

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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First Commandment With Promise

(Jerry Fite)

Paul exhorts children to “*Honor thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise), that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth*” (Ephesians 6:2-3). The first commandment with promise is connected with one of the first things a child should learn in life: honor you father and mother by obeying them. It is not only right, but contains a two-fold promise: it will be well with you, and you will live long on the earth.

Paul is definitely pointing readers to the commandments God gave the children of Israel through Moses. Paul combines what is specifically stated in Exodus 20:12 from Mt. Sinai with what is given to a new generation of Israelites recorded in Deuteronomy 5:16. Earlier, the promise is that “*thy days will be long in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee*”. To a new generation about to enter the promised land, God promises: “*that thy days may be long, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee*”. Paul changes the order and says first it will go well with thee, and broadens the scope from the promise land of Canaan to where one lives on the earth.

To the children of Israel, taking this early step of obeying God by honoring one’s parents was an essential building block for remaining long in the land given to them by God. Starting in obedience in childhood, and continuing to live godly in adulthood, would assure dwelling in the land generation after generation. Moses emphasizes this continued well-being in the promised land when he says, “*that it may be well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days in the land, which Jehovah thy God giveth thee, forever*” (Deuteronomy 4:40).

When Israel ceased to obey God, He removed them from the land. It was not well with them, for they were driven into captivity. If you were to walk in the streets of Jerusalem during Babylon’s besiegement of the city, what would you conclude when you saw the following: “*The youth and the old man lie on the ground in the streets; my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword*” (Lamentations 2:21)? Would it be true that the men dying when they are old were godly men who had been obedient to their parents when young? Knowing God has promised long life to those who obey their parents, should you conclude

that the young lying dead in the streets did not obey their parents? It very well may be that the young were obedient to their parents, who led them away from God. Together, they experienced the wrath of God (Lamentations 5:22).

When people die young, does it mean they were disobedient children? Jesus died as a young man. Was he ever disobedient to his parents? (cf. Lk. 2:51).

Some believe “*only the good die young*” is found in the Bible. Such a saying may give comfort to those who have lost children or young friends in death. But such is not found in the Bible. Knowing Ephesians 6:2-3, what can you say to your child who is watching a young friend die with meningitis?

Principles regarding God’s promises are involved in life and death other than just age. God continues to give and take away life according to His will (Job 1:21-22, James 4:15). He is not contradicting His promise to young children, for “it is well” with the godly young even in death. They have the promise of eternity in heaven (cf. I Timothy 4:8-9). Children obey your parents in the Lord, for it will go well with you as long as you live, even in death.