

'Let the Children Come to Me': A biblical-contextual analysis of Luke 18:15–17 and its relevance to the philosophy of *Anakhonhi do Hamoraon di Au* in Batak culture

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Children occupy an important position in ancient Jewish tradition and Batak culture. This study examines the alignment between the biblical perspective of Luke 18:15–17 and the philosophical meaning of children in Batak culture. The study employs a descriptive-analytical qualitative approach through Contextual Biblical study, literature review and Greek lexical analysis of biblical texts and Batak cultural literature. The research findings reveal a profound alignment between the Luke 18:15–17 narrative and Batak philosophy. In Luke 18:15–17, Jesus affirms the significant value of children by welcoming them as exemplars of those who receive the Kingdom of God, while also correcting the disciples' actions. The act of parents bringing their children to Jesus demonstrates how precious the children's future was to them. Batak society likewise places children as the highest priority. Batak parents willingly sacrifice many things for the education and future of their children.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: In conclusion, both perspectives affirm that care for children transcends mere cultural obligation, as it is a spiritual calling that aligns with the will of God. This study provides a biblical-contextual foundation for the nurturing and education of children in the context of the contemporary Batak church and community.

Keywords: *Anakhonhi do Hamoraon di Au*; Batak culture; children; contextual biblical study; Luke 18:15–17.

Introduction

In ancient Jewish society, there was a deep-rooted tradition of bringing children to rabbis to receive blessings. This was likely related to an Old Testament tradition in which parents laid hands on someone's head to pronounce a blessing (Gn 48:14–15; Mk 10:16), and this was considered an obligation of a rabbi (Swindoll 2016:630). This tradition provides a picture of the importance of the position and status of children in Jewish family and community life. Jewish parents believed that a rabbi's blessing would bring a positive influence on their children's future. That is why parents sought to give their children the opportunity to receive blessings and teaching from a rabbi.

The Gospel of Luke also provides information about this tradition. Luke 18:15–17 reports that parents brought their children to Jesus, the Great Rabbi, to be blessed. In verse 15, the word *brephe* (*brephe*), meaning 'baby', is used. Then in verse 16, the word *paidia*, meaning 'children', is used. Verses 15–16 thus affirm that children of various age ranges were present at the event (ed. Arnold 2002:956–957).

Furthermore, in verse 15, the verb *prosepheron*, meaning 'were bringing', is used. This word indicates a continuous process, describing a repeated or ongoing action, suggesting that long lines of people may have been seeking Jesus' blessing. This action therefore required extraordinary perseverance. Especially when the disciples tried to obstruct them, the parents continued to strive so that their children could be blessed by Jesus (Swindoll 2016:630).

The use of this word can indicate how seriously the disciples tried to prevent the parents' efforts to bring their children to Jesus. Yet the action of the parents portrays a deep faith and hope; they believed that Jesus' blessing would bring an extraordinary impact to their children's lives in the future.

Seeing the situation as it unfolded, Jesus responded firmly to the disciples' actions by turning the rebuke back upon them. He said, 'Let them ... and do not hinder them!' while affirming that the Kingdom of God belongs to children such as these (Morris 2020:291). Jesus' response further underscores how meaningful and important these children are. These children are not without value in his kingdom; on the contrary, they represent those who are sincere, helpless, full of trust and free from worry. Jesus never regarded children as a nuisance; he welcomed them with great enthusiasm. This event affirms how precious children are in the eyes of God, making it essential to bless them from an early age (Swindoll 2016:630).

The biblical concept of the importance of children can be paralleled with the values upheld in Batak culture. The Batak people are one of the major ethnic groups in Indonesia, originally inhabiting the North Sumatra region at Sianjur Mula-Mula on Samosir Island, but have since spread to various cities, islands and even countries (Purba & Purba 1997:1). The Batak ethnicity consists of six sub-groups: Toba, Karo, Simalungun, Pakpak, Angkola and Mandailing. The social structure of these six sub-ethnic groups is fundamentally the same, consisting of three main elements known as the 3H philosophy: *Hamoraon* [wealth], *Hagabeon* [descendants or prosperity] and *Hasangapon* [honour] (Simanjuntak 2009:1).

