

Long Life And Children As Merited Rewards Or Gifts

A long life – as a totally deserved reward or by unmerited grace

The Mosaic Covenant promises a long earthly life as a reward to those who perfectly obey *all* of its commands, statutes and judgements every moment of every day. Deuteronomy 4:40 states: ***“You shall therefore keep His statutes and His commandments which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time.”*** Deuteronomy 32:45-47 records: ***“... ‘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. For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess.’”***

Note Deuteronomy 30:14-20 reveals such perfect obedience includes *loving God* all the time also. So verses like Deuteronomy 4:40 and 32:45-47 are not referring to a type of obedience which lacked deep love for God like the one many Jews had at Christ's time (see Luke 11:42 and John 5:42). The Mosaic Covenant also taught obedience to its commands to love others continually (see Leviticus 19:18 and 19:34).

Deuteronomy 5:31-33, 6:2 and 11:8-9 are other verses which teach that God promises long life to those who obey all of the commands and laws of the Mosaic Covenant. Such obedience needed to be not only in relation to major commands like *honouring your father and mother* (see Deuteronomy 5:16) but also to *seemingly minor laws* such as recorded in Deuteronomy 22:6-7: ***“If a bird's nest happens to be before you along the way, in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs, with the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young; you shall surely let the mother go, and take the young for yourself, that it may be well with you and that you may prolong your days.”***

Deuteronomy 6:1-2 includes fearing the Lord with obeying *all* of God's statutes and commandments in order to receive long life on Earth: ***“Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgements which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.”***

Proverbs 3:1-2 teaches the Mosaic Covenant principle of obey the Mosaic Law and be rewarded with a long life: ***“My son, do not forget my law, but let your heart keep my commands; For length of days and long life and peace they will add to you.”***

In Ezekiel 18:4-20, the prophet Ezekiel repeats the principles of the Mosaic Covenant that the individual who obeys all of its statutes and judgements will deserve the reward of a long life and the person who disobeys these laws will deserve to be punished with physical death. Ezekiel 18:4-5 and 9 says: ***“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die. But if a man is just and does what is***

lawful and right...If he has walked in My statutes and kept My judgements faithfully – he is just; he shall surely live! Says the Lord God.” In verse 4 above, Ezekiel says any soul who sins deserves to die.

God’s promises to kings and rulers

Deuteronomy 17:18-20 contains a conditional promise to the later kings of Israel: *“Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.”* Proverbs 28:16 is another verse related to kings: *“A ruler who lacks understanding is a great oppressor, but he who hates covetousness will prolong his days.”*

In 1 Kings 3:14, God promised to prolong Solomon’s life if he obeyed God’s commandments and statutes and walked in God’s ways in a *real* though imperfect sense like King David did: *“So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.”*

Long life as free gifts of God’s grace to believers

The Old Testament also refers to people, who did not perfectly obey God’s love commands and other Mosaic laws every day, living long lives by God’s unmerited grace and mercy through faith. In Psalm 61:3-7, King David refers to this: *“For You have been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in Your tabernacle forever; I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. Selah for You, O God, have heard my vows; You have given me the heritage of those who fear Your name. You will prolong the king’s life, his years as many generations. He shall abide before God forever. Oh, prepare mercy and truth, which may preserve him!”* In verse 6 above, David said God would prolong his life. In Hebrew, the word *“preserve”* in verse 7 is *“nasar”* which means *“guard from dangers”*.¹ In verse 7, David uses the word *“mercy”* which in Hebrew is the word *“hesed”* which refers to God’s unmerited lovingkindness.

In Psalm 40:11, David refers to God preserving or guarding him from danger on the basis of His tender mercies or *“rahamim”* in Hebrew, and His lovingkindness or *“hesed”* in Hebrew. In Psalm 40:3-4, David reveals his trust and reliance in God. In Hebrew, the word *“trust”* here is *“hasa”* which means *“seek refuge, flee for protection”* and therefore figuratively *“put trust in”*.²

Ezekiel 18:21-23 and 27:32 are wonderful Words of God in which He promises to give more years of life to those wicked people who turn from their sins and begin to obey the statutes of the Mosaic Covenant. Ezekiel 18:21-23 states: *“But if a wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed, keeps all My statutes, and does what is lawful and right, he shall*

¹ Brown, Driver and Briggs, page 665.

² Harris, Archer and Waltke, page 307.

surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions which he has committed shall be remembered against him; because of the righteousness which he has done, he shall live. Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? Says the Lord God, and not that he should turn from his ways and live?" In the above verses and Ezekiel 18:27-32, God promises more days to those wicked people who turn from their sins to Him.

Long life as free gifts of God's grace to the wicked

Ecclesiastes 7:15 records that in this earthly life, there are righteous believers who die young and wicked people who live long lives: *"I have seen all things in my days of vanity: There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness."*³ Refer to Chapter "Bildad's overly simplified view" for Biblical examples of God graciously permitting some unrepentant wicked people to live long lives. So the Bible itself does not support the idea that all wicked people will die young and all people with saving faith in God will live long lives.

A New Covenant promise

Note that in Ephesians 6:2-3, Paul transfers one of the Ten Commandments and its associated promise from the Mosaic Covenant into a New Covenant setting: *"Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth."*

Under the Mosaic Covenant, believers were promised a long life if they obeyed *all* its moral, civil and ceremonial laws not just the command about honouring their parents (see Deuteronomy 4:40, 6:1-2 and 32:46-47). To obtain the fully deserved reward of long life under the Mosaic Covenant, God's people had to also keep the Sabbath, keep all the festivals, obey the Ten Commandments and every other God-given command in the Law.

