

Family Life *in* Bible Times

Dan Brewster

THE CHILDREN & FAMILIES IN THE BIBLE SERIES
Book 2



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Scriptures quoted, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version

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THE IDEA FOR these studies came from a reading of the excellent book *Precious in His Sight* by Roy B. Zuck (Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Mi., 1996). Much of the material in the early versions then was based on gleanings from *Precious in His Sight*, and I am grateful to Dr. Zuck for permission and encouragement to explore in his book for those insights and principles. The book called *Children and Childhood in the Bible Revised Edition* was a result of that exploration.

This series of booklets uses much of the material in *Children and Childhood in the Bible*, but in this shorter 'booklet' format. The material in each one can be covered in a day or so of group or individual study. I am grateful to Dr. Rosalind Tan, the Director of the Holistic Child Development Institute (HCDI) in Penang for the idea and the inspiration to rework the material in this smaller, booklet format. The booklets are in response to her passion to create materials very suitable for 'grassroots' pastors, 'lay' leaders, children's workers and care givers. Thanks Rosalind!

Dan Brewster

I am very grateful once again for the expert assistance to my friend Ms. Lim Siew Ling. She contributed substantially to the creation of this Series. Her comprehensive familiarity with Scripture and wealth of pastoral and ministry experience gives her a marvelous ability to both explore and interpret Scripture and also to craft appropriate and provocative reflection questions. Thank you very much, Siew Ling!

And once again, I have been helped by my friend Mr. Kok Chik Bu in the overall design, look and feel of the books in this series. As has been the case with his work on other Holistic Child Development (HCD) resources, his creative touch has fashioned the attractive and readable style and format of the book. Thanks Chik Bu!

Finally, and not least, I am grateful to Compassion International, the organization in which I have served for nearly 30 years now, for the opportunity to spend time exploring the Word of God as part of my work to develop resources like these.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

THE PURPOSE OF this booklet and the others which follow is to help learners dig deep into the Word to see what it says about children and childhood. But more importantly, they are to create understanding of the worth and significance of children, and their role in pointing to and illustrating Christ's "upside down" Kingdom..

Some people have said that the Bible has little to say about children and childhood. But in fact the Scriptures are *full* of references to children. These booklets include hundreds of verses relating to the child. Moreover, these studies show that children play a significant role in the unfolding of the message of the Bible – that God loves and protects them; that they are extremely perceptive in understanding the things of God; and that God often deploys them as His messengers and models – often it seems when adults may have been too corrupt and deaf to His calling.

The Booklets in this Series are:

Book One: The Worth of a Child

Book Two: Family Life in Bible Times

Book Three: Nurture and Training of Children

Book Four: Parental Modeling and Generational Consequences

Book Five: Child Protection

Book Six: Theological Significance of Children

Note: A bibliography for the Series can be found at the end of Book Six.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

EACH OF THESE booklets contains four studies on a specific theme with a variety of Bible verses or reflections about children. The studies are structured as follows:

Topic Overview: A brief introduction to the topic which presents real life case studies or scenarios as a backdrop to the Scriptures and reflections of the study.

What Does the Bible Say? Here you will be asked to go to specific Bible passages to explore what the Bible says about children and understand more of God's heart for them.

Key Insights or Principles: For those Bible passages, you may find new insights or key learning related to the theme. It may be that the number and breadth of Scriptures on a topic surprises or impresses you. Or you may be convicted anew with the biblical perspective on some topics which contrast sharply with the perspectives we see today and hear about in the news. Write down the main biblical principle, as well as your personal observations and gleaned knowledge about the Scriptures on the topic.

Reflection Questions: This section asks you to apply the key biblical principles to your **personal life**, the **culture** in which you live, and the **context** of your society and circumstances in your own country. They may require more inquiry, research and personal reflection. There are no right or wrong answers to the reflection questions, but they will provide the basis for interesting and lively discussions about how children are viewed and treated in your own personal life, context, and culture/country. Ideally these questions should be discussed in groups. The discussions will draw you deeper into the biblical material, and point to the contemporary significance of the topic.