In Batak society, children are regarded as extremely precious treasures. This is already reflected in several Batak *umpasa* (traditional proverbs). For Batak people, *umpasa* are more than mere sayings; they contain prayer, hope, teaching and serve as a philosophy of life. As explained by Eldarton Simbolon, the *umpasa* were created by the ancestors of the Batak people during the time they lived under animism. But in subsequent developments, even after Christianity arrived in the Batak lands, many of these *umpasa* remained relevant to daily life because they do not conflict with the Christian faith. Some were even adapted into songs, including spiritual hymns sung in worship (Simbolon 2010:vii–viii). The *umpasa* concerning children in particular remain familiar to Batak people today, including:

- 'Bintang ma narumiris, tu ombun na sumorop. Asa anak pe antong di hamu riris, boru pe antong torop'. [May sons and daughters be abundant, like stars and clouds.]
- 'Binsar mata ni ari, poltak mata ni bulan. Tubuan boru ma hamu na malo mancari, tubuan anak na gabe raja panungkunan'. [May God grant you daughters skilled in providing livelihood and sons who are wise leaders.]
- 'Tubu ma hariara, di tonga-tonga ni huta. Tubu ma anak dohot borumu, na mora jala na martua'. [May your sons and daughters be wealthy and blessed or happy.]
- 'Tubuan laklak ma, tubuan sikkoru di dolok ni Purbatua. Sai tubuan anak, tubuan boru ma hamu, donganmu sarimatua'. [May you have sons and daughters who will accompany you into old age.]
- 'Tangki jala hualang, garinggang jala garege. Tubuan anak ma hamu, partahi jala ulubalang; Tubuan boru par-mas jala pareme'. [May you have sons who become leaders or protectors and daughters who bring prosperity.]

The Batak philosophy demonstrates that the important value of children is not only reflected in the *umpasa*. As already noted, some of these *umpasa* have been adapted into songs carrying a profound Batak philosophy. One notable example is a song composed in the 1960s: '*Anakhon hi do hamoraon di au*' [my child is my wealth]. This song, composed by Nahum Situmorang, explains the life philosophy of Batak society, affirming the Batak people's struggle to give the best to their children, including a good education, because the child is an exceptionally precious treasure (Lumbantobing 2006:51–54).

It is therefore necessary to examine Luke 18:15–17 and the values of Batak culture in order to find the alignment between the two in explaining the meaning of children's presence within the family. This examination is expected to provide a solid foundation for the process of nurturing and teaching children, not merely as a moral or cultural obligation, but also as a spiritual calling aligned with the will of God.

Research methods and design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method focused on the Contextual Biblical study of Luke 18:15–17 and a comparison with the philosophy of '*Anakhon hi do Hamoraon di Au*' in Batak culture. Data collection was carried out through library research by examining various literature, books, scientific articles and documents relevant to the research topic (Strauss & Corbin 2013:4). Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques through close reading of texts, categorisation of key concepts and interpretation of meaning using a hermeneutical approach.

The theoretical approach used encompasses contextual biblical exegesis and Batak cultural interpretation. Data validation was carried out through source verification by comparing various literature and conducting inter-source triangulation to ensure the validity of information (Satori & Komariah 2010:22). The research was conducted in several stages: collection of relevant literature, categorisation and data analysis, interpretation of meaning using a comparative approach to find dialogue between biblical values and cultural values and synthesis and conclusion drawing. This study focuses on the theological and cultural aspects of the philosophy of children in Luke 18:15–17 and its relevance to Batak culture, with the aim of producing a deep understanding of the theological and philosophical meaning of children in the Bible and in Batak culture, as well as its relevance for child nurturing in the context of the contemporary Batak church and community.

Findings and discussion

Etymology and terminology: Child

In the Old Testament, the most used word for 'children' is יָלֵד (*yeled*), used to describe offspring or succeeding generations. This word is commonly found in genealogies and patriarchal narratives in Genesis and Chronicles. In addition to *yeled*

(male child), there are several other words describing children: *yalda* [female child], *yaldut* [youth] and *moledet* [offspring] (eds. Botterweck & Ringgren 1997:76–77). There is also the use of the word *ben* (son or heir), which generally refers to the firstborn (Botterweck & Ringgren 1972:145). Etymologically, the word *ben* depicts the good relationship between a father and his child (Botterweck & Ringgren 1972:149). Using the word ‘child’ in the Old Testament, one can understand that a child is something of great value, more precious than gold and gems, for a child is part of the parents’ life (Botterweck & Ringgren 1972:149).

