

PARENTS AND CHILDREN ON THE FIRST PAGES OF THE BIBLE (GEN 1 - 12)

Abstract

The first pages of the Bible provide no example of children's upbringing since the first people, Adam and Eve, are presented as young but adult people. However, the first human couple is predestined for procreation and rearing of offspring. This paper examines the relationships between parents and children, starting from Adam and Eve and their sons up to Abraham and his children. The analysis of their relationships is based on the early chapters of Genesis 1 - 22.

Key words: parents, children, upbringing, God, faith, Gospel Books, biblical narratives.

Introduction

This paper aims to analyse biblical literary figures in: Adam and Eve's family and Abraham's family as well as their interrelated family relationships. However, it is still unknown how many sons and daughters Adam and Eve had (cf. Gen 5:4), but according to the biblical narrative only three of their sons are mentioned: Cain, Abel, and Seth. Also, in the following genealogies, some brothers and sisters are highlighted due to their importance and role in biblical history, thus requiring an extended text description. Also, concerning Abraham's children, Isaac is mentioned more often than Ismael. These data indicate a lack of systematic upbringing of children in this part of the Bible. Since this issue requires further analysis, some thoughts and views on relationship between parents and children on the first pages of the Bible are provided.

1. Adam and Eve

The first people in the Bible, Adam and Eve, are presented as young but adult, so the first pages of the Book of Genesis provide no explicit record on the upbringing of children. However, as soon as they were created, Adam and Eve were given the commandments from God concerning the children. Having created them, God blessed them, and command-

ed them: “*Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it*” (Gen 1:28). This command refers to man’s openness to life, to the procreation which includes child care. Thus, the first task of man and women is pedagogical and is followed by the task of subduing the earth, which implies human development in other areas: ecological, technical, economic, cultural, etc. Moreover, all of these tasks are based on man’s relationship with God. It is unquestionable for the writer of biblical narrative that all areas of human life have a religious ground. God is therefore the first educator as well as educator of all people. In this context, we can notice some specific features of the day-to-day interactions between parents and children.

The very purpose of God to create man in his own image can be seen as a source of man’s natural desire to have a similar offspring. After all, it is explicitly said, “*When Adam was a hundred and thirty years old he fathered a son, in his likeness, after his image, and he called him Seth* (Gen 5:3). Seth is the third son of Adam, as quoted in Gen 5:3, and then his offspring is listed. But it is important that Seth was born to the image and likeness of his father, as it is the case with the first two Adam’s sons, Cain and Abel.

Through His blessing, God demonstrated His love for the created being. This love is expressed by the commandments and prohibitions whose purpose is to protect life. As parents of little children, taking into account their maturity level, prohibit all that would be harmful for them without specific explanation, so God forbids Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, without any explanation what the tree of knowledge of good and evil is, but warning them about the consequences of eating the forbidden fruit. God’s action as such is respected in the Jewish tradition according to which the children start to read the Bible from the Book of Leviticus. This book, unlike the Book of Genesis, lacks any narrative that would be of interest to children, and contains rules concerning everyday life and relationships. It offers God’s law on clean and unclean; the law on allowance and prohibitions, etc. According to this logic, children should be taught the correct behaviour first, and then, when they are able to ask questions it is appropriate time to discuss about everything with their parents. A similar example is the Feast of Passover, which commemorates the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The Israelites are obliged to celebrate the Feast of Passover, and according to ritual regulations, to eat the Paschal dinner. But the explanation concerning the ritual comes only “*when your children ask you, “What does this ritual mean?”*” (Ex 12:26). In the context of salvation history, this dialogue between parents and children is an integral part of a memorial act that reflects God’s work of liberating his people from slavery and preserves it from oblivion. From the point of view of pedagogy and psychology, children’s ability to ask questions indicate to their readiness to receive the answer.

