



# The *locus* of Scripture in the formulation of fatherhood in the Old Testament: Exploratory and reflective discussions

Professor Fazel Ebrihiam Freeks  
Faculty of Theology, North-West University  
Potchefstroom, South Africa  
E-mail: 10589686@nwu.ac.za  
Orcid ID <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2474-8756>

## Abstract

This paper explores the significant position of Scripture and literature in the formulation of fatherhood in the Old Testament. It deals with the Old Testament passages in which God is explicitly called 'Father'. Human fatherhood originates in the Fatherhood of God. God is the Father of his creation and his people, and the attributes and characteristics of his Fatherhood should be perceived as protection, provision, warmth, gentleness, forgiveness, and involvement so that human parenting can adopt and flow from it. God wants to bring the man to the point where he is doing the will of God, thereby fulfilling his fundamental role and function as earthly father the way God intended it to be. The nature and character of God the Father can channel immense meaning to human fatherhood. *Sola Scriptura* is crucial for this dynamic concept of fatherhood. The Bible is the main source and authority for human fatherhood because the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible should be read and studied to notice and comprehend God's original intention with human fatherhood.

**Keywords:** locus, scripture, formulation, fatherhood, Old Testament

## Introduction

Although academics and theologians have written about God the Father for centuries, their endeavors have seldom explored the Father-God motif as the foundation for human fatherhood. Previous research into human fatherhood has largely been based on Christology. For this reason, there has apparently been little progress in understanding what Scripture teaches about human fatherhood (Knobnya, 2011). The basic premise in this article is that human fatherhood originates in the fatherhood of God. The article departs from the viewpoint that Scripture is the foundation of all principles and guidelines for dealing with issues in life. The approach to the Bible is that it is its own interpreter; therefore, it guides the church and the human, and not the other way around (Lion-Cachet, 1991). Human fatherhood should therefore be described and practiced according to the Bible (Steensma, 1995). The issue at stake here is that fatherhood on earth has been distorted and has, in many instances, disappeared from the family because of an absent father. Sin disrupting a life of peace and harmony causes estrangement between the father and his children and family (Verhoef, 2011). The purpose of this article is, first, to suggest a framework for human fatherhood based on the fatherhood of God. Second, the findings will be applied to practice. The strategy in terms of practice is about a training and equipping program which I will propose later in the paper. Though the entire Bible addresses the concept of fatherhood, the focus is on the Old Testament. The topic cannot be investigated, however, without referring to the New Testament. Conclusions will eventually be made in the context of the whole Bible.

In the first part of the article, attention will first be given to ways of communicating views of fatherhood of God in the Old Testament and second, Scripture as authority for fatherhood. The second part consists first of a discussion of the fundamental importance of earthly



fatherhood and second, the necessity for earthly fathers to practice the fatherhood of God. In the third part of the paper, a training and equipping program is proposed as part of a community engagement strategy.

### **Ways of communication the fatherhood of God in the Old Testament**

In the Old Testament, the concept of the fatherhood of God is communicated by explicit descriptions, *Abba* as a form of address, theological teachings, and metaphors.

#### ***Explicit descriptions***

The Old Testament presents God as the Father of Israel, especially through his functions as Creator, Protector and Savior (Dobbs, 2013). The concept of the fatherhood of God is essential and explicitly described in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> That Israel is the son of God is clear from God's commission to Moses to tell the pharaoh to let his 'firstborn son go' (Exodus 4:22-23). God wanted Israel to be his own; thus, God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was to form the nature of Israel in such a way that they would be his own people (Medved, 2016). According to Dobbs (2013), the first time that the word 'Father' is used to refer to God as a father is found in Deuteronomy 32:6, where Moses sang a song about the covenant between God and the Israelites. Moses addressed the people, asking, 'Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?'

God is not only the Father of Israel, but of all of his creation. In Jeremiah 32:27, there is a clear indication that God is God of all flesh and that includes the human whom He created. This means that God introduced a type of image that indicated He is father to all people.