In the New Testament, there are five words that refer to children: (1) *Teknon* ([child, son] in the sense of offspring). This word also refers to spiritual offspring, not only biological descendants. It explains genealogical relationships and family bonds. (2) *Paidarion* [little boy or young slave]. This word refers to a very young child and may indicate the social status of a young slave. (3) *Paidion* [small child, offspring]. This word can also indicate a ‘servant’ (social position). It emphasises immaturity and the need for guidance. (4) *Pais* [child, boy, also girl]. This word has a dual meaning, referring to offspring or a biological child and indicating the social position of a servant or slave, and may also denote a teacher–pupil relationship. (5) *Brephos* [embryo, small child, baby, infant, foetus, newborn or young child] (Kittel 1978:681). The term ‘child’ thus emphasises a very young and vulnerable state, from foetus to toddler, that is in great need of care, protection and guidance. The word is also used to define a young child who still requires deeper teaching and guidance (Vine 1997:547).

Biblical analysis of Luke 18:15–17

The pericope of Luke 18:15–17 is one of the important passages that reveals the concern and care of Jesus for children. Repeatedly, Jesus presents children positively and shows his love for them (Mt 7:9–11; 9:18–26; 15:21–28; 17:14–21; 18:1–5, 6–11; 12–14; etc.). In this account, which is also recorded in Matthew 19:13–15 and Mark 10:13–16 with some redactional differences, Jesus’ concern for children is concretely manifested. Jesus not only received children but also made them a lesson when the disciples were actually trying to keep them away from his presence.

Verse 15 records people bringing even infants to Jesus. In the original text, these people are identified as ‘them’ without gender specification. However, this is notable because the word for baby appears only in Luke’s account, while Matthew and Mark use a different term (Summers 1974:211). Luke strengthens Mark’s emphasis by changing the word for children [παιδιά] to babies [βρέφη]. This redactional change shows that Luke wants to emphasise how important children were in Jewish culture, even from infancy. Jewish parents (both father and mother) were already bringing them (whether carried infants or small children) to the rabbis to be blessed (Nolland & Metzger 2008:881).

The purpose of this visit was that Jesus would touch them. Matthew explains in more detail that the mothers wanted Jesus to lay his hands on the children and pray for them.

Mark concludes the event by depicting Jesus embracing them and blessing them while laying his hands on them. The word *aptetai*, meaning to hold or touch, is used to describe physical contact, and physical contact with Jesus was most likely considered to bring benefit to the infants. This can be compared with his touch that healed the sick. Several events recorded in the Gospels show Jesus touching (making physical contact with) the sick, and they became healed (Mt 8:3; 9:29; Mk 8:22–25; Lk 22:51). It is very likely that these events also motivated the parents’ desire for their children to be touched by Jesus and to receive his blessing (Nolland & Metzger 2008:881).

In truth, the greater blessing expected from a rabbi, including from Jesus as the Great Rabbi, was teaching. For in Jewish tradition, from the age of 6 or 7, Jewish children were already brought by their parents to receive teaching from the rabbis, with the aim of gaining an understanding of the Torah. By the time they reached 12–13 years of age, Jewish children were expected to be able to comply with and carry out all the requirements of Jewish law, at which point a Jewish boy was considered to have attained the status of ‘bar-mitzvah’, meaning ‘a child bound by the Law of the Torah’ (Darmanto 2017:62). It is therefore also possible that bringing the children to Jesus was motivated by the desire to receive teaching from Jesus, the Great Rabbi.