The other specific feature of the relationship between God and Adam and Eve, concerning the issue of children upbringing, is the influence of external factors which can be positive and negative. In this case we can speak of the negative ones. In the same way as the relationship between parents and children is affected by negative external factors that undermine their mutual trust, so the relationship between God and the first people is affected by the cunning snake that questions the goodwill of God's ban against eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. According to the narrative about the snake, it seems that God who created the man in his own image did not really wish man to be in his likeness as he would likely occupy his place. It is a matter of so-called divine *hybris*. It is a mythological fear of God that man would occupy his place, so God wanted to prevent any man's progress that would likely lead to the attainment of divine power. In the context of family relationships, this idea specific for ancient religions may reflect envy of older people or parents towards their children, and sometimes it can be hidden in an overly protective relationship that hampers the integral human growth. The Bible presents this phenomenon through the character of the cunning snake. As an external and opposing force, the snake interferes into the mutual and trustful relationship between God and people, i.e. parents and children, but it turns as if the snake cares for man's happiness more than God, His Creator. Therefore, the Bible (Gen 3) clearly warns about the dangers of those external factors that threaten man's trustful relationship with God.

Concerning Adam and Eve's relationship with their children, it should be noted that, despite their pedagogical task, the Bible provides no record on their upbringing. Their first two sons, Cain and Abel as well as their parents, are mentioned in the biblical narrative only in their adulthood, when they could offer sacrifice to God, the fruit of the work of their hands. The fact that Cain became a farmer and Abel a cattle-breeder implies that they had to be shown the work they were dealing with by someone. And since both of them offered the sacrifice to God from the fruit of their work, that instruction ought to have had a religious character as well. Someone had to teach them about God, the Creator of everything and how to offer Him a sacrifice.

Biblical narrative identifies the beginning of the history of mankind with the beginning of the history of a family, therefore a pronoun 'someone' can only refer to parents. The fact that the parents of Cain and Abel gave them religious instruction is confirmed through the names they were given at birth. When Eve gave birth to her first son Cain, she said, "*I have acquired a man with the help of Yahweh*" (Gen 4:1) and the name Cain comes from the Hebrew verb *kanah* which means 'to obtain'. The etymology of Abel's name is unclear. However, the name Abel comes from the Hebrew verb *hebel* which means *breath*. It also refers to God as the

Life-giver. In any case, the first children born in this world were in direct relationship with God.

A brotherhood of Cain and Abel is described in the Bible only when they are already adults. The story of their offering sacrifices ends tragically. Cain killed his younger brother Abel because God was more pleased with his sacrifice. The relationship between the two brothers and God is described in a way that their parents are not explicitly involved in this event. Abel and Cain are grown-ups who can decide on their own and regulate, rightly or wrongly, their mutual relationship as well as their relationships with God. The narrative suggests that Cain and Abel, though born of the same parents and raised in the same environment, have developed into two quite different persons. It means that their behaviour is not result of parental or family upbringing, but rather a matter of their own free choice. It is especially evident in the negative example of Cain who disregards God who, anticipating his intention to kill his brother out of envy, says: "... *Sin is crouching at the door hungry to get you. You can still master him*" (Gen 4:7).

After Cain killed Abel and finished his dialogue with God, the biblical narrative brings the reaction of their parents who are mentioned in the sentence: "*Adam had intercourse with his wife, and she gave birth to a son whom she named Seth, 'because God has granted me other offspring', she said, 'in place of Abel, since Cain has killed him'*"(Gen 4:25). At the birth of the third son whom she named Seth, Eve claims again that the child whom she gave birth is the gift of God, but she also feels pain because of Cain's killing of Abel. Gen 5:3 tells us that Adam gave name to Seth and not Eve as in Gen 4:25, so we can conclude that his reaction to Cain's murder of Abel is the same. Furthermore, it means that, by killing his brother, Cain not only violated God's command, but also betrayed his parents i.e. the upbringing he had received from them.