Under the New Covenant, the promise of Ephesians 6:2-3 cannot be taken in isolation from other New Testament verses. For example, 1 Corinthians 11:28-30 warns that believers who are taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, can die earlier than if they had not sinned. Therefore, even if believers honour their parents, they can still fail to receive the promise of Ephesians 6:2-3 because of their sinning in this other matter.

Can I believe God wants for me to live 10,000 years or more?

It is very sad but true that some lead others to believe some ridiculous unbiblical ideas. One writer when commenting on Psalm 91:16: *"With long life I will satisfy him..."* said, "So no matter how old you are, if you're not satisfied yet, keep on living...So don't stop at less than 70. If you are satisfied with 70, go on home. If you're not satisfied, go on to 80. When you get there, if you're not satisfied, go on up to 90. If you get satisfied, then go on home. Some people,

³ The writer of Ecclesiastes is above referring to those who are righteous by God's grace through faith and not to the righteous by nature or by works of Law. Except for Jesus Christ, there is no human who is perfectly righteous by nature or actions (see Psalm 130:3, 143:2, Ecclesiastes 7:20, Romans 3:9-20 and Galatians 2:16).

bless their hearts, will say, 'Well, that's far-fetched.' But its Bible principles. Can't you see it?...How many is the number of thy days? Until you get satisfied."

Well, what about if I want to live as old as Methuselah (969 years – Genesis 5:27), Noah (950 years – Genesis 9:29), Adam (930 years – Genesis 5:5) or Seth (912 years – Genesis 5:8)? Do you think that if I keep believing and confessing for one of these lengthy options, and keep walking in God's love, that He will surely grant me this?

What about if I decide to want to set a record for a human and live another 5,000 or 10,000 years? Do you think that God will grant it, if I keep believing and confessing this will be fulfilled in my life?

Also, do you think that Jesus will delay His second coming by 969 or 5,000 or 10,000 years – whatever I decide I need to be satisfied – just to fit in with my believing and confessing? Believing and confessing for God's miraculous intervention in our lives only works if what we are believing for is His revealed will. In its original context, Psalm 91:16 does not specifically promise all believers 90 or 100 years.

Children as a merited reward or by God's unmerited grace?

A very good example of the difference between God rewarding humans with totally or partially deserved earthly blessings under the Mosaic Covenant and Him giving undeserved earthly blessings by His grace can be seen when we compare Psalm 127:3 with Genesis 33:5.

Psalm 127:3 states: "***Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is His reward.***" This verse says that children are a reward from God. In the original Hebrew Old Testament, the word "***reward***" here is "sakar". Psalm 127:3 is referring to the Mosaic Law principle found in Deuteronomy 7:13, 28:4 and 28:11. This principle is obedience to the Mosaic moral, civil and ceremonial laws results in the merited reward of having children.

Genesis 33:5 records Jacob's answers to Esau's question about Jacob's children: "***And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children, and said, 'Who are these with you'? And he said, 'The children whom God has graciously given your servant'.***" Note Jacob here said God had given him his children by *grace*. One of the Hebrew words for God's grace – "hanan" – is translated "***graciously***" in this verse.

Jacob understood he had received his children not as a deserved reward but as a undeserved gift of God's grace. By this stage in his life, Jacob understood better the totally gracious nature of the Abrahamic Covenant under which God had placed him. Note Genesis 15:5 records the totally grace-based promise God made to Abraham in relation to Abraham's descendants – this including Jacob: "***Then He brought him outside and said, 'Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them'. And He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be'.***"

In Genesis 33:11, Jacob said how gracious God had been to him in general. He used the Hebrew word "hanan" here also.

God's wonderful grace to Jacob in relation to the children Rachel bore to him can be seen in the fact she still desired to possess household idols (see Genesis 31:34). Rachel deserved a punishment of death for this sin. God also gave children to Abraham's wife Sarah and his son Isaac's wife, Rebecca as free gifts of His totally undeserved grace and not as deserved rewards. Romans 4:1-21 relates to Abraham and Sarah receiving Isaac as a free gift of grace.

By His undeserved grace, God gives children as free gifts to believers and unbelievers not living under the Mosaic Covenant. He does this through the gracious mandates He gave through the Adamic and Noahic Covenants which are expressions of His eternal plans (see Genesis 1:28, 9:1 and 9:7). Genesis 9:1 records: “***So God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.***”

John the Baptist and his parents

Luke 1:6 reveals John the Baptist’s parents were blameless in relation to the commands and statutes of the Mosaic Covenant and Law: “***And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.***” Luke 1:7 says that despite their blamelessness and being well advanced in years, they did not have a child. Luke notes this fact because the Mosaic Law promised children to those who obeyed its commands and statutes (see Deuteronomy 7:13, 28:4 and 28:11).

So for most of their lives, Zacharias and his wife did not see the fulfilment of God’s promise of children. Others who observed the childlessness of Zacharias and his wife may have concluded the latter were very wicked people or God does not fulfil His promises. But the latter’s lack of children had nothing to do with either of these things.

What would you have thought, if you were righteous by God’s grace through faith and blameless in relation to His revealed will and had waited most of your long life for the fulfilment of His promise about children and were still waiting? This happened to them because in His perfect justice, God was under no obligation to have to give them a child as a totally deserved reward. Therefore, He could choose to give them the child at the time *He chose* without being unjust in the slightest way.