Where I have quoted Scriptures, I have used the New International Version. However, as you are doing your studies, you may profit from using a variety of versions if available. Also, while often single verses are given; good Biblical scholarship requires you to read the Scriptures around the verses, to have a fuller understanding of the historical settings, and contexts of the Scriptures.

Note: There are frequent references especially to Dr. Roy Zuck's outstanding book *Precious in His Sight*,¹ which inspired this Workbook. In some places we have sought to include more of Dr. Zuck's fine analysis and development of the many themes he addresses in his book. However, the references to his book can surely not do it justice. I highly recommend that learners using these booklets get a copy of *Precious in His Sight* which will add immeasurably to the depth and breadth of the topics explored here.

Whether you are a front-line childcare worker, a church or organization leader, I trust that these booklets will encourage, inspire, and provide you broad new insights about children and childhood in the Bible—and about your ministry and mission priorities.

¹ Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight-Children & Childhood in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996).

FAMILY LIFE IN BIBLE TIMES

IN THIS BOOK, we will explore a wide range of topics related to children and families in the Bible. The Bible is a case book illustrating so well the “good, bad and ugly” about family relationships. Interestingly, one has to look very hard throughout Scriptures to find fully Godly and functional families. But just as lawyers and doctors learn from the case study method, we can also learn much from both the positive and negative “cases” we find in the Bible.

Families come in all shapes and sizes. Do you know that having children—“godly offspring”—was the reason God created the institution of marriage? (See Malachi 2:13-15) Some societies highly value the extended family—the more aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relations, the better! Other societies are more “nuclear”—there is less inter-generational contact, and less involvement of the extended family in daily activities, matters of discipline, and other social situations.

Generally, around the world, families are smaller today than in times past. In the 1970’s there were pessimistic population projections that the world would grow to **20 or 50 billion people**. At that time, there was the fear that we wouldn’t be able to feed everyone. There would be mass starvation, and not enough resources and energy to support even a modest standard of living.

It hasn’t quite turned out that way. Fertility rates (the number of children per woman), have dropped dramatically not only in the more developed countries, but

also in the less developed countries as well. We know that Western families are typically smaller; but in fact, nearly 100 countries around the world have a fertility rate under the replacement rate of child per child. Recognizing how devastating the shrinking next generation is to economies and social well-being, many countries are now offering significant subsidies and other incentives for women to have children.

No matter where you are born, there will be family matters concerning siblings and possible rivalries. They are as ancient as those between Cain and Abel. Just as there is no one child who is exactly the same as another, there is no one family the same as another. But we can learn about godly families through Scriptures which teach us this vast topic.

Families begin with the birth of a child. As in biblical times, childbirth is an exciting, sometimes frightening, and certainly an unknown experience as each child’s birth is unique to the child herself! Once born, the mystery and awe of a new life can be a blessing to the parents and extended family.

As we explore childbirth in Bible times and how God blesses the future generations through the birth of children, let us begin with a new appreciation of God’s love for His world to allow His very own Son to also be born as a helpless infant, into our world!

STUDY 1: CHILDBIRTH IN BIBLE TIMES

■ Introduction

CHILDBIRTH IS ONE of the most amazing and complex experiences in life. No one can fathom exactly the marvellous way a child is formed and brought into the world. Despite the “remarkable facts”² science has revealed to us about the development of a baby in a mother’s womb, pregnancy and childbirth remain deep mysteries. Such is the mystery that whenever a child is born, it “stagger[s] the imagination and causes parents to experience a deep sense of amazement and awe.”³

Yet, while the birth of a child is an occasion of joy, the act of giving birth itself is often described in Scripture as the epitome of pain and suffering. Moreover, there is always the risk of miscarriages, stillbirth and birth defects.

What does the Bible say about the joys and pains of childbirth? How did the people of old respond to these extremes of experience in childbirth?

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 45-63, 69-70.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. Read the following Scriptures to summarize what is said about childbearing:

Primary References	Statements on Childbearing
I Chronicles 4:9	Jabez’s mother: “I gave birth to him in pain.”
Psalms 48: 6	“... pain like that of a woman in labour.”
Isaiah 13:8	“pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labour.”

² Zuck, p. 53 quoting from Lennart Nilsson and Lars Hamberger, *A Child is Born*, trans. Clare James (New York: Delacorte Press, 1990), pp.39,78,83,85,108.