The response of the disciples was therefore very surprising. They rebuked those who were bringing the children. The word *epetemon* [to rebuke, to censure] indicates the disciples’ effort to prevent the mothers and children from reaching Jesus. This action may have been motivated by a sense of superiority that made them feel important because of their closeness to Jesus, and by the view that children were less important, or perhaps to protect Jesus from trivial matters so as not to distract him from ministry they considered more important (Summers 1974:211). Whatever the disciples’ motivation, this response was very surprising in the context of the Jewish tradition that placed the teaching of children as something of great importance. That is why Jesus’ response in verse 16 shows a difference in understanding between Jesus and the disciples. Verse 16 contains Jesus’ command, which has both a positive and a negative dimension: let the children come, and do not hinder them. He did not regard the coming of the children as a disturbance. He welcomed them. Mark even records that Jesus was angry with the disciples, although Luke replaces this expression of anger with προσεκάλεσατο αὐτά, which literally means he called them to himself (Nolland & Metzger 2008:881).

What is notable is the change of object in Luke’s narrative. The rebuke in verse 15 was directed at the parents, but in verse 16 Luke uses the neuter form with the term λέγων. The words following λέγων not only rebuke the disciples’ behaviour, but also constitute an invitation addressed to both the parents and the disciples. By using the word λέγων, Jesus gives a rebuke to the disciples, followed by a profound theological statement: ‘for the Kingdom of God belongs to people such as these’. The Greek word translated ‘such as

these' means type or quality. The phrase thus literally means: 'for the Kingdom of God belongs to people of this kind', with the emphasis on their character, not on what they possess. The Kingdom of God belongs not only to these children, but to all who share the qualities of children such as these (Nolland & Metzger 2008:881).

The question that arises is: what qualities in children warrant such a statement? In the context of the ancient world, this may not have to relate to a romantic view of children: openness, a willingness to trust, freedom from hypocrisy, an awareness of weakness and a willingness to depend on other qualities. However, the metaphorical meaning of these words can be maintained by leaving various possibilities open (Nolland & Metzger, Lk 9:881–882). One therefore cannot enter the Kingdom of God unless one possesses qualities like those of a small child. On another occasion, when the disciples asked who the greatest in the Kingdom is, Jesus's answer was that to enter the kingdom, one must turn away from seeking greatness and, like a small child, become a humble recipient. Thus, only those who humble themselves like a small child become the greatest in the kingdom. In all related passages about children, the emphasis is consistently on childlike humility, not on chronological age. The children of the kingdom are therefore those who possess childlike humility, unlike the ambition to achieve great things that characterises adults.

The meaning of 'Anakhonhi do Hamoraon di Au'

In Batak community life, children occupy a very special and central position and may indeed be said to be the highest priority, surpassing many other things in the lives of parents. In particular, the philosophical meaning of 'Anakhon hi do hamoraon di au' has inspired Batak parents to establish the central position of children in the Batak family. Literally, the philosophy of 'Anakhon hi do hamoraon di au' means 'my child is my wealth'. For Batak society, a child is not merely a biological descendant, but also an heir of the family's good name, a successor of the clan, a hope for the future, and a representation of all the parents' sacrifices and hard work. Children are the greatest investment, the greatest treasure and wealth for parents, the deepest source of happiness, and at the same time the most fundamental goal of life for Batak parents (Sagala, Ginting & Harahap 2022a:22).

The philosophy of 'Anakhon hi do hamoraon di au' does not stand alone; it is closely related to three very fundamental values of life in Batak Toba culture: *hagabeon*, *hasangapon* and *hamoraon* (Sagala, Ginting & Harahap 2022b:30589).

Hagabeon means having many descendants. In Batak society, having many children and grandchildren is the highest blessing a person can receive. Many descendants are seen as a source of strength, continuity of the clan and a guarantee that the family name will continue to be remembered and honoured from generation to generation. This concept of *hagabeon* reinforces the central position of children in the life of Batak people, because they believe that the more children one has, the greater the blessing the family receives. It is

these children who will care for parents in old age, continue family traditions and uphold the honour of the clan in the eyes of society (Simamora, Marbun & Simanjorang 2015:133).

Hasangapon means glory, honour, dignity and prestige. This value greatly determines a person's social standing in Batak society. Notably, a person's *hasangapon* is not only determined by personal achievements, but is also greatly influenced by the success of their children. Parents who successfully raise their children to become successful, educated, morally upright individuals who contribute positively to society will receive high *hasangapon*. Conversely, children's failures can lower the family's honour in the eyes of society. Batak parents therefore take the education and preparation of their children's futures very seriously. This concerns not only the children's future, but also the honour of the entire family and clan (Simamora et al. 2015:133).