#### ***'Abba' as a form of address***

The Word is the inspired scriptural revelation of *Abba*, which is the name of God. The name *Abba* is an intimate way of addressing God (Hoepfner, 2009). *Abba* means 'father,' according to a Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word (p. 50). The meaning of *Abba* is special, especially in the context of a family (father-child relationship), and can further be translated as *pappas*, *papas* and *po-i-*, which mean 'to protect,' 'to give attention to', and even 'to obey' (Hoepfner, 2009; Parker, 2008; Pfafflin, 1993; Strong, 2006). The connotation of intimacy is important for understanding the fatherhood of God.

#### ***Theological teachings***

Two theological teachings throw light on the fatherhood of God, namely that God created the human in his image and that God is a triune God. Of course, the triune nature of God is only fully revealed in the New Testament.

#### ***Human in the image of God***

According to Genesis 1:27, God created the human in his own image and as his representative. He created both man and woman in his image (Dobbs, 2013). When Genesis 5:3 says that Adam became the father of a son in his likeness, and called him Seth, humankind as an 'image' (*tselem*) of God emanates through all generations.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 1:31; 8:5; 14:1; 32:6; 2 Samuel 7:14; Psalm 68:6; Isaiah 43:6; 63:8,16; 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4; 14; 19; 22; 3:9, 20; Hosea 11:1-4; Malachi 1:6; 2:10; 3:17.



### ***The Creator is a triune God***

The human father is analogous to the description of God as Creator. Being a human father implies the father has a relationship with his wife and children, and that can be seen as analogous to ontology of God found in the Trinity (Kinlaw, 2003). Before God is the Creator of heaven and earth, however, He is Father God, which implies that fatherhood is Trinitarian and connected with human beings who are created in the image of God the Father; therefore, the human father will discover his role as a father in the Trinitarian Godhead (Kiesling, 2017). In the New Testament, the view of the father image of God gains a new dimension by way of another analogy. The man is the head of the family, as Jesus Christ is the head of the house and the church (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18).

### ***The Metaphor of father***

The Old Testament is rich in metaphors for God. Such a metaphor is knowing God the Father (Wright, 2007), as deeply and intimately, as is possible for a human. If we refer to God as Father, we speak of Him metaphorically, which does not mean that God the Father does not exist. God is not literally a Father. A literal father is in fact male, and God is not a sexed being. According to Sarot (2016), the metaphor of father in this context means 'he who brings forth effortlessly.' He continues that especially in the Hellenistic environment, the most common meaning of the term 'father' with reference to God is 'God is Creator' (p. 3). The Israelites were well aware of the significance of the metaphorical meaning of Yahweh, their God, in the context of the common human experience of fatherhood.

In the Old Testament, the word 'father' is seldom recorded and applied *directly* to God, but Hebrew Scriptures frequently refer metaphorically to God as a father. The purpose is to add weight to the concept that God is like a father who pities his children and spares his people as a man spares his son (Shaw, 2016). The metaphor of father used in Isaiah 63:7 and 64:11 is modified as 'redeemer' and 'potter'. This scriptural nuance elucidates the understanding of 'father' and reflects a covenantal bond (Niskanen, 2006). To Israelites, God had initiated the mutually binding contract between Himself and Israel, as the 'people of God' and he was their father. The 'divine' contract was thus based on the mutual assent of both God and the Israelites as His 'chosen' people. God presented His people with laws because of his love for them and His desire as a Father was that they should not stray from his will which is what is expected of all fathers when dealing with their offspring (Nicolaidis & van der Bank, 2011).

The Old Testament texts also rarely speak about Yahweh as 'Father' in contexts of devotion and worship (Wright, 2007). The metaphor for God as Father is therefore not as common in personal narratives as one might expect. It is noteworthy, however, that though the Israelites were reserved about the concept of Yahweh as Father in worship, they used it freely in personal names (Wright, 2007). An example is the name of Moses' mother, Jochebed (Yokheved), a word based on the name Yahweh (Yahweh, 2020). In the New Testament, however, the concept of the fatherhood of God as revealed in the Old Testament is frequently found. 'Father' is used directly as the name for God 250 times (Shaw, 2016).

As has been noted above, the concept of the fatherhood of God is not as common in the Old Testament as might be assumed. 'Fatherhood' that refers to the fatherhood of God has a divine meaning. It does not only have the connotation of God being responsible ('bringing forth effortlessly,' 'God is Creator'), but also that He is full of mercy and compassion like a parent in the loving treatment of his child (Howes, 2016). His Fatherhood is not merely a simple psychological expansion of the human's experience of human fatherhood. It is a divine scriptural portrayal of genuine fatherhood that judges and corrects our knowledge and understanding of human fatherhood.