³ Ibid.

Isaiah 26: 17	'As a pregnant woman about to give birth writhes and cries out in her pain..'
Jeremiah 50:43	"Anguish has gripped him, pain like that of a woman in labour."
Micah 4:9-10	"Has your ruler perished, that pain seizes you like that of a woman in labour?" "Writhe in agony, Daughter of Zion, like a woman in labour."

2. Women in the Bible were exhilarated at the prospect of being pregnant and giving birth to children (even through their maidservants). For each passage, identify key words uttered by these mothers with reference to children.

	Mother's Name	Child's Name	Mother's Expressions	Key Words
Genesis 4:1	Eve	Cain	"With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man."	<i>Help of the Lord</i>
Genesis 4:25	Eve	Seth	"God has granted me another child."	
Genesis 30:11 30:17,18 30:20	Leah	Gad Issachar, Zebulun	"What good fortune!" "God has rewarded me." "God has presented me with a precious gift."	
Genesis 30: 23	Rachel	Joseph	"God has taken away my disgrace."	
I Samuel 1:20	Hannah	Samuel	"Because I asked the Lord for him."	

3. Conditions for childbirth during Bible times were challenging. Read the following passages and describe the conditions and the help mothers received during childbirth.

	Scripture Contents	Conditions/Places of Childbirth	Help Received
Genesis 35:17	And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her ... "Don't despair, for you have another son."	Rachel died while giving birth to Benjamin on the way from Bethel to Ephrath (Bethlehem).	<i>Midwife</i>

Exodus 1:15, 16	The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live."		
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4. Roy Zuck in *Precious in His Sight* (pp. 69- 70) provides 7 possible interpretations from several commentators on the puzzling verse found in 1 Timothy 2:15: "But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

Which of the following interpretations would you choose? Give your reasons.

1. Women will be saved physically through the difficult process of childbirth. (quoting H.A. Ironside)
2. Women will be saved spiritually through the childbearing of the Messiah. (quoting Homer A. Kent, Jr.)
3. Women will be saved spiritually even though they must bear children. (quoting E. F. Scott)
4. Women will be saved spiritually through being faithful to their role as Christian women. (quoting Ann L. Bowman)
5. Women will be saved spiritually through performing their duties as mothers. (quoting Robinson, cited in Albert Barnes' work on the New Testament.)
6. Women will be kept safe from the sinful influence of society by being at home raising children. (quoting Barnes' work who cites Wetstein)
7. Women will be kept safe from Eve's error of usurping the husband's leadership role by being a godly mother. (quoting S. Jebb)

5. The results of mankind's "Fall" are reflected in the Scriptures. Genesis 3:16 states that the consequences of sin would result in "pains in child bearing." Discuss the meaning in context in each passage and explain why pain in childbirth is used as a metaphor here.

	Place/Person	Scripture Contents	Meaning in Context
Isaiah 21:3	Babylon/Jeremiah	"At this my body is racked with pain; pangs seize me, like those of a woman in labour..."	<i>The prophet Jeremiah was expressing suffering and terror when prophesying on coming judgement on Babylon.</i>
Jeremiah 30: 5,6	Israel/Judah	""Cries of fear are heard— terror, not peace. Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labour, every face turned deathly pale?"	
Jeremiah 49: 24	Damascus	"Damascus has become feeble, she has turned to flee and panic has gripped her; anguish and pain have seized her, pain like that of a woman in labour."	
Romans 8:22	Creation	"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."	
Galatians 4:19	Paul	"My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..."	

■ *Key Insights or Principles:*

■ *Reflection Questions:*

1. What risks do women in your culture face during pregnancy? Do these risks cause them to have more or fewer children? Do they cause the parents to treasure or despise their children? Why?

2. Discuss the conditions/places and the assistance women receive during childbirth in your culture. What are the pros and cons? What positive or negative effects do these birth conditions/places have on the young infants and their subsequent childhood?

3. It is a well-documented fact that the nutrition of the pregnant mother influences the health of her baby during pregnancy. Read the following Scriptures involving food and diet. Judges 13:4-5, 7 (Manoah's wife) and Luke 1:24 (Elizabeth).