Hamoraon means wealth and prosperity. In the philosophy of 'Anakhon hi do hamoraon di au', children are regarded as the most precious form of wealth, even more valuable than material possessions. True wealth for Batak people does not lie in how much money or assets one owns, but in the success and happiness of their children (Purba, Haloho & Manurung 2025:1916). A person who has abundant wealth but has no children, or whose children fail in life, is not considered truly wealthy in the perspective of Batak culture. By contrast, a person who lives simply but has successful and devoted children is considered truly wealthy and fortunate.

These three values (*hagabeon*, *hasangapon* and *hamoraon*) are interrelated and converge on the same point: children. Children are the bridge for achieving *hagabeon* [descendants], *hasangapon* [honour] and *hamoraon* [true wealth]. This is why, in Batak culture, children are genuinely placed above all else, for through the presence and success of children, all the most fundamental values of life can be realized.

This philosophy is not merely a beautiful expression; it is a worldview that is truly practised and serves as the foundation of values driving every action of Batak parents. Because children are seen as extraordinarily precious treasures, this has motivated the Batak people to make their children into children of value. Batak parents therefore strive to the utmost to ensure their children receive the best education and a bright future (Haloho 2022:1).

This philosophy produces a very intensive and sacrifice-filled pattern of parenting. Batak parents hold a very strong principle: 'it is better for the parents to suffer than for the children to suffer'. This principle demonstrates the importance of the parents' responsibility in guiding their children towards success and honour (Simanjuntak & Sianipar 2026:545).

This philosophy becomes a motivation for Batak people to show extraordinary dedication and a willingness to sacrifice many things, including personal comfort, material possessions and even their health, for the sake of their

children's future. It is not uncommon for Batak parents to live in extreme simplicity, working day and night without adequate rest, and to postpone or even forego personal pleasures, simply to ensure their children receive the best education, a decent life and a bright future.

They will strive hard to send their children to study in other regions or even abroad, even if it means being separated from them for a long time and incurring very high costs. This sacrifice is not only financial but also emotional, as they entrust their longing and family togetherness for the sake of giving their children better opportunities.

Batak parents are also willing to sell inherited land and valuable assets to finance their children's education. Some work in several jobs at once, from early morning until late at night, to accumulate their children's tuition fees. Some live in very simple, even inadequate, homes to send their children's educational costs. Some parents go years without ever buying new clothes for themselves, yet always ensure their children are properly dressed so as not to feel ashamed in front of their peers.

Batak parents prioritise the allocation of family resources for their children's education. When family income is limited, the first and foremost priority is always for the children: children's education, children's health and children's needs. The parents' own needs are placed last. If there is money left over, only then do parents think of their own needs; if there is no money left over, they are willing to reduce their food intake, delay medical care or use broken items without replacing them.

These sacrifices are made sincerely and with great joy. Batak parents do not feel burdened or regret all the sacrifices they make. On the contrary, their greatest happiness is to see their children grow, achieve and have a better life than their own. Every success of the children, whether good grades at school, passing an exam, finding a job or attaining a particular achievement, is a joy that far surpasses any material happiness for Batak parents (Norde & Dotrimensi 2025:81).

However, material sacrifice is only one aspect. Batak parents also pay great attention to the formation of character, moral values and the quality of their children's personalities. They understand that true success is not measured only by academic or material achievement, but also by integrity, morality and the children's positive contribution to society. Batak parents therefore have a very strong determination to give the best to their children in all aspects of life. They equip their children with quality education, both formal and informal, and instil a high fighting spirit, strong mental resilience and solid moral values. Children are taught to work hard, not to give up easily, to value education, to respect parents and others, and to have social responsibility towards family and society (Simamora et al. 2015:128).

The reputation of a family in Batak society is very much determined by the quality and success of their children. This creates a dual responsibility for parents: they are accountable

not only to the child as an individual, but also to the extended family, clan and community. The success of children will elevate the name of the family and clan, while children's failures can bring shame to the entire family. Batak parents therefore strive hard by every means to ensure their children do not fall into poverty and can achieve success in the future. They strive hard to ensure children have sufficient provisions to face life. They instil a strong work ethic, provide an example through their own sacrifices and continually motivate children never to give up in pursuing their dreams (Norde & Dotrimensi 2025:84).