### ***Conclusion: Ways of communicating the fatherhood of God in the Old Testament***

The Old Testament teaches its readers about the fatherhood of God using different strategies, from explicit statements, the word *Abba* with its connotation of intimacy, theological concepts, and the metaphor stating God is father.

### **Scripture as authority for fatherhood**

As has been indicated above, the Bible is the supreme source of authority for human fathers, because the genesis and measure of all parenthood is God himself (Sabra, 2008). The Bible offers guidelines for the man to equip himself thoroughly for fatherhood. God wants the human (father) to do good and therefore He gave his Word to help the man (and the woman) as parents to deal with certain situations in life.<sup>2</sup> In the New Testament, Paul assures Timothy of the value of the Bible, saying, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:17). These words from the New Testament confirm several truths about fatherhood already present in the Old Testament. A few of these will now be briefly discussed.

### ***Truths about God the Father in the Old Testament***

The Bible teaches that God is Father of all humans, that God is the original Father, and that as Father, He expects honor and respect from his children.

#### ***God is Father to all humans***

God is Father to all humans, even those that have no family. God has a passion for those who fear him, and therefore the father on earth ought to have the same passion for his children. As the human is a fallible being, God's concern over the human is eternal. God remembers the condition of the human when He examines him. This aspect implies further that God has a fatherly heart that helps, and therefore He supports his children. God is the Father of all and He is truly the caretaker of every human who is searching for Him (Psalm 68:5).

#### ***God is the original Father***

Feenstra (1972) highlights a second truth when he describes God as the original Father, the origin of all generations. In this context, this statement is a confirmation that God is not only the Father of creation, but also the Father of believers and the Father 'from of old'. This is clear from the fact that already in early biblical history, the people of Israel saw God as their Father, while they were called the first-born of God (Kidner, 1975). God introduces the concept of human fatherhood at a very early stage in Genesis 2:24, where it is said the man will leave his parents and unite with his wife to fulfill his role as head of the house. It means he will assume the responsibility as father in his family and a prominent role in society (Genesis 2:24). In the New Testament, it is explicitly stated that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, which emphasizes that his Fatherhood is eternal (2 Corinthians 11:31; Ephesians 1:3).

#### ***God expects honor and respect***

A third truth that characterizes the fatherhood of God is that He expects honor and respect from his children. Isaiah 63:16, referred to above, emphasizes that because God was Israel's Father 'from of old,' He regarded fatherhood to be of cardinal importance, and as a Father He expected honor and respect from his children. According to Malachi 1:6, God reproached his priests, asking them, 'A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me?' There was no honor and respect for Him. As the people did not show honor and respect to their earthly fathers, it followed that they would reject the

---

<sup>2</sup> An example is the absent father, which is dealt with in Freeks (2019).



fatherhood of God (Malachi 2:10-11). The conclusion is that honor and respect for God is the foundation of good fatherhood, and that good fatherhood is necessary to foster honor and respect for earthly fathers.

### ***Conclusion: Truths about the fatherhood of God***

Having an insight into the truths about the fatherhood of God will guide earthy fathers in laying down a foundation for their own fatherhood.

### ***Fatherhood of the patriarch in the Old Testament***

In the Old Testament, families functioned according to a patriarchal system, which implies the father was seen as a figure of authority, as a leader, as a parent, and as a teacher. In light of the New Testament, there has been a shift of emphasis regarding some of these duties.

#### ***The father as a figure of authority in the Old Testament***

Bergh (2002) explains what it meant for the man to be the patriarch of a patriarchal family. In the structure of the patriarchal family, the oldest male in the family was a figure of authority and represented the family. He acted as ruler, priest, educator and manager of his family (see Bergh, 2002; Freeks, 2011a). When a man moved from his parental home and united with his wife, he was seen as a father with authority (Genesis 29:1-30). Honoring and respecting the father were inherent in the patriarchal system of Old Testament times. The children born in the marriage were frequently named after the father so that the father's name would live on (Bergh, 2002). Bergh also points out that the father would live on in the son, even when the son was standing in his own marriage (p. 60). Regarding the choice of a spouse, the parents, especially the father, made the decision (p. 60).