Gen 5:3 tells us that many sons and daughters were born to Adam and Eve besides Seth. Their number is not mentioned nor any detail of their lives. A short passage describing several generations of Cain's children is presented and followed by the biblical narrative describing Seth and his offspring (Noah is to come after him).

2. Cain's children

After murdering his brother, Cain was exiled from the fertile land and sentenced to wandering. He settled in the Land of Nod, east of Eden, and there he founded his family. The name of his wife is not mentioned in Gen 1:17, but the name of his son Enoch after whom he named a city that he built. We can conclude from this fact that Cain is attached to his son Enoch, but no other detail about their life is mentioned.

Certainly, it is interesting that in the whole chapter of Gen 4:17-24, referring to Cain's descendants, the name of God is not mentioned even once. However, in a certain way, God is implicitly present in the sequence of generations of the descendants of Cain. Namely, in listing the descendants of Cain, the biblical text terminates in the generation of Lamech. It seems as if Cain's murder of Abel brought so much evil, which has been lately passed on from generation to generation of Cain's offspring. Lamech had two wives, contrary to the marriage ideal and principle of "*the two will be one body*" (Gen 2:24). In addition to this, he treated them harshly, threatening and warning them about his revengeful intentions: "*I killed a man for wounding me, a boy for striking me*" (Gen 4:23). The murder of a child, who is not shown as an innocent being, indicate to distorted relationships between *the old and the young*, and therefore between *parents and children*. We can even wonder who the boy that stroke Lamech was and whether he was killed by his own father. In any case, violent relationship with the child which ended in murder is explicitly characterized as godless, in Gen 4:17-24.

Although, the name of God is not mentioned even once, the voice of God echoes in Lamech's words. He concludes his brief talk with two women saying: "*Sevenfold vengeance for Cain, but seventy-sevenfold for Lamech*" (Gen 4:24). These words are based on God's response to Cain's complaint for the sentence passed upon him as hard and severe. Cain was obviously afraid that one would be capable of seeking revenge in order to repay evil for evil, so he said to God "... *whoever comes across me will kill me!*" (Gen 4:14). God replied: "*Very well, then, whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance*" (Gen 4:15). These words of God warn him about the danger of revenge, which is nothing but a continuous evil and violence. If Lamech, in addition to his commentary, mentions God's words, and he is a descendant of Cain in the fifth generation, then it means that God's words said to Cain became part of a family heritage that were passed from generation to generation. Thus, the religious upbringing of Cain's descendants was marked by an idea of God's protection of their forefather. The purpose of Cain's experience was to warn about the wrath of revenge for the next generations, and to prevent the others seeking revenge among Cain's offspring, while Cain himself was not prevented to commit evil. We can say that the religious upbringing from generation to generation of Cain's descendants transmitted a false view of God that will be clarified in the Great Flood.

3. Seth's offspring

The genealogy for Adam's son, Seth, begins with these words: "*This is the roll of Adam's descendants: On the day that God created Adam he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them. He blessed them and gave them the name Man, when they were created. When*

Adam was a hundred and thirty years old he fathered a son, in his likeness, after his image, and he called him Seth” (Gen 5:1-3).

The record that God created Adam in his own image was transmitted until the birth of his third son, Seth. Although other Adam’s children were born in his likeness, the highlighting of Seth’s resemblance to his father Adam, and thus to God, the Creator, suggests a proper analogue for understanding of the God-man relationship and man’s likeness to the Creator. Seth’s character is not described or supported by any particular record, but his descendants are described as righteous people who have an intense relationship with God.

