

The Boy Jesus

Eccl 3:1, 7; Luke 2:39-52

SS Lesson for 07/12/2020

Devotional Scripture: Isa 53:1-2

OUTLINE

LESSON BACKGROUND AND KEY VERSE

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Key Verse: Luke 2:40

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

MAJOR THEME ANALYSIS

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A child that is well cared for (Ps 144:12)

A child that is obedient (Eph 6:1-3)

A child that walks in the truth (2 John 1:4)

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Maturity through seeking God's power to overcome the world (Rev 3:12)

Maturity through the testing of their faith (James 1:12)

Maturity through persevering (1 Peter 1:7-9)

PHYSICAL GROWTH (LUKE 2:39-45)

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God says that it is better to have wisdom than physical strength (Eccl 9:16)

Hope in God will renew strength (Isa 40:31)

In man's weakness, God demonstrates His strength (1 Cor 1:25)

Doing everything through Jesus who gives strength (Phil 4:13)

Physical age (42)

Physical age is related to when mature, thinking should also mature (1 Cor 13:11)

Aging should allow one to tell of God's power to those younger (Ps 71:18)

Advanced physical age is a blessing and can signify a righteous life (Prov 16:31)

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Physical inquisitiveness is one way of training the young (Deut 6:20-21)

Physical inquisitiveness is a way of passing on God's mighty acts (Ps 145:4-5)

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Teachers will be judged more strictly, so respect and learn from them (James 3:1)

Learning from teachers who have the Word of God dwelling in them (Col 3:16)

Learning from the teaching of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27)

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Understanding aids in not taking the wrong path (Ps 119:104)

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Understanding guards us in life (Prov 2:11)

Understanding is worth achieving (Prov 4:7)

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Spiritual responsibility is finishing the tasks God has assigned (Acts 20:24)

Spiritual responsibility is pressing on toward the goal and prize God has assigned (Phil 3:13-14)

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The wise consider and obey the great love of God (Ps 107:43)
The wise accept commands from God (Prov 10:8)
The wise adhere to instruction (Prov 13:1)
The wise listen to advice and instruction (Prov 19:20)
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Obedience through pleasing God (52)

Living as a child of light (righteousness) is pleasing to God (Eph 5:8-10)
Always seek that the meditation of the mind and the words of the mouth are pleasing to God (Ps 19:14)
Serving God in righteousness, peace and joy is pleasing to God (Rom 14:16-18)
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CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FROM THE ECHOES COMMENTARY

Lesson Background and Key Verse

Background from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

Ever since Shirley Temple (1928-2014) appeared in movies as a child, preteen actors have been a feature of popular entertainment. Children with exceptional talent consistently attract large audiences eager to be amazed at youngsters who can outperform adults. Imagine being the adult who nurtures and guards such a child. It might seem that all the usual principles of parenting have to be ignored so that the child's full potential can be realized. Friends? School? Play? Discipline? There is no time for such matters when practice and performances beckon. How can caring parents ensure that the child's life is as "normal" as possible in the pressures of the limelight? The sad stories of many child stars suggest that their path to adulthood is not easy. Today's text narrates a never-to-be-repeated first-century version of this dilemma.

As one of the Old Testament books known as wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes explores the accumulated wisdom of its time and place. In so doing, it asks whether life has meaning. Its writer, "the Preacher" (Ecclesiastes 1:1), has long been identified as King Solomon. He alternates between principles of wise living and his own discouraged impression that "all is vanity" (2:17). But in the end he concludes that the purpose of human life is to remember the Creator before our lives slip away from us (12:1). Therefore one must read the entirety of the book to glean the ultimate truth of it.

Of the four Gospels, only Matthew and Luke give stories of Jesus' birth, and only Luke includes a story from Jesus' childhood. It comes just after the accounts of the announcement and birth of both John the Baptist and Jesus. Luke portrays both births as vital parts of God's plan, closely linked to one another as the two men's ministries later would be linked. Even so, Jesus' uniqueness is evident from the beginning (Luke 1:32, 35; 2:11). As His story unfolds, we see that Jesus is greater than all others because He has the nature and authority of God himself (Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:6). In Jesus, God entered the world to rescue His people (John 1:1, 9-14). How we understand something so unusual, something that is fundamentally different from every other thing, is answered by today's text.