#### ***The father as leader in the Old Testament***

God created the human as part of his creation (Genesis 1:26), but He also created the human as male and female (Genesis 1:27; 2:22; 5:1-3). God created Adam as father and Eve as mother, and differentiated between the roles that Adam and Eve would fulfill. The man (father) and the woman (mother) had all the necessary qualities to function as father and mother respectively (Gross, 1999). According to Genesis 2:24, the man would leave his parents and unite with his wife, which implied that the man would observe his responsibilities and duties as father in his own family. Although God created the woman (mother) as the helper and equal of the man (father), in the context of the family, the father is sometimes seen as the figure responsible for giving attention to aspects such as counseling, discipline and emotional intimacy (Bartlett, 2013).

From a cultural viewpoint, male leadership remains a strong concept, especially where the concept of 'family' is instituted by marriage, with the man as the head of the family and the parent responsible for providing for the family (see Popenoe, 1996).

#### ***Human fatherhood more than patriarchal fatherhood***

In modern times a broader base than the patriarchal system is needed for setting out principles for fatherhood. When New Testament views of fatherhood are considered, the biblical analogy between the human father and God the Father suggests a view of human fatherhood that requires the man to adjust Old Testament views of the status of women. When Scripture explains in John 1:12 that humans become children of God only when they accept Jesus and believe in his name, men and women are implied. Although the man is appointed as head above the woman, man and woman are equal in Christ (Galatians 3:28). Acting as head of his family is a vital task that God gave to the man. In fulfilling his responsibility and duties as a father, the man therefore has to direct his heart to God when he loves his wife and educate his children (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:20-21; Deuteronomy 6:7; 1 Timothy 3:4-5). The appointment of the man as the head and father of his house indicates his task and not his status; therefore, he is not more important than the woman is. This is true, even as the task of



the woman is to act as mother, as a help and supporter in the family, as described in Genesis 2:18-24.

To God, the father and mother are equally important; God therefore forbids harming either your father or mother (Exodus 21:15).

### ***The father as parent in the Old Testament***

The male breadwinner is central to the traditional idea of fatherhood (Koenig-Visagie & Van Eden, 2013). The Christian male gender is also traditionally connected with the idea of the man as the warrior (Viljoen, 2011). God appointed the father to the office of parenthood. His role as father is to be present and available, so that he can communicate wisdom about life to his children (see Bergh, 2002). According to Proverbs 10:1, wise children are a joy to their father, but foolish children a grief to their mothers. The teachings and warnings from the father heart to the child are of cardinal importance (see Psalm 128). In the Old Testament, the great value God attributes to fatherhood is clear where fathers had to bless their sons, especially the first-born, based on the notion of primogeniture. In a total different scenario, a father showed his respect for God by being willing to sacrifice his son, while the son reacted by acknowledging the will of the father. The father who uses his son to obtain the goodwill of God the Father is truly favored by God. The son does not question the will of his father and places his life in his father's hands. His response of honoring and obeying his father is clearly seen as a form of good behavior in children (Deuteronomy 5:16; Exodus 20:12).

As has been indicated above, in Malachi 1:6, it is explained that the son has to honor his father and treat him with respect. Fathers have to be advised to teach and instruct their sons in their faith inheritance and duty. This father-son relationship is dynamic and meaningful, because it is based on the relationship between God and Israel, where Israel is referred to as the son of God (Deuteronomy 14:1). It was the duty of fathers in biblical times to be involved with their young children and to take care of them, teach them, educate them and treat them well (Forster, 1993). A father involved with his children had to display characteristics associated with care, protection, provision, play, social interaction and participation in activities (see Bergh, 2002; Forster, 1993). The involvement of the father was comprehensive, especially at the birth of babies (Proverbs 1:8-9; Ephesians 6:1-24). By his involvement, he fulfilled his role as father (see Forster, 1993; Freeks, 2004; Parker, 2008;).

