

THE BIBLE: GOD'S CHILD-RAISING MANUAL

We live in an incredibly informed nation, do we not? Any and all questions people can possibly think up are answered within a few clicks on the Internet, or a brief study from some readily available self-help books. Television is filled with talk shows that offer counsel on everything from how to dress to best flatter your body type, to how to overcome depression. Advice columns infiltrate magazines and newspapers as people desperately seek counsel to guide them through difficult life-situations. One of the most popular topics in which people seek counsel is on the matter of how to raise children, and every self-proclaimed expert has his own way of doing things. Their advice is based on their own set of morals; it strives to make the child conform to what the *expert* feels would guarantee a successful adult. Sort of scary if that expert's views don't coincide with your own! The most important source a Christian can turn to today, however, is still the Word of God. You may be sitting there thinking quietly to yourself: "But the Bible doesn't come out and say, 'Thou shalt discipline Johnny if he pulls the dog's ears' or 'Thou shalt give six chores to each child in order to build good work ethic!'" And you are right! But there are many principals in how to raise children...and they can be found in how the Lord God Almighty dealt with His own children in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The crux of this article is to reveal three basic guidelines for how to raise godly children; these are pulled from the OT books of Jeremiah and II Kings.

In the book of Jeremiah, God used His prophet to rebuke and redirect His wayward people. His children lived in sin and wickedness, and because of their lack of repentance, their sin would need to be punished. The Lord was very clear what the consequence of their sin(s) would be and He asked Jeremiah to reveal the explicit details of what their continued rebellion would procure them. We, too, need to be very clear with our children what they will reap when they disobey. To set unclear guidelines and to follow them arbitrarily provokes anger (which can lead to resentment and bitterness), and Ephesians 6:4 is clear that parents are not to provoke their children to wrath. Then, after the discipline is carried out and a repentant heart is evident, we are to restore our children to us as if nothing had ever happened. Complete forgiveness...just like God offered to His children after their punishment was complete.

In the book of Jeremiah, one of the greatest hindrances to the restoration of children to Father was "false prophets who prophesied in the Lord's name". While God's message was clear—repent or be punished—the false prophets toted a different message. Their message proclaimed, "Peace, peace! No evil shall overtake you!" One of the saddest passages ever to be recorded in God's Word is found in Jeremiah 23:21-22 when God says, "*I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings.*" Because more than one message was being proclaimed, the people had the choice of which one to believe...and in their naivety or outright rebellion, they chose the ear-tickling one. All around us are false prophets who proclaim a message that contradicts the Truth, yet they claim to be speaking on behalf of God. Satan, as the angel of light (II Corinthians 11:14), has miraculously changed the Truth into a lie,

and lies into the [perceived] truth (Isaiah 5:20). False prophets—whether religious or not—will continually try to woo your child from the Truths and life lessons you've taught him. Stay by your child's side and protect him or her from those who would wish to sway them. Know your child spiritually and discern whether or not he or she is able to influence those around them, or if they are still too influence-able and need the shelter of mom and dad. Gain their heart (Proverbs 23:26) and jealously guard it. And trust always in the promise given in Proverbs 22:6, *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."*

In the book of II Kings we find that King Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign. He did much the same as his father and grandfather did by allowing sorcerers, sodomy, and spiritual adultery to permeate the lives of God's chosen people. His fathers and his father's fathers did not teach him the Truths of God's Word, and both he and his kingdom continued in their sinful filth for the first 18 years of his reign. But then something wonderful happened: the high priest found the book of the law (II Kings 22:8). As King Josiah read through the first five books, he came under conviction (II Kings 22:11). He began to know the thoughts of the Lord, and understood that the way the kingdom was operating was an abomination to a holy and righteous God. He allowed God's Word to *change* his thoughts and *redirect* his ways. He used the Bible to purge out the filth that had corrupted God's people. He used God's Word to open the eyes of the people to the errors of their ways. And King Josiah encouraged the people to live in accordance to the law of God...and not the law of man (II Kings 23:3). There are many, many codes of morals in our world...each measuring up to some man's opinion of what's acceptable and what's not. But God says in Isaiah 55:8, *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways..."* Teach your children God's ways...keep them always in the Bible and when they are spiritually ready, help them transition from blind obedience to their parents to deliberate obedience to God's Word. For it is only when they live in complete accordance with God's ways that they might be able to say, *"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:"* (II Timothy 4:7) and hear, *"Well done, thou good and faithful servant."*

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