

PARENTS WITH UNBELIEVING CHILDREN

What about believing parents who have children die in unbelief?

We can affirm that each child is accountable to God for his own sin and personal faithfulness to God (Ez 18:14-20) and that to assign blame to parents or ministers, apart from the revelation of scripture (cf. 1 Sam 3:13; 2 Chron 12:13-14; 22:3) is a fruitless, unhelpful and hurtful mission given the complexity of the task and the fact that it cannot be proved. Likewise, we can affirm that a parent will be also accountable to God for their personal faithfulness, which includes parental faithfulness.

Furthermore, we can affirm that it would be unwise to prematurely judge the immediate wanderings of our children. We ought to encourage both parents and ministers to take the long view and through diligent prayer and covenant obedience, seek God for the return of a prodigal son.

The Bible's teaching of Parental Covenant Nurture does not undermine the Sovereign Grace of God. People come to faith in Christ through the obedient messenger sent from God to declare the gospel (Rom 10:14-15). The salvation of sinners does not ordinarily occur apart from the obedient messenger and yet the messenger remains an instrument of grace - nothing more.

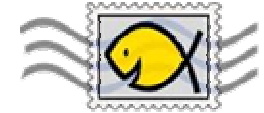
Likewise, parents are the usual instrument by which their Covenant children come to faith in Christ, whether before, during or sometime after birth (cf. Ps 22:9; Lk 1:41).



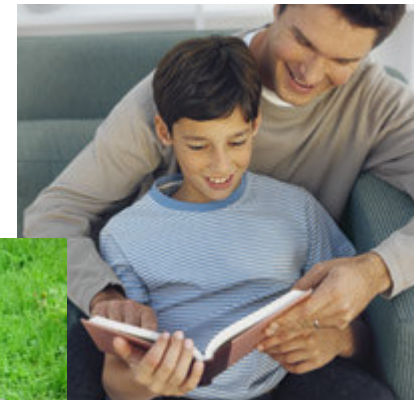
The connection between faithful nurture and Covenantal faithfulness is one of the grand themes of Proverbs. The Covenantal name 'Yahweh' used throughout demonstrates the books immersion in Covenantal life.

(Proverbs 2:1-21; 14:26; 19:18, 22:6, 15; 23:13-14).

This wonderful teaching of God is given as an encouragement to believing parents. Your faith in God's gracious promises for yourselves and your children - and the obedience that follows from that faith - is not in vein.



EZRA CHAPTER 8



COVENANT GENETICS

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Those who came back under Ezra tended to be from those families that had come back in 538B.C (Ezra 2). Is there a principle here that would give encouragement and hope to parents? The message here seems to be that covenant faithfulness tends to run in families.

“Even over the generations, it was particular families that were to the fore in making the journey back to the land. Reading between the lines, we may discern here an example of that faith-in-action ... transmitted from generation to generation by those families which took seriously their religious and educative duties.”

(McConville, *Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, Daily Study Bible, 53*)

This study will focus on the concept of Covenantal Succession and its implications for families today.

THE PROMISES IN THE COVENANT OF GRACE BELONG TO CHILDREN

1. The Covenant of Grace consistently has the family in view and is accompanied by Covenant Promises and Conditions.

(Gen 17:7, 9; 18:19; Deut 7:9-13; Ps 103:17-18; Isa 65:17; Jer 32:39-40; Ez 37:24-25; Lk 18:15-16; Acts 2:39; 3:25)

Therefore,

With the arrival of the New Covenant, God did not move from “you and your children” to “every man for himself”. Parents who put their hope in the promises of God for their own salvation have ample warrant from scripture to put their hope in God for the salvation of their children. Yet it is not the faith of a parent that saves a child but the gracious promise.

This hope is expressed in our prayers, petitions and the parental obedience that flows from faith in those promises.

COVENANT NURTURE IS THE USUAL MEANS OF GRACE TO CHILDREN

1. Children of Believing Parents are members of the Covenant of Grace and subject to its Promises and Conditions.

(Lk 18:15-16; 1 Cor 7:14; Eph 6:1)

2. Believing parents are the common instrument by which God brings their children to embrace the promises for themselves.

(Deut 4:9-10; Ps 78:1-8; Prov 22:6; 1 Cor 7:14; Eph 6:1-4; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:15-16)

3. The larger Covenant community and especially the ministry also bear responsibility, particularly in equipping parents.

(Hos 4:6; Mic 2:9; Jer 2:8-9; Zech 11:16-17)

4. Parental disregard for the Covenant may be one the reasons for ongoing unbelief in a child. Whilst children will not ultimately die for the sins of their parents, they do often suffer for it.

(1 Sam 2:29; 3:13; cf 2 Sam 11 with 2 Sam 13; 1 Kings 1:6)

It is instructive that, so far as scripture speaks, all of the righteous kings in Israel had Hebrew mothers and in two cases the identity of the kings mother as pagan is offered as an explanation for their betrayal of the Covenant (2 Chron 12:13-14; 22:3).

It must be acknowledged, however, that God can still act graciously towards the children of unfaithful parents (Saul and Jonathan) and the imperfect obedience of faithful parents (Hezekiah and Manasseh - see 2 Kings 20:14-19).

Therefore,

The goal of parenting is not to convert their children but to raise them up as Covenant keepers through the fear and admonition of the Lord. Children of a believing parent are to be welcomed into full fellowship as members of the Covenant until they show by their rejection of the faith that they are not.