

Proverbs 22:6 - What is “a child”?

Proverbs 22:6 “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Our family is in full-time evangelism, and as such we travel all the time. As one can imagine, we have had our fair share of road issues, confusions, and “adventures”. :) A couple of times, for instance, we have traveled to a certain church or home only to find that its street had a twin many miles away..., and we were on the wrong one! Our first year in evangelism had one such occurrence in eastern Michigan where we were late for a church service. Praise the Lord, though, the pastor was able to keep the service going long enough until we got there!

Sometimes in scripture, we can innocently misinterpret a certain word or phrase only to find that we were slightly off track or that we had it all wrong. If we are not careful, our little misinterpretations can lead us far from where we intended to go just like our family's evangelism mishaps! Proverbs 22:6 is such an example. The word “child” can easily be misinterpreted with far reaching effects.

At first glance, the word “child” in Proverbs 22:6 would lead us to think of an age range somewhere between toddler years to elementary age. As such, many preachers and believers have based their teaching, preaching, instruction, and life on this assumption. **Some teach that training is not important in infancy. Many others drop training when their child becomes a “tween” or “teen”.** The results of this innocent misinterpretation, though, have had devastating effects leaving homes on a path far from where they intended to be. Let's look at “a child” more closely.

A basic search through Strong's Exhaustive Concordance finds that the Hebrew word for “a child” in Proverbs 22:6 is “na'ar”. **It is defined as “a boy or girl from the age of infancy to adolescence.”** Sometimes the word is used to denote an infant such as baby Moses found in the bulrushes by Pharaoh's daughter in Exodus 2:6.

“And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe <na`ar> wept.”

Other times, the word “na'ar” refers to a young man like the two spies sent by Joshua to spy Jericho and who rescued Rahab in Joshua 6:23.

“And the young men <na`ar> that were spies went in, and brought out Rahab...”

Obviously, the two young spies (na'ar) were not babies, toddlers, or elementary students. These were young men capable of performing a major task that would affect an entire nation! **Therefore, the word “child” in Proverbs 22:6 ranges from when your offspring is born to when they are ready to leave the house.** That is quite a different road to be on mentally than just training toddlers and elementary age!

Now, some may wonder why God used the word “child” if the range is so wide.

However, **we still use the word “child” today to refer to our offspring even if they've already left the house and are over 50 years old!** God is wonderful and perfect to have chosen one single word to have so much depth, nuance, and meaning! Only God can put so much into such a little space, and He does continually throughout the scriptures. (Psalm 119:96 “thy commandment is exceeding broad.”)

Dear parent, start your child's training as soon as they are born and don't let up until they leave the house and are starting a new family on their own!