Key Verse: Luke 2:40

And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him

Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

2:22-24. The couple was required by the Law not only to have Jesus circumcised (Lev. 12:3), but also to present their **firstborn** to God (Ex. 13:2, 12) 33 days later and to bring an offering for Mary's **purification** after childbirth (Lev. 12:1-8). The offering which they presented for her purification showed that they were a poor couple. They could not afford a lamb, so they bought a pair of doves or pigeons, which were all they could afford. They traveled the short distance from Bethlehem **to Jerusalem** for the presentation and purification at the temple.

2:25-26. **Simeon** had been told **by the Holy Spirit that he would not die** till he had seen the Messiah. Simeon was **righteous** (*dikaios*) and **devout** (*eulabēs*, "reverent") before God. Unlike the religious leaders, **he was waiting for the consolation of Israel**, that is, the Messiah, the One who would bring comfort to the nation (cf. "the redemption of Jerusalem," v. 38). The notation that **the Holy Spirit was upon** Simeon reminds one of the Old Testament prophets on whom the Holy Spirit came. Since Anna was "a prophetess" (v. 36), Simeon was probably also in the godly prophetic tradition of Israel. The special revelation from the Holy Spirit about seeing the Messiah was apparently unique and perhaps came because of Simeon's intense desire for the Promised One.

2:27-32. On seeing **the Child** and picking Him up, **Simeon... praised God**, the response of godly people toward the Messiah throughout the Gospel of Luke. He then uttered a psalm of praise extolling God for fulfilling His promise by bringing **salvation**. The Messiah is the Source of salvation, as His name Jesus indicates. In all three of the hymns of thanksgiving and praise recorded by Luke in his first two chapters (1:46-55, 68-79; 2:29-32) lie the deep significance of the births of John and Jesus for the salvation of Israel and the world. Simeon noted that the Messiah was to be for **the Gentiles** as well as for **Israel**. The idea of salvation for the Gentiles is set forth many times in the Gospel of Luke.

2:33. The words of Simeon caused Mary and Joseph to marvel (*thaumazontes*; cf. v. 18). Though they had been told that their Son was the Messiah, perhaps they had not comprehended the scope of His ministry to the entire world—to the Gentiles as well as to the people of Israel.

2:34-35. **Simeon** revealed **to Mary** that her Son would be opposed (**a sign... spoken against**) and that she would be hurt greatly. Her grief would be like **a sword** piercing her **soul**. The Son would **cause the falling and rising of many in Israel**. Throughout His ministry Jesus proclaimed that the only way to the kingdom, something the nation had long sought, was to follow Him. The ones who did so would receive salvation; they would "rise." But the ones who did not believe Him would not receive salvation; they would "fall." These consequences would reveal what they thought about Mary's Son.

2:36-38. This godly woman from the prophetic tradition continued the work Simeon had started. Anna **was 84** years old and had devoted herself completely to the Lord's service in **the temple** since her husband had died years before. She announced **to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem** (cf. v. 25) that the Messiah had come. The word about Jesus was likely known throughout the entire city as people either believed or disbelieved the words of the old prophet and the widowed prophetess.

2:39-40. **Joseph and Mary** then **returned** with Jesus to their home in **Nazareth of Galilee**, about 65 miles north of Jerusalem, where Jesus **grew** up. Luke omitted Jesus' sojourn in Egypt from his account (cf. Matt. 2:13-21) since it was not his purpose to show the early rejection of the Messiah. In Nazareth He was first rejected after He publicly declared that He was the Messiah. The preparation for His ministry took place in that town as He continued to grow up. Luke noted that He **became strong** and **was filled with wisdom** (*sophia*). His growth in wisdom was mentioned later (Luke 2:52). Luke also portrayed Jesus as the Source of wisdom for His followers (21:15). Jesus had **the grace** or favor (*charis*) **of God... upon Him**. Luke also reiterated that characteristic in 2:52. The wisdom and favor from God were evident before He reached the age of 12.