### ***The father as teacher***

Education was one of the primary responsibilities of the father and it took place in the household of Israel, for example Joseph taught Jesus to be a carpenter (Matthew 13:54-55; Mark 6:3). Deuteronomy 6:1-19 indicates the responsibilities and obedience related to fatherhood and it gives guidelines on how the human father should practice the fatherhood of God. In Deuteronomy 6:4-10, the well-being and happiness of the family is guaranteed when the character of God the Father and his purpose are revealed. The education system in the family was aimed at equipping the child spiritually and socially (Bergh, 2002; Forster, 1993). In the context of the whole Bible, both the father and mother are accountable to God for teaching their children from the Word of God and for guiding them in ways of the Lord. The purpose should be that the children would follow these teachings in their daily life and live righteously before God and their parents (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Proverbs 1:8). The Christian father and mother's teachings, which are also referred to as biblical principles, will be like garlands and chains adorning a child's neck (Proverbs 1:9). It is therefore clear that fathers from biblical times fulfilled the role and duty of a father. God the Father saw fatherhood in this way and blessed it.

The author is of the opinion that this good biblical way of giving expression to fatherhood has, however, declined and died out due to the increase of father absence and because most people find themselves caught up between traditional and contemporary understandings of



fatherhood and motherhood (see Meyer, 2018:1). This is why it has been stated at the beginning of the article that the purpose of this discussion is to create awareness of fatherhood in Scripture again.

### **Conclusion: Fatherhood in the Bible**

Characteristics and duties of the father identified in the Old Testament are exercising authority, taking the lead, performing parental duties and educating his wife and children. In the New Testament, the wife and mother share some of the duties.

### **Fundamental importance of earthly fatherhood**

Abraham Lincoln confirmed the importance of parenthood and fatherhood more than two centuries ago in his statement that the strength of a nation is found in the home where the father and the mother function together (Family Life, 1998).

Many narratives in the Old Testament confront the modern father with the dire and compelling question of what is at issue when men repudiate the vital vocational call to accept the essence of human fatherhood. Following the significance of fatherhood through the Israel's story of redemption and arriving at the last of the prophetic books, where Malachi concluded the Old Testament and prophesied that Elijah will return one day to restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:6), human fatherhood is still relevant and of paramount importance, even in this age and time. The New Testament confirms this statement and assures its readers that they can learn more about the Father if they know Jesus, because the Father and Jesus are one (John 10:29-30, 36; see also Hoepfner, 2009).

### **The earthly father has to practice the fatherhood of God**

The fatherhood of God has to be seen as a model for earthly fatherhood and the Christian father should follow this model (see Isaiah 64:8). The man or the father, according to Ephesians 5:23, is the head and leader of the woman, but his primary responsibility within the framework of the family is to love his wife (see Ephesians 5:25). Included in the responsibility of loving his wife, the man as the father in his family has the responsibility to teach his wife and children about the fatherhood of God and to show them the way they have to follow, just as Paul as the spiritual father of the Corinthians did (1 Corinthians 4:14-16). The biblical notion of the character of God comprises love, care, grace, life, goodness, health, and peace, not control and dominion (Shaw, 2016). One should know and understand that God is like a father and that his wealth, property, goodness, love, forgiveness, care and compassion describe his capabilities and character. These characteristics are 'large' enough for all people and children. This is one of the fundamental reasons why parenting should reflect the character of God. Children's understanding of God the Father is in fact formed by their relationship with their human fathers (p. 43). In the same way Christians view Jesus Christ as their Father and in the Gospel according to St John 1:12, the *ethnos* (nation), Laos (people) and *tekna tou Theou* (children of God) are all identified. The *tekna tou Theou* are 'all who received Christ' and they are forever safe, because Jesus Christ has chosen them as their Father, and he is faithful in his desire to maintain them as His children and this is what fathers are called to do (Nicolaidis, 2010).

Biblical teachings on the character of God the Father can shape effective practices such as spiritual forming of Christian parenting if earthly parents could model the character of God to their children in such a way that the children can understand God the Father in their daily life and even in the challenges with which they are faced (p. 44). Frequently, God is compared to a father who will allow his children to experience tough times and severe challenges so that they can learn from them (Wright, 2007). At the same time, however, God also acts in his



grace. An example is that his love and faithfulness are dimensions of his grace. In truth, the grace of the living God in action bought us into a relationship, a father-son-relationship (Wright, 2007). The father-son-relationship reflects God-the-Father-and-the-son-Israel relationship, and this is a given status (Wright, 2007; see also Deuteronomy 32:6-18).