What are some of the preparations, precautions and traditional observances for pregnant women in your culture? Discuss the pros and cons of these practices on the mother and child.

4. Chuck Swindoll has said that "Since He assigns children to parents, there is no such thing as an 'accidental birth' or a 'surprise pregnancy' from God's viewpoint."⁴ Do you agree? What are the viewpoints in your society and their consequences?

⁴ Charles R. Swindoll, *Living Beyond the Daily Grind, Book II* (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1988), p.326.

5. The Scriptures reflect the feelings and thoughts of women who have learned they are expecting a child. Do you see any evidence in Scripture of an active role of fathers in childbirth? In your culture, what roles to husbands have during their wives' pregnancy and childbirth?

■ *Case Study: Children with Special Needs*

Roy Zuck notes that "although some babies born in Bible times had physical defects," they were not abandoned or put to death because of their handicaps. For example: a man born blind (John 9: 1-7), a beggar born crippled (Acts 3:1-10) and a man born lame (Acts 14:8-10).

Discuss how these "special" children were mightily used by God to promote His Kingdom. What are the implications for child development ministries for "special" children? Discuss and reflect about how children with special needs are treated in your context and culture.

STUDY 2: WHAT'S IN A CHILD'S NAME?

Introduction

CHILDREN COME WITH all kinds of names.⁵ Many people believe that a name can influence all of life! Have you ever stopped to reflect on the fact that the names we give our children are the names by which they will be known throughout eternity? God uses whatever name we give our children. The very same names are those which (hopefully) will be written down in heaven.

Some cultural groups give children unflattering names to make them less appealing to the demons. Others give names which are biblically based. For example, the name, “Nathan” means “gift from God”, and indeed the prophet Nathan in King David’s life provided the “gift” of admonishment to King David. As a result of Nathan’s counsel, David repented and turned his life around towards obedience to God.

My name, “Daniel,” means “God Judges” (or something like that!). My Asian friend Lim Siew Ling tells me that her name means - “petite” and “active”—a pretty good description of her, I’d say, even now as an adult! (Apparently though, it may mean something different depending

upon what Chinese characters are used! Whew!) And names differ widely from place to place. If you are born in Africa, you might be named Abeni, Chika, or Khamisi. If you are born in Poland, your first name could be Babina, Dobieslaw, or Sergiusz. In Korea, the given name may be Moon, Shin, Soo, or Sun. In China, Wei Xia, and Xiang are common given names. In Ethiopia, common names include Dawit, Mulatu, and Shiferaw.

Interestingly, even in the secular Western culture, the most common names today are biblical names. A popular “website” shows that the three most popular names for boys in America in 2006 were (in order) Jacob, Michael, and Joshua. Matthew, Daniel, and Andrew were also in the top 10. As recently as 2011, according to the Social Security Administration Statistics, the top name continues to be Jacob, with Michael, Noah, and Daniel all making the top ten boys’ names!

Do you know what is the most common given name for boys in the UK today? Mohammed! (Think what that says about how society and ethnicity is changing there today!)

How should one name a child? Today, it is considered trendy to name a child after a famous person whom the parents

⁵ There are many fascinating websites on names. This one has lots of information about baby’s names around the world:
<http://www.babynames.org.uk/>.

idolize e.g. a famous author or celebrity. Some parents name their children after a relative or even themselves! Just as in the Bible, there are parents who name their children after nature (e.g. flowers), places (cities, towns, and countries), an event (e.g. tsunami, el Nino), colours, days, months or gemstones.

It was common for some illiterate cultures to name their children after domestic objects (e.g. plates, scissors), or animals (e.g. cat, dog, cow). In the past, some children were also given derogatory names that describe their negative physical appearance or disability (e.g. dumb, deaf, limping leg).

Because God knows each of our names, we will explore the meaning and significance of names of children then and now throughout the Bible. We will find that parents in the Bible who feared God chose names that were deliberate and purposeful for their children. And children in the Bible were expected to live up to their names to fulfill God's plans for their lives.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 63-67.