2:41-50. By the time Jesus **was 12 years old**, He understood His mission on earth. As was their custom, Mary and Joseph went yearly **to Jerusalem** to observe **the Feast of the Passover**. The one-day Passover was followed by the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 23:15; Lev. 23:4-8; Deut. 16:1-8). The entire eight-day festival was sometimes called the Passover (Luke 22:1, 7; John 19:14; Acts 12:3-4). On the return home from their trip to Jerusalem, **His parents** did not realize He was not with them until they had gone some distance. **After three days they found Him in the temple courts**. The "three days" refer to the time since they had left the city. They had traveled one day's journey away from the city (Luke 2:44); it took them a second day to get back; they found Him on the following day. When Jesus was found, He was interacting with the **teachers** of the Law, **listening** and **asking intelligent questions**. **Everyone... was**

amazed (*existanto*, “beside themselves in amazement”; cf. 8:56) **at His understanding and His answers**. When Mary and Joseph **saw Him, they were astonished** (*exēplagēsan*, “struck out of their senses,” perhaps with joy; cf. 4:32; 9:43). In response to Mary’s question about why He had **treated** them in this manner, Jesus drew a sharp distinction between them and God, His true Father (2:49). His statement confirmed that He knew His mission and that His parents also should have known about His mission. However, His parents **did not understand** this.

2:51-52. Luke was careful to point out that Jesus **was obedient to** Joseph and Mary in case his readers would think otherwise from the previous paragraph. Mary **treasured all these things in her heart**, reflecting on and remembering her 12-year-old’s words, even though she did not understand them. Perhaps Luke received these details about the early years of Jesus from Mary herself or from someone in whom she had confided. Jesus continued to grow (*proekopten*, lit., “cut one’s way forward,” i.e., “increased”) in every way (spiritually, mentally, and physically) and had **favor with God and men** (cf. v. 40).

Major Theme Analysis

(*Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV*)

Time for Growth (Eccl 3:1, 7)

1 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:
7 A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

Time to be a child (1)

A child that is a blessing for parents who fear God (Ps 128:3-4)

3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. 4 Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord.

A child that is well cared for (Ps 144:12)

12 Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace.

A child that is obedient (Eph 6:1-3)

1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"-which is the first commandment with a promise— 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."

A child that walks in the truth (2 John 1:4)

4 It has given me great joy to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us.

Time to mature (7)

Maturity through growing in faith (Heb 6:1-2)

1 Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, 2 instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Maturity through seeking God's power to overcome the world (Rev 3:12)

12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

Maturity through the testing of their faith (James 1:12)

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

Maturity through persevering (1 Peter 1:7-9)

7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Physical Growth (Luke 2:39-45)

39 So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.

40 The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

42 And when He became twelve, they went up there according to the custom of the Feast;

43 and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it,

44 but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they began looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances.

45 When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him.

Physical strength (39-40)

It is God who provides physical strength (Ps 18:32)

32 It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.

God says that it is better to have wisdom than physical strength (Eccl 9:16)

16 So I said, "Wisdom is better than strength." But the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer heeded.

Hope in God will renew strength (Isa 40:31)

31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

In man's weakness, God demonstrates His strength (1 Cor 1:25)

25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.

Doing everything through Jesus who gives strength (Phil 4:13)

13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

Physical age (42)

Physical age is related to when mature, thinking should also mature (1 Cor 13:11)

11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.

Aging should allow one to tell of God's power to those younger (Ps 71:18)

18 Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

Advanced physical age is a blessing and can signify a righteous life (Prov 16:31)

31 Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life.