Both parents (mother and father) should know that they play a critical role in forming the spiritual life of children, but numerous studies have noted that the father's relationship with children may be more significant and influential in this respect (Shaw, 2016). In this paper, the intention has not been to omit biblical narratives of women who exercised their imperative function in the family in terms of the spiritual lives of children. Husbands (fathers) should be spiritual leaders in the home (Deuteronomy 6:1-25; Psalm 78:1; see also Freeks, 2011a), but husbands (fathers) are becoming progressively uncommon in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As researcher, the author is reluctant to move this point that the mother should also be considered as influential when it comes to forming the spiritual life of children. The author also alludes to the fact that the Virgin Mary played a significant and critical role in raising Christ. Mothers and fathers should equally engage to reflect and model the character of God and to shape the spiritual life of their children in terms of their godly parenting role.

According to Matthew 7:7-11, Jesus brings the characteristic of God the Father in context of what earthly fathers should really do. The fatherhood of the man can be meaningful if he practices his fatherhood according to the Word of God and tries to adopt the characteristics of God in his relationship with his family. One of the most typical characteristics of God is his goodness. God is the Father and giver of all good gifts and therefore earthly fathers must know to give good things to their children when they ask. The good gifts that the Father gives, makes God a special Father to the human because of his abundance in goodness, tolerance and patience (see Romans 2:4, 11, 22). Jesus also explained in Luke 11:9-13 that his followers should use the name *Abba*, just as He himself addressed God the Father (Hoepfner, 2009). *Abba* is an intimate form of address for God, as has already been indicated. It is assumed that the Christian Father and even his children can address God as 'Abba,' just as Jesus addressed God as 'Abba' (see Lotter & Hoepfner, 2011). The Christian father and his family have to make this form of address part of their vocabulary (see Hoepfner, 2009).

### **The Fatherhood Training and Equipping Programme as Community Engagement Strategy**

The Fatherhood Programme is a training and equipping solution distributed in the form of a facilitator's manual (Frees, 2011b). The program as strategy is aligned to and supports the purposes of faith-based communities and has the potential to make a positive impact in communities. The programme aims to address father absenteeism, fatherlessness, un-involvement, neglect of children, and family dilemmas. It offers guidelines and possible solutions to restore the crucial role of the father within a family context and to build better relationships in families through the leadership of the father and mother. The programme proposes the opportunity for fathers to make informed and quality decisions based on the amelioration of their families, especially the wellbeing of their children. Fathers and father-figures are encouraged to become more involved in the lives of their family members, especially their children (Frees, 2011b).

The programme was first drafted, structured and compiled in 2011 and officially started in faith-based communities. The layout of the program consists of a concrete manual and workbook with practical activities which fathers actively participate when conducting the training sessions. The programme has seven themes which are constructive, relevant and practical. These themes are: the concept of fathering; the importance of self-mage for fathers;



the approach of character versus career; how to overcome labelling; how to handle disappointments; the father as developer; and how to becoming fully you (Freeks, 2011b).

The programme was specifically developed to be used in the field of community engagement. It was later amended and adapted after further studies into fatherhood, father absenteeism, uninvolved fathers, and the fundamental role of the father within the family context (Freeks, 2016; Freeks, 2017; Freeks, 2018; Freeks, 2019). Furthermore, the program strives to enable fathers to connect with other fathers about their role; to feel empowered; to help identify a common purpose in terms of their families; and to create a space within which new possibilities for fathers can emerge. In summary, the program is one of the strengths and core responsibilities of the author because the main aim thereof is to train and equip fathers in general and to restore the indispensable role of the father within the family context.

### **The application of the mentioned passages from the Hebrew Bible to contemporary fatherhood**

The mentioned passages of the Hebrew Bible indicated that fatherhood originated from God the Father, and that parenthood is paramount. The Hebrew Bible shows that God emphasized the essence of parents, both father and mother, and that they are compelled to teach the Bible to their children. The Hebrew passages teaches that parents should teach God's commandments to their children so that they live by the guidelines in His Word. Parents have a special place in God's sight, therefore families should not be ignored (see Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-4; Matthew 15:4-6). Even those who find it difficult to get along with their parents, they are still commanded to honor them. No father should ever allow that secular viewpoints about fatherhood, detract him from his family responsibilities.

