

October 2006

But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.

–Joshua 24:15, NLT

Strong families are no accident! They don't just happen. They're the product of patience and hard work.

According to Webster's Dictionary, the modern definition for "family" is simple: "Father, mother and children." But in order to grasp the biblical understanding of family, we must take a look at God's first covenant people—the Jews.

Ever wonder why the Jews have been around for more than 4,000 years as an ethnic group and 2,000 years as a national entity? One reason is that God helped them to develop a strong family structure. Strong families are His primary means of preservation for any people group, nation or ethnicity.

When addressing Abraham, God said, "All the families on earth will be blessed through you" (Gen. 12:3, NLT). We know this is a prophetic statement that refers to Christ the Messiah. However, could it also be a reference to the concept of family that God initiated with Abraham? (See Gen. 18:19.)

In Scripture we find at least five prevailing principles that are still practiced in the lives of Jewish families today—principles that are time-proven and God-tested. Violate them and suffer; keep them and be blessed. It's that simple.

Jewish families are built upon: (1) a patriarchal system; (2) a covenant with God; (3) a strong value system; (4) heritage and legacy; and (5) the family blessing. In this issue of Digging Deeper, we'll look at the first principle.

The term "patriarch" is composed from two Greek words. The first is patria, meaning "father," and the second is archeo, meaning "ruler" or "one who is responsible." In the Jewish

family, the fathers are the ones who rule over and are responsible for their families.

Does this mean mothers don't play a role? Absolutely not! However, it does mean that all fathers will give an account to God for what they have done with their family responsibilities.

In Israel, desertion of one's family was an offense punishable by death. That law might seem a bit harsh, but it was God's way of showing how important family is.

How important is your family to you? We'd all like to think that somehow the family unit is exempt from the destructive trends sweeping our world today. However, the odds are proving that assumption to be wrong. Will you beat the odds? How's your family doing today?

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