Physical inquisitiveness (43-45)

Physical inquisitiveness is one way of training the young (Deut 6:20-21)

20 In the future, when your son asks you, "What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the LORD our God has commanded you?" 21 tell him: "We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Physical inquisitiveness is a way of passing on God's mighty acts (Ps 145:4-5)

4 One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. 5 They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.

Physical inquisitiveness should cause one to seek God (Acts 17:26-28)

26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.

God reveals Himself even to those who do not pursue their physical inquisitiveness (Rom 10:20)

20 And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."

Spiritual Growth (Luke 2:46-50)

46 Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.

47 And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

48 When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, " Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You."

49 And He said to them, "Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?"

50 But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them.

Growth through learning from teachers (46)

One of the functions of the Church is to provide teaching (Eph 4:10-13)

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Teaching of God's Word should lead to being able to distinguish between good and evil (Heb 5:13-14)

13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Teachers will be judged more strictly, so respect and learn from them (James 3:1)

1 Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

Learning from teachers who have the Word of God dwelling in them (Col 3:16)

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Learning from the teaching of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:27)

27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit-just as it has taught you, remain in him.

Growth through understanding (47)

Understanding aids in obedience to God's Word (Ps 119:34)

34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

Understanding aids in not taking the wrong path (Ps 119:104)

104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path.

Understanding comes from God (Prov 2:6)

6 For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Understanding guards us in life (Prov 2:11)

11 Discretion will protect you, and understanding will guard you.

Understanding is worth achieving (Prov 4:7)

7 Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

Growth through spiritual responsibility (49)

Spiritual responsibility is accepting the calling of God (Isa 6:8)

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Spiritual responsibility is finishing the tasks God has assigned (Acts 20:24)

24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

Spiritual responsibility is pressing on toward the goal and prize God has assigned (Phil 3:13-14)

13 Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Spiritual responsibility is fighting the good fight of faith (2 Tim 4:7-8)

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

Obedient Growth (Luke 2:51-52)

51 And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

Obedience through subjection to authorities (51)

Subjection to authorities because God established them (Rom 13:1)

1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Subjection to authorities because it is a command of God (Titus 3:1)

1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good,

Subjection to authorities out of reverence for Jesus (Eph 5:21)

21 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Subjection to authorities because they are there to administer justice (1 Peter 2:13-14)

13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, 14 or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

Obedience through increasing wisdom (52)

The wise know the proper time and procedure (Eccl 8:5)

5 Whoever obeys his command will come to no harm, and the wise heart will know the proper time and procedure.

The wise consider and obey the great love of God (Ps 107:43)

43 Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.

The wise accept commands from God (Prov 10:8)

8 The wise in heart accept commands, but a chattering fool comes to ruin.

The wise adhere to instruction (Prov 13:1)

1 A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.

The wise listen to advice and instruction (Prov 19:20)

20 Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.

The wise continues to do God's Word until He returns (Matt 24:45-46)

45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

Obedience through pleasing God (52)

Living as a child of light (righteousness) is pleasing to God (Eph 5:8-10)

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.

Always seek that the meditation of the mind and the words of the mouth are pleasing to God (Ps 19:14)

14 May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Serving God in righteousness, peace and joy is pleasing to God (Rom 14:16-18)

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, 18 because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Praying for others is pleasing to God (1 Tim 2:1-3)

2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone- 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior,

Taking care of family is pleasing to God (1 Tim 5:4)

4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

The Disappearance, Discovery, and Declaration of Jesus (2:39-52)

The story is really very simple. The parents of our Lord had gone up to Jerusalem to observe the Feast of Passover, just as they had done every year (2:41-42).⁴⁵ It is not clearly stated, but I am of the impression that Jesus was taken along on throughout the years of His growing up. This year, He was twelve. Depending on the commentator you are reading, it was either at the age of 12 or of 13 that the Israelite lad was made a “son of the law.”⁴⁶ The pilgrims who made journey to Jerusalem and back would often travel together in caravans. Thus, family, friends, and other acquaintances from Nazareth and the surrounding area seem to have formed such a caravan.⁴⁷ The Feast having concluded, the caravan began the journey home, and among them were Mary and Joseph (with perhaps some of their children), but not Jesus.