<http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/babynames>

■ *What Does the Bible Say?*

- Read the following Scriptures to discover when children were named in the Old and New Testaments. Identify the children and the time they were named:

	Child	When was the Child Named?
Genesis 29:32	Reuben	<i>Not mentioned specifically but assumed to be after birth.</i>
Genesis 35:18	Benjamin	<i>When Rachel was at her last breath after giving birth. She originally named the child Ben-Oni which means "son of my trouble" but Jacob changed it to Benjamin which means "son of my right hand."</i>
I Samuel 1:20	Samuel	
Luke 1:59	John	
Luke 2:21	Jesus	

2. The following passages reveal how children are named with specific meanings. Identify the person/s who named the children and, if possible, the circumstance that influenced the choice of the names.

	Child's Name	Meaning	Context	Named by:
Genesis 4:1	Cain	"brought forth" or "acquired"	<i>Eve was grateful that the Lord helped her to bring forth a child.</i>	<i>Probably Eve but not specifically mentioned.</i>
Genesis 16: 11	Ishmael	"God hears"	<i>God instructed Hagar to name her son "Ishmael" to remind her that God has heard her misery and will favour her.</i>	<i>Hagar as instructed by the Lord</i>
Genesis 17: 17	Isaac	"he laughs"		
Genesis 25: 25	Esau	"hairy"		
Genesis 25:26	Jacob	"grasps the heel" – Hebrew idiom which means "he deceives."		
Genesis 30:24	Joseph	"may He add"		
Genesis 38: 27-30	Perez & Zerah	"breaking out" "scarlet" or "brightness"		
I Samuel 4:21-22	Ichabod	"no glory"		
I Samuel 25:25	Nabal	"fool"	<i>Not mentioned</i>	<i>Not mentioned</i>

2 Samuel 12:24	Solomon Jedidiah	"loved by the Lord"	<i>David & Bathsheba</i> <i>Prophet Nathan</i>	<i>The Lord instructed Nathan to name him "Jedidiah" because He loved him.</i>
I Chronicles 4:9	Jabez	"pain"		
Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23	Immanuel Jesus	"God with us" "the Lord saves"		
Luke 1: 13,59	John	Not mentioned here.	<i>Angel Gabriel appeared before Zechariah and instructed him to name the child "John".</i>	<i>Zechariah</i>

3. In the Bible, some people had their names changed. Whenever this happened, it was usually a significant event, indicated by the change of name and also the character of the person. Discuss the new meanings and transformations that took place after the following name changes:

References:	Name Change:	New Meanings/Transformations Observed
Old Testament Examples:		
Genesis 17:5	Abram to Abraham	Abram = "exalted father" Abraham = "father of many" Although he initially doubted God, Abraham went to fulfil God's promise to become a father of multitudes.
Genesis 17: 15	Sarai to Sarah	Sarai = "a princess" Sarah = "mother of nations"
Genesis 32:28	Jacob to Israel	Jacob = "deceiver" Israel = "he struggles with God"

New Testament Examples:		
Mark 3:16	Simon to Peter	Simon = "hearing" Peter = "rock"
Acts 4:36	Joseph to Barnabas	Joseph = "son of prophecy" Barnabas = "son of encouragement"
Acts 13:9	Saul to Paul	Saul = "asked for" or "prayed for" Paul = "small" or "humble"

■ *Key Insights or Principles:*

■ *Reflection Questions:*

1. What is the meaning of your original given name? If you know it, share with your group the process and background of how your name was chosen for you as a baby. In what specific ways, positively or negatively, has your name impacted you as an adult?

2. How are children named in your country/culture? Describe the process of choosing and determining names in your culture. Who chooses the names of children—the father, the mother, in-laws, extended family or pastors? Are names chosen to challenge or provide life direction? Discuss.

3. Does your culture give derogatory names to their children? What is the historical and cultural background of this practice? To what extent is this practice a spiritual bondage?

4. Is it common for believers in your culture to adopt a Christian name after they become believers? Why? Do you agree with that practice? Describe the process of how believers change their names and the response from their community (e.g. family, friends, or colleagues).

5. Names (and nick-names) can have a powerful impact on a child right into adulthood. What is your opinion on the names given to children today?

6. If you are in a position of influence, what guidelines would you give to parents when naming their infants? List some ways you can influence young parents in your church to choose meaningful names for their children.

