

OLD TESTAMENT PARENTS TEACHING

“Dear Aebi: *What does the Old Testament say about parents teaching their children God’s word?”*



It says a great deal. Read Deuteronomy 6 — the whole chapter. In vv. 1-2 he urged the adults to obey all God’s word—“you and your son and your grandson,” which implies teaching. They were to love God completely (5) and keep His word in their heart (6). Verse 7 says, “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” [NKJV] They were to write God’s word on doorposts, gates, and cloth to wear (8-9). Verses 20-25 admonish them to tell their children the meaning of God’s law and the need to obey it. In Exodus 13:8,14 they are told to explain the Passover and other things to their children. Deuteronomy 4:9,10 tells them to teach God’s word and ways to their children and grandchildren. Deuteronomy 11:19-23 is much the same as chapter 6 in requiring Israel to teach God’s word to their children continually and to write God’s word in places where it could be seen regularly. Near the end of his farewell admonitions, Moses said in Deuteronomy 32:46, “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law.”

The book of Proverbs abounds in statements urging children to heed instruction of parents and also urging parents to train their children. Proverbs 1-9 is set forth as a father (and sometimes a mother also) instructing a son in the path of life he should take. Sometimes wisdom is personified as teaching the son. The son here is warned against the danger of adultery and of falling in with wayward women. He is also warned against getting involved with gangs who would rob people or kill people for their possessions. He is taught to be wise, to be righteous, to be merciful, to obey his parents, to trust in the Lord, to be humble, to honor the Lord with his possessions as well as his mouth, to accept discipline from God, to share with his neighbor, to tell the truth, and to heed his father’s teaching as that father heeded his own father’s instruction.

Sometimes this instruction is addressed to “My children” (4:1; 7:24; 8:32), but more often it is addressed to “My son” (1:8,10; 2:1; 3:1,21; 4:1,10,20; 5:1; 6:1,20; 7:1). This teaching also urges the son to be diligent, honest, trustworthy; to imitate the ant’s industriousness, but to avoid those things which the Lord hates. Surely such a literary device (posing the poetry as teaching from parents to children) would be used because just such teaching as this was what God prescribed.

Parents are urged to “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Punishment has a place in this training (22:15; 13:24), and children are urged to cooperate in learning by hearing instruction (13:1) and profiting from correction (15:5). “Correct your son, and he will give you rest; Yes, he will give delight to your soul” (29:17). Many similar statements could be cited from Proverbs and elsewhere.

Yes, the Old Testament required people to teach their children, but many then like many today failed to do it. Eli and David are two examples of the failure of leaders to train their children, and the results were tragic in both cases. Eli's sons lost their lives and Eli forfeited the high priesthood for his posterity. Two of David's sons rebelled against him and tried to usurp the throne, one from David, the other from Solomon. Both lost their lives because of it.

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