Jesus was not discovered to be missing immediately. This was probably for several reasons. First, Jesus was an absolutely trustworthy and reliable child. As the Son of God, He was without sin, and thus His parents did not have the same concerns other parents might have. Also, the men and the women may have traveled in groupings which were separate. We are told that the women and children were often in front, with the men at the rear. Each of the parents might therefore have assumed that Jesus was with the other parent. Eventually, Jesus’ absence was noted, and after searching among those in the caravan and finding Him missing entirely, Mary and Joseph went back to Jerusalem, which may have been a day’s travel.

For three days they searched for the boy Jesus.⁴⁸ Some think that the three day search included the time required to search for Him in the caravan, as well as the time spent traveling back to Jerusalem. I am inclined to read Luke’s account as indicating a three day search took place, commencing at the time they arrived back at Jerusalem. This would indicate a long, intense, search, which would lead to growing concern and consternation, as well as growing frustration, which seems evident in the parents’ first response to Jesus, once He was found.

Finally, almost as a last resort it would seem, the parents looked for Jesus in the temple. And there He was, sitting in the midst of the teachers, busily engaged in conversation. His role was principally that of a learner and a listener, who asked many pertinent and penetrating questions. It is evident that He also gave some responses, for those nearby who overheard Him marveled at His answers.

Imagine yourself as one of the parents of Jesus at this point. Be very honest, now. Imagine your growing sense of concern as the time passed, and as the child was not found. Consider your fears intensifying as you recalled the absolute reliability of Jesus and His wisdom. And then when you find Him, seemingly aloof to all the consternation He has caused, discussing theology (perhaps as He often had done in Nazareth) in the temple. Admit it, now, you would be angry with Him, just as I would have been.

All the concern and anxiety and intensity caused by Jesus’ absence now turns, I believe, to frustration and anger. His mother scolds Him, gently perhaps (in front of the teachers and those looking on), but nevertheless her words are intended as a rebuke. At this moment in time, Mary may have almost entirely forgotten that Jesus was any different from any other child. All of the strange and wonderful things she was told and had seen, the things she “treasured in her heart” were probably momentarily overshadowed by her frustration. “How could you have done this to us, Jesus!” seems to be the essence of her first words. “Your father and I have been looking for you for days, and we were just about at our wits end.”

One would have expected the lad to have looked downward, stung by the rebuke and His foolishness and thoughtlessness. Such is not the case, however, for Jesus’ response shifts the focus from His error to their own. In response to the rebuke of His mother, there is the gentle rebuke of His own question. “Why would you have had to look for Me?” He seems to have said. “Would you not have known where you could find Me?” And perhaps pointedly in response to Mary’s reference to Joseph as His father, Jesus stated that He was in His Father’s house, just where the Son should have been.

There was no resolution, the reason being that neither Mary nor Joseph really grasped what was happening, nor what “their” Son, our Lord, had said. The incident ends with Mary (along with Joseph) once again perplexed at

the events occurring in her life related to this child. All she could do was to place these things alongside the others she had previously experienced, waiting for that day when the meaning of all this would become clear. If the memory of the mysterious events of Jesus' birth had begun to fade in the minds of Mary and Joseph, this incident would once again bring them vividly to mind.

The matter was over as quickly as it happened. Jesus went with them, back to Nazareth, to live with them, and in submission to their authority. Nevertheless, things would never be quite the same, I suspect. Jesus continued to grow, physically, spiritually, and socially. Years would pass until the public ministry of Jesus would begin, but during this time Jesus was continually growing, ever being prepared for the day of His public appearance as Israel's Messiah. His sense of purpose and calling toward this destiny can be seen, even in this childhood incident.

What Does This Story Mean?

It is tempting to look at this text casually, without struggling to grasp its meaning. Remember, this is not just one of many stories we have heard of a misplaced child, it is Luke's only account of an event in the growing-up years of Israel's Messiah, our Savior. There are several ways in which this story can be explained. Let's consider our options and then seek to determine which one points to the meaning of the text.