STUDY 3: FAMILY MEMBERSHIP AND SIZE

■ Introduction

"HOW DO YOU define a family?" What is the size of a "real" family? And what about cultural currents in which homosexual couples are seeking legal recognition as families? In the past, such questions did not arise. It was understood that a family consisted of a father, mother, children and often live-in grandparents or other relatives.

Today, it is hard to insist on one definition of a family. As Zuck describes it aptly, "a family may consist of a divorced or never married mother and her child or children" or an "unmarried couple living together, with or without children" or "households with adopted children."⁶

God's original definition of a family is far from what we hear or observe in the 21st century. Most Bible families were complete with a father, mother, children, grandparents, in-laws, and servants. They averaged 6.1 per family. Concubines and slave girls were considered part of the Bible families in view of their roles in bearing children.⁷

Case Study: Until recently in China, abortion was not just an option for women, but mandated by the One Child Policy. This policy was established by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in 1979 to limit communist China's population growth. Although designated a "temporary measure," it continues long after its establishment. Fines, abortions, and even forced sterilization are often imposed for second or subsequent children.

Abortions were not the only result of this misguided policy. There is alarming evidence that the intense pressure on couples to make sure their only child is a boy has prompted a resurgence of female infanticide, despite official attempts to stamp out the centuries-old practice.

Rural families are said to be particularly tempted to kill female offspring, such was the pressure to produce a child capable of coping with the physical demands of farming and prevent cash-strapped farming households from being plunged even deeper into poverty. In some cases, according to reports, other girls are hidden from the authorities, or die at a young age through neglect.⁸ China's One Child Policy is one of the ways that

⁶ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, p.91.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.92.

⁸ McCurry, Justin and Rebecca Allison The Guardian, London, Tuesday, Mar 23, 2004, quoted in The Taipei Times <http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/editorials/archives/2004/03/23/2003107449>

children are victimized. This policy has caused a disdain for girl children, and, neglect, abandonment, and even infanticide.

Unfortunately when one seriously examines the one-child policy, it is clear that these are not the only catastrophes that have emerged. One acquaintance who works in China made the obvious point that the One Child Policy means that children today have no brothers and sisters. (Of course!) But if the policy is continued for more than one generation, it also means that the child has no aunts or uncles, no cousins, no nephews or nieces. In fact, the policy destroys the entire

extended family, for such children have no relatives at all. How tragic for a child! (And how lonely once the child is an adult, with grandparents and parents gone – not a single related person in the world!)

Sadly today, many societies have a “de-facto” one child policy. Families are voluntarily deciding they cannot afford more than one child – if indeed they have any at all. Think what this means for our societies in the coming decades.

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 91-94.

■ What Does the Bible Say?

1. We discover in the Bible that it was “ideal” to have 7 children and if you did, it was an indication of a special blessing from God. Identify key words in the Scriptures to form implications on the significance of having 7 children.

	Scripture Contents	Implications of Having 7 Children
Ruth 4: 15b	“Your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons...”	<i>Implies having 7 sons as the ultimate blessing one could ever wish for.</i>
I Samuel 2:5	“she who was barren has borne seven children.”	
Job 1:2,3; 42:13	“he had seven sons and three daughters ... He was the greatest man among all the people of the East.”	
Jeremiah 15:9	“The mother of seven will grow faint and breathe her last.”	<i>Implies that even the most blessed woman will not stand under God’s judgement.</i>

2. Consider Solomon's statement in Ecclesiastes 6:3: "A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a still born child is better off than he."

- What does this verse say to you concerning family size in the Bible?

- How does having many children compare with acquiring properties and achieving prosperity in the Bible?

3. There are countless examples of "blessed" fathers in the Bible, not only with children who were boys, but also girls. Here are a few examples⁹:

Fathers	Number of Boys	Number of Girls
Ishmael	12	1
Elkanah (Samuel's father)	4	2
Rehoboam (who had 18 wives and 60 concubines!)	28	60
Cush	0	5
Ibzan	30	30
David	19 (born to his wives; how many to his concubines?)	
Isaiah	20	
Lot	0	2
Ishmael	12	1
Abijah (He had 14 wives!)	22	16
Hosea	21	
Joseph (Married to Mary, Jesus' mother)	4	Several

⁹ Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp.92-93.