For Batak parents, children are the most precious long-term investment. Unlike material investments that can be depleted or destroyed, investment in children continues to grow and yields compounding returns, not only for the parents but also for future generations. Successful children become a source of pride, will care for parents in old age, will pass on family values to grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and will be valuable assets to the clan and community. This is why, in Batak culture, children are truly regarded as the most precious wealth, the true 'hamoraon'. Children are not a burden but a gift, a blessing, and an irreplaceable source of happiness. The philosophy of '*Anakhon hi do hamoraon di au*' teaches that no sacrifice is too great for children, no effort too strenuous for their future, and no happiness is greater for parents than to see their children succeed and be happy.

Biblical foundation for educating children

In Jewish tradition, education has deep roots, beginning when God called Abraham as the forefather of the chosen people and God himself was present as the Supreme Educator for his people. Subsequently, God entrusted the patriarchs, such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with the responsibility of being educators for their entire households. They served not only as priests functioning as intermediaries between God and the people, but also as teachers who taught about God's great works and his promises that brought blessing from generation to generation. This process of transmitting teaching continued from generation to generation: Isaac continued the teaching from Abraham, then Jacob instilled these teachings in his children, so that knowledge of God's promises and blessings was preserved in the life of the nation of Israel. Moses, chosen by God to free his people from oppression, was not only a leader, but also an educator and lawgiver who taught them in the wilderness and built an educational system so that the teaching of the Word of God would continue through his successors (Stevanus & Yulianingsih 2021:20–21).

In the Old Testament era, the process of learning and spiritual strengthening took place in three main settings: places of worship, royal courts and the family environment. Religious leaders provided instruction in faith at places of worship, while education at the royal court aimed to prepare personnel for governing and was usually conducted in Jerusalem. The most important setting, however, was instruction within the family. The family was the most vital centre for the formation of character and education for children (Sin 2020:49).

The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, particularly 6:4–9, emphasises the importance of religious education within the family. Parents were commanded to provide religious education to their children from an early age, so they would know the Lord's law and obey it. The Old Testament emphasises that the primary responsibility for raising children spiritually lies with parents in the household. Parents were commanded to retell the narrative of God's covenant with their forebears and explain the meaning of God's wonderful acts in history and in religious celebrations. Children were also involved in participating in daily rituals, annual celebrations and visits to sacred places alongside their parents. Through instruction at home, young Israelites learned how God had revealed himself and how they should live as his chosen people. In particular, the 'Shema' (Dt 6:4–5) became the primary foundation for the faith and life of the people of Israel, which was subsequently required to be recited every morning and evening as a reminder that all their behaviour was under the authority of God (Sin 2020:50).

The book of Proverbs also repeatedly emphasises the importance of education and instruction for children. For children who receive teaching from parents, and especially from the Lord, will enjoy long life, happiness, wealth, honour and prosperity (3:1–26). A child who does not receive teaching will perish and go astray (5:23). Because teaching has a great influence on the life and future of the child, parents need to take seriously the education of their children, not only so that the children may live and be blessed, but also so that parents may live in peace and joy (29:17). Parents are thus responsible for providing instruction to their children, not only for the sake of the child's life, but also for the continuity of the parents' own lives. This aligns with what Bruce J. Malina says, namely that the bond between parents and sons is based on mutual need: parents need their son to support them, and the son needs parents as his caregivers. Both depend on each other (Malina 1996:73). The son is treated well because he is the family's socioeconomic investment: he is the one who will care for parents in old age and continue the lineage (Malina 1996:122–123). That is why, once grown, a son would typically remain in or near the parents' home, while daughters were married out. The eldest son would usually inherit his father's house, remaining in that household and thereby taking responsibility for caring for his parents (Pilch & Malina 1993: 126). A daughter, once grown, would marry and would be expected to support her husband's parents (Malina 1996:123). This situation provides a compelling reason for parents to fulfil their responsibility to educate their children.

