

Ten Commandment Lesson 6 Article

Although this word/commandment requires children to honor their parents in all sorts of ways large and small, there can be little doubt that its most basic insistence from the point of view of establishing a responsibility that might otherwise be shirked is to demand that children take care of their parents in their parents' old age, when they are no longer able to work for themselves, as well as to honor whatever their parents have prescribed by way of inheritance for their children. Thus the commandment is followed by the promise of living long in the promised land. Just as parents who have lived long in their own personal lives need to be cared for at the end of those long lives, so Israel as a nation (not every individual therein) would be able to enjoy a long life in the land God was giving them.⁶⁰¹

The Fifth Commandment is concerned with the home and family. Family solidarity has long been one of the unique features of Jewish life. Underlying this law is the warning against the heathen habit of abandoning the aging when they can no longer support themselves. In some ancient cultures the "old folks" were put out to die of exposure or be eaten by wild beasts. This inhuman act is now sternly forbidden by God. Parents are to be respected and revered and protected. And the reward is plain: a stable society blessed by prosperity. Happily both Judaism and Christianity are family religions and this emphasis has contributed mightily to history's progress.²

There is a double promise here. So long as the nation rejoiced in the possession of obedient children, it was assured of a long life or existence in the land of Canaan; but there is also included the promise of a long life, i.e., a great age, to individuals (cf. Deut. 6:2; 22:7), just as we find in 1 Kings 3:14 a good old age referred to as a special blessing from God. In Deut. 5:16, the promise of long life is followed by the words, "and that it may be well with thee," which do not later the sense, but merely explain it more fully.³

⁶⁰ Cf. R. Albertz, "Hintergrund und Bedeutung des Elterngebots im Dekalog," *ZAW* 90 (1978): 348–74. Albertz sees a complex of responsibilities in the commandment, including that of children to understand that their parents, not they, are in charge of key aspects of their lives and have this charge *in loco dei*; this responsibility does not cease just because the children reach maturity of their own. Albertz argues that Akk. parallels are supportive of the biblical notion of the meaning of honoring parents, so the expectations were in fact general in the ancient world and not merely limited to Israel—something seen in Proverbs and other wisdom literature, where the expectation of honoring parents is hardly portrayed as only Israelite but rather as a basic human act of righteousness. Cf. J. Gamberoni, "Das Elterngebot im Alten Testament," *BZ* 8 (1964): 161–90; P. Green, "The Fifth Commandment," *ExpTim* 47 (1935–36): 504–7.

¹ Stuart, D. K. (2006). *Vol. 2: Exodus*. The New American Commentary (461). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² *The teacher's Bible commentary*. 1972 (F. H. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs, Ed.) (68). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

³ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Ex 20:12). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.