In your opinion, how many children should modern parents have today? Why?

Who should determine the number of children a couple should have? Is the husband, wife, parents, or parents-in-laws? Why?

4. Psalm 127:5 says, "Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gates." Consider the list of selected fathers and number of children above. In what ways are these fathers "blessed"? How does family size play a role in being a blessing to the men in the family in the Old Testament in Bible culture?

5. Observe the following Scriptures. You will discover that the following parents have only ONE child. Identify the context and write your observations on the grief they suffer at the prospect of losing their only child to a sickness or tragedy:

References:	Incident Described	Observations on Parents' Grief
I Kings 3:16-28	2 prostitutes came before King Solomon with each claiming the baby is hers. The king suggested cutting the child in two and give half to each mother. The real mother pleaded for the child not to be killed but the "fake" mother insisted on cutting the baby in two so that neither she nor the other mother could have the baby.	<i>The real mother fought for her only child to be returned to her to the extent of bringing her case before the king.</i> <i>The "fake" mother resorted to stealing another woman's child after her own died. Perhaps she was grieved to the point of desperation upon losing her only child.</i>

I Kings 17: 7-24	Elijah was staying with the widow who had a son. He fell seriously ill and died. The widow implied that Elijah had brought judgement to her house and “killed” her son. Elijah prayed for the boy and he was resurrected.	
2 Kings 4:16-37	The Shunammite woman had a boy who died of a sudden pain in the head. She rushed to seek Elisha’s help who prayed for the boy and he was resurrected.	
Luke 7: 11-17	A widow at Nain brought her only son who had died to Jesus. Jesus commanded the young man to rise up and he sat up and began to talk.	
Luke 8: 40-42; 49-56	Jairus fell at Jesus’ feet pleading for him to go to his house to heal his only daughter who was dying. As Jesus was healing others, the girl died. Jesus went to Jairus’ house and commanded the child to get up. Immediately she stood up.	

■ *Key Insights or Principles:*

■ *Reflection Questions:*

1. Discuss the effects of a “one-child policy”. If practiced for more than one generation, what are the results for the society and the extended family?

2. In many societies, modern couples delay having children, intentionally limit their family size, or opt for childlessness today. Is such an attitude a rebellion against God’s general command to “be fruitful and multiply” (“Genesis 1:22)? Give your reasons and examples if applicable.

3. Some people feel that there are already too many people in the world, especially in some heavily populated countries, and each new child adds to the problem. Do you agree or disagree? What is your response to this perspective?

STUDY 4: SIBLINGS AND EXTENDED FAMILIES IN THE BIBLE

■ Introduction

ALL FAMILIES EVERYWHERE work through the familial joys and challenges of the interaction between siblings. The Bible has several examples (sometimes fatal) of siblings competing with or not getting along with each other. Sometimes rivalry between siblings was a direct result of parental partiality or a result of many different factors including personality differences, family circumstances, financial stresses, etc.

The Bible alludes to the privileges of the firstborn, yet we also see that in His sovereignty, God at times intentionally chooses the younger over the older child to fulfill His purposes. Although this might have created rivalry amongst the siblings, the outcome was usually positive for both the older and the younger child.

Generally, the phrase “extended family” is used to refer to traditional family units in cultures such as Asia or Africa. The extended family usually includes grandparents and grandchildren, aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces, and perhaps other family members. In western cultures, the role of the family could be different due to many factors, including distance, career choices, health, etc.

Scripture reveals that extended families can play a vital role in the lives of the “immediate” family unit. Far from being perceived as “outlaws,” as sometimes stereotyped in western cultures, grandparents, relatives and in-laws were a blessing to their “immediate” families. This is true across many cultures today including western cultures. In biblical passages, in some instances, extended families acted as adoptive parents to their relatives’ or in-laws’ children. For example, it has been suggested that Jacob adopted his grandchildren Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48:5). Perhaps he helped the destiny of his grandchildren by crossing his hands in the blessing, favouring the younger Ephraim over the elder Manasseh (Genesis 48:13-20).

Have you ever wondered why Joseph is not considered one of the 12 tribes of Israel? It is rather Joseph’s sons, who headed the “half-tribes.” Why do you think that happened?