Education in the New Testament era is essentially a continuation of the Old Testament pattern of education, with the primary focus on the community of God's people, or the church, as the successor of Israel. The life of Jesus provides several important lessons related to education: firstly, from an early age Jesus received teaching from Jewish religious teachers, like other Jewish children; secondly, Jesus then became the Great Teacher (Jn 3:2, 13:13), employing various effective teaching methods worthy of study by all educators; thirdly, Jesus' teaching did not emphasize merely theoretical

understanding but spiritual awareness and the transformation of attitudes in the form of repentance to God, which should be the primary motivation for teachers of Christian religious education. The entire life of Jesus, including his suffering and death, constitutes a profound teaching on salvation for sinful humanity (Mt 4:17, 10:19–27). This shows that true Christian education is not merely a transfer of knowledge but the formation of character and an understanding of the grace of God (Hastuti 2013:6).

Biblical-contextual analysis of Luke 18:15–17 and the philosophy of 'Anakhonhi do Hamoraon di Au'

The study of children from a theological and cultural perspective has become a subject of research attracting the attention of many scholars. Previous research has explored the interpretation of Luke 18:15–17 from exegetical, historical-critical, narrative and theological viewpoints. Likewise, the philosophy of 'Anakhonhi do Hamoraon di Au' in Batak Toba culture has been studied from the perspectives of cultural anthropology, sociology and local philosophy. However, as far as the literature review conducted here indicates, no research has been found that explicitly combines both perspectives in a single comprehensive analysis to reveal the alignment of values contained within them.

The novelty of this research lies in the effort to synthesise biblical values with the local values of the Batak Toba culture. Although there has been much research discussing Luke 18:15–17 and many philosophical studies of 'Anakhonhi do Hamoraon di Au', this research fills an academic gap by showing that, in both ancient Jewish society and Batak society, there is a fundamental similarity in the way they view children. This similarity of perspective is not merely coincidental, but reflects universal values rooted in an understanding of the importance of the next generation as heirs of noble life values.

Although it reflects universal values, since there are certainly many other traditional cultures in which children are highly valued, the Batak culture has its own distinctive character, which is visible through its tenacity in fighting for children, particularly in education. This can be seen through one data point released by Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik) on 05 February 2025, which states that 'the Batak people contribute the largest number of university graduates in Indonesia, at 18.02%, followed by the Minangkabau people at 18.00%' (BBC News Indonesia 2025). The *umpasa* are thus not merely beautiful expressions, and the song is not merely art; they have become the foundation driving every Batak parent to actively and maximally take various actions to ensure their children receive the best education for a better future. This philosophy has long been rooted in the life of Batak society, before Christianity and continuing to take root after Christianity arrived in the Batak lands. Christian values, including the values of Jewish culture, further reinforce the foundation of this philosophy in the life of contemporary Batak society.

As already noted, children held a very special position in ancient Jewish society. The tradition of bringing children to rabbis to receive blessings and teaching reflects a deep understanding that children are a gift from God who need to be cared for, guided and blessed from an early age. This practice was not merely a religious ritual, but a manifestation of the theological conviction that children's futures are greatly influenced by the blessings received from revered spiritual figures (Carroll 2024:4).

The pericope of Luke 18:15–17 itself is one of the texts depicting how Jewish parents with great perseverance brought their children, even infants [*brephos*], to Jesus to be blessed. The use of the verb in imperfective form [*προσέφερον*] indicates a continuous and repeated action. This verb shows that this action, parents coming and bringing their children to Jesus, required extraordinary perseverance, all the more so when the disciples tried to obstruct them with a harsh rebuke [*ἐπετίμων*]. The disciples apparently regarded the children as a nuisance unworthy of taking up the Teacher's valuable time (Nolland & Metzger 2008:881–882).

Yet the parents did not give up. They continued to strive because they held a deep conviction that children are very important and precious in their lives and therefore needed to be blessed by Jesus while they were still young. This perseverance shows that for Jewish parents, the future of their children was the highest priority, one that could not be compromised. They believed that the blessing of Jesus, the Great Rabbi, would bring a transformative impact to their children's lives in the future.

Jesus' response to this situation was highly significant. He not only received the children with open arms, but also sharply rebuked the disciples who were blocking them. Jesus said, 'Let the children come to me and do not hinder them!' (v. 16). This statement is not merely an invitation, but a profound theological declaration: 'for the Kingdom of God belongs to people such as these'. Children, who were often considered unimportant in ancient society, were made by Jesus to be exemplars of those who receive the Kingdom of God (Panjaitan & Kusumaningdyah 2024:4–6).