The first Seth’s son is Enoch. Gen 5 tells us nothing about it, but the previous paragraph 4:26 points out: “*A son was also born to Seth, and he named him Enosh. This man was the first to invoke the name Yahweh*” (Gen 4:26). It is difficult to explain why the name of Yahweh began to be invoked exactly *then*, but obviously this sentence provides at least two records. The first relates to the way of worshiping the Lord, and the other to the worshipers. The verb “invoke” (Hebrew *kara*) denotes the worship expressed through prayer and offering of sacrifices, and the passive form of the verb “began” (Hebrew *hohal*, passive conjugation / *hofal* / of the verb *halal*) denotes a common worship of Yahweh, not individual. Thus the beginning of the common worship of Yahweh is associated with the generation of Seth’s son Enoch, contrary to the individualist Lamech’s attitude towards God, which he inherited from his forefather Cain.

In the context of religious education, it means that the generation of Seth’s descendants introduced religious upbringing and practiced it within the community of believers that transmit it to the future generations as a common form of worship of God. Such upbringing prevents one to doubt whether one’s sacrifice would please God more than that of the other.

The other Seth’s descendant who had a special relationship with God is Enoch. He is the seventh generation of descendants from Adam, and there is presumably some symbolism in it. Almost a perfect figure of Enoch comes in the line of Adam and is simply described as: “*Enoch walked with God, then was no more, because God took him*” (Gen 5:24). A rich apocalyptic literature based on these few records developed. However, we are primarily interested in the religious environment in which Seth’s sons were born and raised, among whom the righteous figures appeared and were to become responsible for the salvation of the whole human race. The mystery of Enoch’s disappearance from the earth and his entrance into the divine sphere are less important than the sentence: “*Enoch walked with God*”. The Hebrew text contains verb *halak* in the form of *yithalek*. This is the conjugated form of *hitpael*, which denotes the reciprocal relationship between two subjects. So, more accurate translation of the sentence “*Enoch walked with God*”, would be *Enoch walked side by side with God*. In his earthy walk with God, Enoch lived 365 years, which is

undoubtedly an allusion to the solar year consisting of 365 days. In comparison to the other Patriarchs in Gen 5, this is the shortest life time, but, since God *took* him, Enoch just moved to another form of life with God. On the other hand, Enoch is the father of the longest-living descendant of Seth, Methuselah who lived 969 years. According to the Apocrypha, i.e. the Dead Sea Scrolls, Methuselah as well as his father Enoch dwell in the celestial sphere and know many secrets.

However, Enoch is not the most important righteous man in Seth's, or Adam's genealogy, Gen 5. That figure is Noah, Enoch's great grandson, the grandson of Methuselah, and son of Lamech.

The name of Lamech is already mentioned in Cain's offspring, so we can make a comparison. While Cain's Lamech speaks in a threatening voice of his killing a man that wounded him and a child who stroke him, expressing his willingness to revenge to anyone who would harm him in any way, even if it is a child, Seth's Lamech is quite different person. The vision of the future seen through his son, is full of good hopes despite the distorted relationships on earth: "*When Lamech was a hundred and eighty-two years old he fathered a son. He gave him the name Noah because, he said, 'Here is one who will give us, in the midst of our toil and the labouring of our hands, a consolation out of the very soil that Yahweh cursed'*" (Gen 5:28-29).

As in many other cases, the Bible does not provide any detail about the family lives of Lamech and Noah. But the basic positive experience of the birth of Lamech's son Noah expresses a favourable family environment in which a young Noah grew up, despite the unfavourable social conditions. In such context, Noah became a figure similar to that of his great-grandfather Enoch, "*Noah was a good man, an upright man among his contemporaries, and he walked with God*" (Gen6:9).

4. Children of the Sons of God and the Daughters of men

Before storytelling narration of the Great Flood, the mysterious passage Gen 6:1-4 tells us about the Sons of God who had intercourse with the daughters of men and they gave birth to children. These children are called the *Nephilim*, the offspring of giants. It is hard to explain the primordial meaning of this text, but since it precedes the narrative of the Great Flood, it suggests that the intercourse of the Sons of God with the daughters of men fits into the massive corruption of the earth, so the children born out of their relationships are perceived as 'hybrids'. They are large and powerful and their identities are twofold. They are neither gods, nor angels, nor humans. They cannot be identified with their fathers or mothers.