For Further Exploration:

Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*, pp. 95-104; 168-175.

■ *What Does the Bible Say?*

1. Read the examples of sibling rivalry found in the Bible. What are some of the causes? Who was “at fault?” Why?

References:	Siblings:	Causes and Outcomes
Genesis 4:4-8	Cain and Abel	The Lord favoured Abel’s offering but not Cain’s. Cain became angry and jealous. He lured Abel to the field and killed him.
Genesis 21:8	Ishmael and Isaac	
Genesis 27:41	Jacob and Esau	
Genesis 37: 2-4, 8-9	Joseph and his brothers	
Numbers 12:2	Miriam and Aaron	

2. Read the following passages about the parental partiality towards one child which results in sibling rivalry in the Bible. Describe the long-term effects of this partiality and how it influenced their children:

References:	Parents Who Showed Partiality	Effects on their Children
Genesis 25:28; 27: 1-28	Isaac and Rebekah	
Genesis 37:3; 45:1-7	Jacob and Rachel	

3. In the Bible, there is a pre-eminence of the younger siblings over the older siblings in various passages. Read the following Scriptures and identify the siblings involved and trace the outcome of their lives. Two are done for you.

Reference:	Younger Sibling/ Older Sibling	Outcome
Genesis 4:25-5:8	Seth/Cain	Seth was Adam's genealogy
Genesis 29: 16-18	Rachel/Leah	
Genesis 38: 27-30; Ruth 4:18-21; Matthew 1:3	Perez/Zerah	Perez in David's and Jesus' genealogy
Genesis 48:14	Ephraim/Manasseh	
Exodus 7:7	Moses/Aaron	
I Samuel 16: 10-13	David/his brothers	

4. The Bible refers to grandparents and the special influence they have over their grandchildren. Read these verses to identify the roles and responsibilities of grandparents.

	Scripture Contents	Roles and Responsibilities of Grandparents
Genesis 48:5,9	<p>"Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine.</p> <p>"Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them."</p>	Jacob described his grandchildren as his own children and he blessed them.
Deuteronomy 4:9	<p>"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."</p>	

Psalm 78: 5-6	“He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our ancestors to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children.”	
Proverbs 13:22a	“A good person leaves an inheritance for their children’s children...”	
Ezekiel 37:25	“They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your ancestors lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.”	
2 Timothy 1:5	“I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.”	

■ *Key Insights or Principles:*

■ *Reflection Questions:*

1. What are the prevailing customs concerning the rights and privileges of older and younger siblings in your culture/country? How do these cultural practices hinder or enhance sibling relationships?

2. From your observations in the Bible, what lessons can be learned concerning sibling rivalry today? What can parents and children do to prevent or overcome sibling rivalry in a Christian context, in particular?

3. What is the definition of “extended family” in your culture? Who are the members that officially belong to a typical “extended family”? Discuss this definition.

4. Proverbs 17:6 states that grandchildren are a “crown to the aged.” What are some common quotations about grandchildren in your culture and their implications in grandparents/grandchildren relationships?

5. As mentioned in the introduction, sometimes “in-laws” are stereotyped as “outlaws” in different cultures. Generally, what are the types of problems that occur in relation to “in-laws”? Discuss some root causes and how in-laws can live as godly families with God-given roles without becoming “outlaws”

6. Ruth is a classic example of a godly daughter-in-law who enjoyed both the favour of her in-laws as well as the special blessings of God despite the odds against her. What godly attitudes and qualities set Ruth apart, not only as a loving daughter-in-law, but more so as a godly woman? List or discuss these qualities and her actions based upon her godly character.

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- **Topic Overview:** A brief introduction to the topic presents real life case studies or scenarios as a backdrop to the Scriptures and reflections of the study.
- **What Does the Bible Say?** Here you will be asked to go to specific Bible passages to explore what the Bible says about children and understand more of God’s heart for them.
- **Key Insights or Principles:** For those Bible passages, you may find new insights or key learning related to the theme.
- **Reflection Questions:** This section asks you to apply the key biblical principles to your **personal life**, the **culture** in which you live, and the **context** of your society and circumstances in your own country.