(1) Our first option is simply to take this as a kind of anecdote, an incident in the life of Christ with which we can all identify. If I have already suggested that there are too many things each gospel writer could have said to think that a trivial incident would be included, if not significant to the gospel as a whole.

(2) A second, but unacceptable, option is to understand that Jesus was wrong to remain behind in Jerusalem, at least without informing His parents of what He was doing. Since Jesus was the Son of God, in whom there was no sin, then He cannot have done wrong here, even as a child.

(3) A third option is to view Jesus as a kind of "absent-minded" Messiah, who is so preoccupied with the temple and the Scriptures that He simply missed the Caravan, and was thus left behind. This seems to be the view of at least one commentator.⁴⁹ I know of several "absent-minded professor" stories from my years in seminary. One such story is about a professor who stood at his own back door, deep in thought, knocking for some time, without realizing that he had not yet gotten outside his own house and at the door of his neighbor, where he intended to go. Another story is told of the professor who drove his car to Houston, Texas, where he spoke, only to fly home, forgetting that he had driven there.

Jesus, it is suggested, was just caught up with "His Father's business," and the rebuke of His parents came as a shock. This is a bit hard to believe, however. I hardly think that an "absent-minded Jesus story" is fitting immediately after Luke's comment that Jesus was increasing in wisdom. Jesus' words indicate that He purposefully remained on in Jerusalem ("I had to be..." v. 49). We know that Jesus was the oldest child, among several others (Matt. 13:55, 56), and thus He may have had the task of watching over them, and perhaps of getting them situated in the caravan. Also, when that first day in the temple came to an end, it was obvious that He was separated from His parents, yet He showed no concern, made no effort to be rejoined to them, and was apparently not looking for them. Absent-mindedness may not be sin, but it isn't all that smart, either. Jesus was not absent-minded here.

(4) The fourth option is that Jesus' parents were negligent, and were solely responsible for leaving Jerusalem without Jesus. How could they have left Jerusalem without Jesus? How could they have expected Him to assume such responsibility? This doesn't square with the story, either. If Jesus had made this trip with His parents before (as I take it He did), then He must have been accustomed to the way it was done, He must have proven Himself capable on previous trips. An oversight on the parents' part still does not explain the purposefulness of our Lord in remaining behind. Even if He had not succeeded in staying behind, He intended to do so, and without asking their permission or informing them of His intentions.

(5) Our final option is that Jesus was right in what He did, and that His parents were wrong in being angry with Him and rebuking Him. Jesus purposed to stay in Jerusalem, without His parents' permission, and without informing them of His actions. The question is, why?

In the light of the rest of the life of Christ and of New Testament revelation, I believe that we can identify several reasons for Jesus' actions, reasons which Mary and Joseph were not able to grasp at the moment.

First, Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem to learn of God. I cannot explain how our Lord, who was fully God and fully man, needed to learn, needed to develop in His grasp of God's Word, but I believe it to be true nonetheless. The verses which introduce and summarize this section make the growth of our Lord one of the highlights of the text:

And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him (Luke 2:40).

And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men (Luke 2:52).

It is much easier to believe that the Lord Jesus grew physically than it is to believe that He grew intellectually and spiritually, but the text tells us that He grew in all these ways. The interchange of our Lord and the teachers at the temple reveals both our Lord's eagerness to learn (for He was asking questions and listening to them—the posture of a learner), and the depth of the wisdom He had already attained.

Second, it appears that Jesus remained in Jerusalem to learn from the teachers at the temple those things which His parents could not teach Him. There is a broad sense in which every person needs the ministry of others in the “body of Christ,” and thus parents surely cannot and should not jealously guard the teaching their child by keeping him or her from the ministry of others. Here, however, I believe something more involved is taking place. Jesus was in Jerusalem during the observation of the Passover (Luke 2:41). I am inclined to think that He was particularly interested in the meaning of the Passover, especially as it applied to Him. The teachers at the temple could answer our Lord's question more academically, more objectively. Our Lord's parents surely did not allow their minds to ponder the sacrifice of their own son. Jesus therefore remained in Jerusalem to learn from others what He could not learn from His parents.