A good family life is a reward for following God by the leadership of the father. The scriptures assigned fathers to teach and educate their children, especially from the Bible, and not worldly wisdom and insight. Through the fatherhood of God, contemporary fathers are not only obliged to show their involvement in the family, but they are spurred on to care, protect, provide, socializing, etc. to their families. This involvement already started with the birth of babies as indicated by the various passages. An important notion that the passages highlighted, is the character of God the Father. The passages clearly indicated that God cares but He also discipline and teach His children the importance of fatherhood. If a father is not willing to care for discipline, and teach his children, he is not qualified to lead the church. In the passages it is also clear that respect for parents and authority are crucial elements because it builds stronger families. As author my observation as discussed in this paper is that fatherhood has been distorted because of father absence, the negative influence of the media and the distorted view of the public. Due to this social ill, most contemporary fathers neglected or lost this important task of good fatherhood. A way to restore this social issue, and to see families flourish again, is the idea of Biblical fatherhood with the emphasize on the Fatherhood of God.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this article was to suggest a framework for human fatherhood based on the fatherhood of God, so that the fatherhood of God can be applied to practice. Father absenteeism is a serious problem in society, and human fatherhood based on the fatherhood of God (Scripture-based fatherhood) can be a possible solution to the mentioned problem. In the Old Testament, the success of fathers was their adherence to biblical principles when they guided their families. Fathers taught their children pertaining their daily lives from the Law of God, which is the Bible. These findings and type of education are supported by the Old and New Testaments and numerous Hebraic writings such as the Talmud.



The revelation by Scripture of God as Father through his son Jesus Christ and his saving grace does not only provide knowledge and information, but basic help, advice and meaningful insight into fatherhood in a time and era of father absence. As such the father should fulfill his role of a figure of authority and is called by God to fulfill this role and calling in the context of the family.

The author is convinced that fatherhood will be rekindled by taking note of fatherhood in the Bible. When identified and studied, issues like fatherlessness, absence of fathers and the father that does not fulfill his role adequately will be limited to a minimum. In Malachi 4:6, it is written that God wants to bring fathers and children together again; otherwise, He will come and destroy our land. To address the issue of fatherhood, a Christian model from the Hebrew Scriptures including a community engagement program should strongly be considered.

God brings the human to a point where the human wants to act according to his will. God also brings the man to a point where he has to fulfill the fundamental role and function as father and live up to the expectations of God.

## References

- Bartlett, E. (2013). 'The impact of absent fathers on adolescent girls' psychosocial well being'. BA (Hons). North-West University, Potchefstroom.
- Bergh, S.J. (2002). 'Family ministry as an integral part of building-up the congregation'. DTh Thesis. University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein.
- Bible, (1991). Life Application Bible: New International Version. Wheaton, Ill, Tyndale House Publishers.
- Dobbs, P. (2013). 'The impact of fatherlessness on the way one relates to God as Father'. MA dissertation. University of Otago, Dunedin.
- Family Life. (1998). 'A declaration of timeless values'. Retrieved from <http://www.familylife.org.za/manifesto.html> (Retrieved on March 27, 2020).
- Feenstra, J.G. (1972). *Learning and Living*, Sacum, Pretoria.
- Forster, B. (1993). The biblical omen and evidence for the nurturance of children by Hebrew males. *Judaism*, 42(3), 321.
- Freeks, F.E. (2004). 'The role of the absent father figure in the South African context: A Practical Theological study'. MA dissertation. Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, Potchefstroom.
- Freeks, F.E. (2011a). 'The role of the father as mentor in the transmission of values: A Pastoral-Theological study'. PhD thesis. North-West University, Potchefstroom.
- Freeks, F.E. (2011b). *Fatherhood Training and Equipping Manual for Fathers: Dad becoming fully you*. Ivyline Technologies, Potchefstroom.
- Freeks, F.E., (2016). The necessity of Scripture-based fatherhood as a solution to the continuing problem of absent fathers in South Africa. *Journal for Christian Scholarship*, 52(1&2), 1-27.



