 21-24).
- God commanded the Israelites to turn back into the wilderness (v. 25).
- God elaborated on the punishment of the Israelites: except for faithful Caleb and Joshua, the entire adult generation would die in the wilderness while their children would remain in the wilderness forty years (vv. 26-35).
- The Lord killed by a plague the ten scouts who brought a negative report of Canaan (vv. 36-38).
- The people mourned at the divine sentence, but in pseudo-repentance they disobeyed God by now trying to take Canaan by themselves, but were defeated (39-45).

Summary: Corporate amnesty was accomplished through intercession with God. Amnesty for the group was an act of pure grace, but it required elimination of the most disloyal and did not prevent punishment of the rest of the group, without immediately

destroying them. So while forgiveness allowed the group to continue its existence, it did not erase all negative consequences of the crime. The fact that the terminally condemned adult generation did not repent makes this case open-ended: Their continuing attitude of disloyalty to God could lead to further rebellion, which it did, leading to the need for further intercession, amnesty, and divine judgment between the loyal and disloyal (Num 16).

III. God's amnesty for the human race following the Fall into sin (Gen 3:1-8).

- God confronted Adam and Eve with what they had done, reminding them of his command not to eat from the tree, and called for confession (vv. 9-11). The pair knew the command and that violation was punishable by immediate death (2:17; 3:3).
- Rather than showing repentance, Adam blamed the woman and the woman blamed the serpent (3:12-13).
- God cursed the serpent, implying future deliverance for the human race (vv. 14-15).
- God told the woman that he would punish her with negative reproductive and marital consequences (v. 16).
- God told the man that he would punish him with having to work hard to eat from the cursed ground until he would die and return to it (vv. 17-19).
- Adam named Eve as the mother of all living (v. 20).
- God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins (v. 21).
- God expelled Adam and Eve from Eden to deny them access to the tree of life that would give them immortality (vv. 22-24).

Summary: Comparison between the warning of immediate death and the actual divine sentence shows that amnesty took place in the sense of delaying death as an act of pure grace. While this was amnesty for two individuals, it was corporate for the human race because the delay allowed the pair to reproduce (cf. Gen 4:1-2) so that the race could continue even though they would eventually die (like Num 14—nation continued through children). Because both humans, comprising the entire race at that time, were guilty and condemned, there was no human intercessor and no immediate destruction of the most disloyal (unlike Exod 32 and Num 14). With the sentence of eventual death came other negative consequences (as in Exod 32 and Num 14) that would be ongoing. Genesis 3 does not state that Adam and Eve repented, but Genesis 4:1 indicates that they at least cooperated with the divine plan for continuation of the race, and when Eve bore Cain she expressed belief in the divine promise of a Savior through her descendants (cf. 3:15) by saying, “I have acquired a man: YHWH.” This shows that Eve already understood that there would be an incarnation, although she misidentified it.