Third, I believe that Jesus remained on in Jerusalem because He would not have been given permission to stay there. Think about it for a moment. What do you think Mary and Joseph would have said in response to this request: “Can I stay on in Jerusalem for a few days to discuss the Old Testament and theology with the leading teachers of Israel?” More than now, children were to be seen and not heard. I can't imagine our Lord's earthly parents giving Him permission to do what He needed to do. Thus, He did not ask them.

Finally, and most importantly, Jesus did not ask permission to stay on in Jerusalem because He was God. On one level, the level from which Mary and Joseph saw it, Jesus was but a young boy, a boy incapable of making such critical decisions, a boy who was not old enough to stay by Himself in Jerusalem, a boy who was too young to be discussing the Scriptures with the finest teachers in Israel. But while He was a human being, a 12 year-old boy, He was also God incarnate, just as the angel had said to Mary and Joseph years before (Matt. 1:20-25; Luke 1:32, 35). On the divine level, God did not need to have man's permission to act any way He saw fit, nor was it required of God to explain His actions to man. Indeed, God is even free to do those things which cause men pain and consternation. It is only the fact that Jesus was fully God (as well as fully man) that explains how He could act as He did and not be wrong for so doing. If it were any other child, we would have sided with the parents, but since the child is the Son of God, we quickly acknowledge that He was right. Jesus, unlike any other 12 year-old in history, was God.

(Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/6-day-jesus-went-awol-luke-239-52>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

How do we comprehend something that is fundamentally different from every other thing with which we have experience? Ecclesiastes speaks of the regularity of life's cycles, showing the wisdom of understanding circumstances. Luke shows Jesus' uniqueness in how Jesus defied the conventional wisdom of those cycles as He spoke in the temple at age 12. But Jesus' words come to us as the first divine revelation from His lips at the time the uniqueness of His identity began to build. As people called into fellowship with Jesus, Christians are to follow God's purpose in mundane, daily ways—ways that can give way suddenly to our saying and doing the unexpected. For us to expect to do only and always the unusual is not God's way. Even so, God's will can run counter to conventional expectations on many occasions. Expect the world to scold us for defying its expectations as we continue to follow in the surprising direction of Jesus' footsteps.

Concluding Thoughts from the Echoes Commentary

Timing - Solomon affirmed through his writings in Ecclesiastes that God has absolute, sovereign control over all things in heaven and on earth. Nothing operates unless it is according to the Father's timetable. There is a time to speak out and a time to be silent. Jesus moved in step with God's set agenda while here on earth. At the age of 12, He started wisely and intelligently conversing with Jewish rabbis in the temple in Jerusalem. His verbal interactions amazed the learned teachers.

Growing - Mary and Joseph settled in the town of Nazareth and Jesus grew up there, receiving His parents' instructions like any other child. However, when Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover, something remarkable happened. Customarily, they traveled in a caravan to the capital city during this time each year for the celebration. But Jesus did not stay all the time with His parents during this trip. When they left, He stayed behind, went to the temple, and sat at the feet of the Jewish teachers well versed in the Law. Mary and Joseph were already in the caravan returning home to Nazareth when they realized Jesus was nowhere to be found. They frantically searched for Him for days before finally locating Him in the temple back in Jerusalem. Mary reacted like a typical mother: "Why have You behaved like this? Your father and I have been worried sick." Jesus replied they should have known He would be in His Father's house, the temple.

Learning - Jesus' response to Mary are His first recorded words in the Bible. It indicated He was beginning to take on the responsibility of His divine calling, even though his parents failed to grasp the entire meaning of His words. When Jesus returned to Nazareth, He subjected Himself to His parent's authority and grew even more in wisdom and in favor with those who knew Him. The Bible tells Christians to come together and learn from each other. One person may have one piece of the puzzle while someone else holds another. The wise thing for us to do is to study and grow together as we gather in God's house each week.