The term *Nephilim* itself is mentioned in the Bible only once, in the Book of Numbers, and in the negative report of the spies who explored

the Promised Land: “*We saw giants there too (the Anakim, descended from the Giants). We felt like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them*” (Num 13:33).

These scary-looking creatures are mentioned as the reason for not entering the Promised Land.

5. Noah's sons

Noah had three sons who were called Shem, Ham, and Japheth. In the biblical narrative they have an active role only at an adult age, after the storytelling of the Great Flood in which Noah, his wife, their three sons, and their women were saved. The narrative of flood corresponds to the narrative of creation, and the text that follows can be compared with the narrative of the first sin in Gen 3. So, as Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree and realized that they were naked, so one of Noah's sons violates the prohibition against copulation that is associated with nakedness. After the Flood and God's covenant with Noah, there is the episode of Noah's drunkenness. He planted a vineyard; and drank of the wine and became drunk. In that state he was lying in the middle of the tent *uncovered*. One of his sons, Ham, who is mentioned here intentionally as the forefather of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and reacted inappropriately. He spoke with his brothers about his father's nakedness and did not try to cover him discreetly, as Shem and Japheth did, lately.

When Noah realized what had happened, he cursed his youngest son and blessed Shem and Japheth. At first sight, the narrative seems to reveal confusing data, which actually clarify the matter. In the listing of Noah's sons, Ham is always mentioned as the second one, and Gen 9:24 tells us he is the youngest son whose name is Canaan and not Ham. From a historical point of view, it is clear that the cursing of Ham is not directed to him personally but to his descendants who were to settle the Promised Land and were known for their corruption and sexual immorality. That was one of the reasons why they were expelled from the country they had lived in (cf. Lev 18:24-25). Since Kanaan is Ham's son, and Noah's grandson, it means that the curse directed to Ham came to pass to his son and his descendants.

In this complex situation, the text does not explicitly mention Noah's wife, the mother of his sons or their wives. However, if we understand the term “*father's nakedness*” properly, as it is cited in Lev 18:8 “*You will not have intercourse with your father's wife; it is your father's sexual prerogative*”, then it seems to refer to Noah's wife, and the term “*uncovered in the middle of the tent*” would indicate to a marital intercourse in a drunken condition. Of course, this text can be interpreted in other ways. It is possible that this narrative discloses not only a hidden sexual taboo regarding the genitals, but also the problem of homosexual or heterosexual incest.

In any case, the narrative suggests an inappropriate behaviour concerning sexual, marital and family morality, which resulted in the cursing of Ham and his offspring.

The question arises: What is known about Noah's children upbringing before this event? Obviously, three brothers have different characters and they behave accordingly, as in the case of Cain and Abel. Shem and Japheth's behaviour suggests that they were taught how to deal with their father's nakedness, unlike Ham whose behaviour reveals that it is possible to act contrary to the parent's upbringing of the child.

There is no single difference between the case of Cain and Abel and that of Noah's sons. While Abel, and especially Cain, directly communicate with God who warns, punishes and protects them, his father Noah blesses and curses them. God is present in the third person and the image of God is mediated through parenting. This is an important record in the Bible history whether it refers to upholding of the image of God in man, or destroying it.

6. Terah and Abraham

Terah was born from the offspring of Shem, Noah's son, and was the father of Abram whose name God later changed to Abraham. Terah had three sons: Abram, Nahor, and Haran. They lived in Ur of Chaldees, but after the death of Haran, Terah with Abram, his wife Sarai and Haran's son Lot moved to the city of Haran, in northern Mesopotamia. When Abraham was 75 years old, God commanded him to leave his father's house and to go to the land he would show him. He promised him land and offspring, though Abraham's wife was barren. Abraham left his home and obeyed God's commandment. In Islam, this event is also interpreted as a breakdown with his father's polytheistic religion, and thus he is presented as the first true believer. The Bible does not explicitly state a break with the father's religion, but Abraham's response to God's call, i.e. leaving of his father's house can be understood as acting contrary to his religious upbringing.