- Freeks, F.E. (2017). Responding to the challenge of father absence and fatherlessness in the South African context: A case study involving concerned fathers from the North-West Province. *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, 3(1), 89-113.
- Freeks, F.E. (2018). Views of mothers on the fundamental role of the Christian father as mentor in a nuclear family environment. *In Luce Verbi*, 52(1), a2365. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v52i1.2365>
- Freeks, F.E. (2019). The problem of father absenteeism in South Africa: A possible solution according to Biblical guidelines. *Journal of Humanities*, 59(4), 700.
- Gross, S. (1999). Intersexuality and Scripture. *Theology and Sexuality*, 11(Summer), 65-74.
- Hoepfner, H.G. (2009). 'The significance of the fatherhood of God in the pastoral guidance of adopted children'. PhD thesis. North-West University, Potchefstroom.
- Howes, L. (2016). Your father knows that you need all of this: Divine Fatherhood as socio-ethical impetus in Q's formative stratum. *Neotestamentica*, 50(1), 9-33.
- Kidner, D. (1975). *Genesis (Tyndale Old Testament commentaries)*, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester.
- Kiesling, C. (2017). Oh Father, where art thou? *Christian Education Journal*, 14(1), 85-98.
- Kinlaw, D. (2003). Sacred pedagogy: How & what we learn about God from the family. *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, 16(5). <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=16-05-029-f>
- Knobnya, S. (2011). God the Father in the Old Testament. *European Journal of Theology*, 20(2), 139-148.
- Koenig-Visagie, L.H. & Van Eden, J. (2013). Gendered representations of fatherhood in contemporary South African church imagery from three Afrikaans corporate churches. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 34(1), 1-12.
- Lion-Cachet, F.N. (1991). The Christ testimony in the Old Testament: A confession reality. *In Luce Verbi*, 25(1), 97-113.
- Lotter, G.A. & Hoepfner, H.G. (2011). The pastoral guidance of the adopted child with regard to the fatherhood of God. *In Luce Verbi*, 45(2&3), 551-568.
- Medved, G. (2016). The fatherhood of God in the Old Testament. *Evangelical Journal of Theology*, X(2), 203-214.
- Meyer, J. (2018). 'Restructuring the Christian Fatherhood Model: A practical theological investigation into the 'male problematic' of father absence', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 74(1), DOI: 4870. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v74i1.4870>
- Nicolaides, A. (2010). 'The Laos tou Theou – an orthodox view of the "people of God"', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 66(1), DOI: 10.4102/hts.v66i1.372
- Nicolaides, A. & van der Bank, C.M. (2011). The role of Law as identified in the Old Testament and its impact on the Hospitality Industry, *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 1(3).



Niskanen, P. (2006). YHWH as Father, Redeemer, and Potter in Isaiah 63:7-64:11. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 68(3), 397-407.

Parker, E.I. (2008). 'The attributes of God the Father in the covenant: A pastoral foundation for fathering'. PhD thesis. North-West University, Potchefstroom.

Pfafflin, U. (1993). The abortion of fathers: Reflections on the construction of parenting in psychological, sociological and theological perspectives. *Encounter*, 54(Winter), 59-78.

Popenoe, D. (1996). A world without fathers. *Wilson Quarterly*, 20(2), 12-16.

Sabra, G. (2008). 'Our father (and mother?) who art in heaven'. (Lecture presented at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon).

Sarot, M. (2016). Believing in God the Father: Interpreting a phrase from the Apostle Creed. *HTS Theological Studies*, 7294, a3287. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3287>

Shaw, P.W.H. (2016). Parenting that reflects the character of God. *Christian Education Journal*, 13(1), 43-58.

Steensma, D.J. (1995). *Ouders en kinderen: Een theologisch-ethische bezinning*, Boekencentrum, Zoetermeer.

Strong, J. (2006). *Strong's handi-reference concordance*, AMG, Chattanooga, TN.

Verhoef, G.C. (2011). 'God is our Father', *The Church Magazine*, February 14, 2011.

Viljoen, S. (2011). Papa don't preach: Fatherhood in a South African Christian men Magazine. *South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research*, 37(2), 308-331.

Wright, C.J.H. (2007). *Knowing God through the Old Testament*, Illinois Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

Yahweh. (2020). Encyclopaedia Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yahweh>. Retrieved on March 26, 2020 .