In the life of the Batak Toba society, children also occupy a position no less special than in the perspective of ancient Judaism. The philosophy of '*Anakhon hi do Hamoraon di Au*' [My child is my wealth] is not merely a beautiful saying; it is a worldview that is truly practised and constitutes the foundation of values driving every action of Batak parents. Children are viewed as the most precious treasures, even more valuable than gold and jewels, because through children, all the most fundamental values of life can be realised.

This philosophy does not stand alone; it is closely related to three fundamental values in Batak Toba culture known in terms of life values: *hagabeon* [many descendants and long life], *hasangapon* [glory and honor] and *hamoraon* [true wealth]. These three values are interrelated and converge on

the same point: children. Children are the bridge for achieving continuity of descendants; children bring honour to the family and clan; children are also the true wealth (Gultom & Damanik 2025:2).

A comparative analysis between the Jewish perspective in Luke 18:15–17 and the Batak philosophy of '*Anakhonhi do Hamoraon di Au*' reveals a striking alignment in the way both cultures view children. This alignment is not superficial, but encompasses deep and multi-dimensional aspects. The author therefore endeavours to comparatively analyse the role of parents in Judaism alongside parents from the Batak ethnic group, covering:

Firstly, in both Jewish tradition and Batak culture, children are viewed as the most precious gift. Jewish parents who diligently brought their children to Jesus, even having to face obstruction from the disciples, demonstrate the high value they placed on their children. Similarly, Batak parents who are willing to sacrifice all personal comfort, material possessions and even health for the sake of their children's future reflect the same view that children are the greatest investment and an irreplaceable, deepest source of happiness.

Secondly, both perspectives emphasise the importance of education and blessings for children from an early age. The Jewish tradition of bringing infants to rabbis for blessing reflects the awareness that a spiritual and moral foundation needs to be built from childhood. Jesus himself affirmed the importance of welcoming and blessing children, even making them exemplars for entering the Kingdom of God. In the Batak context, parents not only equip children with formal education, but also instil solid moral values, a high fighting spirit and strong mental resilience from an early age. Both acknowledge that childhood is a critical period in the formation of character and one's future.

Thirdly, both cultures demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of children. The Jewish parents in Luke 18:15–17 did not give up even when they received a sharp rebuke from the disciples. They continued to strive with extraordinary perseverance because they believed that blessings for the children mattered more than any shame or rejection they faced. Batak parents demonstrate parallel sacrifice, working day and night without adequate rest, living in extreme simplicity, postponing or foregoing personal desires, to ensure the children receive the best. These sacrifices are made sincerely, without expectation of immediate reward, because the happiness of the children is the highest happiness for the parents.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates a profound alignment between the biblical perspective revealed in the pericope of Luke 18:15–17 and the philosophical value of children in Batak culture. The study successfully proves that there is a profound alignment between the Jewish perspective in Luke 18:15–17 and the Batak philosophy of '*Anakhonhi do*

Hamoraon di Au' in their view of children. In both ancient Jewish society and Batak society, children are regarded as precious gifts that require attention, education, blessing and sacrifice from an early age. This similarity of perspective reflects universal values rooted in an understanding of the importance of the next generation as heirs of noble life values.

The primary contribution of this research lies in the synthesis between biblical values and the local values of the Batak Toba culture that has not previously been undertaken in earlier research. Although there have been many exegetical studies on Luke 18:15–17 and philosophical studies of 'Anakhonhi do Hamoraon di Au', this research fills an academic gap by demonstrating the fundamental alignment connecting the two. These findings provide a solid theological-contextual foundation for the nurturing and education of children in the context of the contemporary Batak church and community, affirming that care for children is a spiritual calling aligned with the will of God, not merely a cultural obligation.

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CRedit authorship contribution

Raulina Raulina: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualisation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Herowati Sitorus: Data curation, Funding acquisition. Roy Haries Ifraldo Tambun: Conceptualisation, Methodology. All authors reviewed the article, contributed to the discussion of results, approved the final version for submission and publication and take responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Raulina Raulina, upon reasonable request.

Disclaimer

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