7. Abraham's children

Abraham's wife Sarah was barren and it was painful for both of them. Since they did not have children, Abraham seemed to direct his fatherly needs on Lot, the son of his late brother Haran. Abraham took him when he left his father's house. However, God assured him the promised seed would come from his own body. The first Abraham's descendant was Ishmael. He was born out of the union of Abraham and Hagar, the Egyptian handmaid of his wife Sarah. Ishmael was the fruit of Abraham and Sarah's desire *to have* a child and their efforts, but Ishmael was not

the son of the promised seed. However, God blessed him. Abraham loved him, but before he was born, Ishmael became a problem because of the disgraceful behaviour of his mother Hagar. Sarah encouraged Abraham to sleep with her handmaid Hagar in order to have descendant, so Hagar and her child were expelled into the desert. But God protected Hagar twice. In these tense and complex family relationships, God cares for the future of Hagar and her son. In the context of education, this biblical narrative shows that God keeps his promises and takes care of rejected human lives. Although Ishmael is not the son of the promise seed, God took care of him, so he had many descendants (Gen 21:12-13). Further-ly, the Bible lists the names of Abraham's six sons that he had with his third wife Keturah (Gen 25:1-4), but they are not described in the events of Abraham's life. Abraham made them grants (cf. Gen 25:5-6), but sending them away from his son Isaac, who was born of his wife Sarah and was the son of God's promise. The claim that Isaac's birth is the gift of God, the biblical narrative supports with the record that Isaac was born to them when they were too old and it was physically impossible for them to have a child. It is to conclude that an approach to the child as the gift of God and not the property of his parents is promoted throughout the biblical narrative consistently. This is particularly highlighted in one of the greatest biblical dramas: Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22:1-18. This narrative begins with the record that God put Abraham to the trial. The reader is informed in advance that the outcome of the event will not be as dramatic as it is at the beginning. There are different approaches to this event, but we approach to it from the point of view of religious upbringing of children.

The narrative suggests that Isaac is unaware what is happening and that his father Abraham, according to the commandment of God, is to sacrifice him. However, this issue has to be clarified. The Hebrew word *na'ar* denotes a *child*, but this word also means a male young person, an unmarried young man, but a servant too. Thus, Gen 22:5 tells us that the same word is used for Isaac and for the servants who went with him. According to the Jewish tradition, Isaac was 37 years old at the time of event, since Sarah died at the age of 127 and gave birth to Isaac at the age of ninety. This tradition is based on the record of Sarah's death described in the next chapter 23. By linking these two events, it is to conclude that Sarah died because she was shocked when she heard what had happened. Of course, there are no evidences to support this claim, but at the time of the sacrifice, Isaac was likely an adult aware of everything. It also means that he accepted the trial of his father Abraham.

This event marked Isaac's upbringing, and the role of his father in it. Their relationship is really great. Isaac trusts his father and obeys him and Abraham loves his son. However, "*Isaac spoke to his father Abraham. 'Father?' he said. 'Yes, my son,' he replied. 'Look,' he said, 'here are the*

fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering? 'Abraham replied, 'My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.' And the two of them went on together" (Gen 22:7-8).

This short dialogue reveals the deepest relationship between father and son, which resembles to the relationship between the child and the mother while still in her womb. So, as Sarah had to deliver his son and cut the umbilical cord to give him life, so Abraham had to cut the umbilical cord with his son. Abraham's relationship with God empowered him to cut the ties that bound him to his son; this pattern occurred at the very beginning of the history of mankind. God created Adam and Eve, so their children are the gift of God and they are free human beings whose choices make them happy or unhappy. This would be a brief conclusion about the upbringing of children in the biblical history of mankind and God's chosen people, the Israelites.