**Research: Jesus in the Temple at 12 years old**

**Luke 2:40-43, 45-47, 52**

40And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

“Strong in spirit - In mind, intellect, understanding.

“Filled with wisdom - Eminent for wisdom when a child - that is, exhibiting an extraordinary understanding, and "wise" to flee from everything sinful and evil.

“And the grace of God ... - The word "grace" in the New Testament commonly means unmerited favor shown "to sinners." Here it means no more than favor. God showed him favor, or was pleased with him and blessed him.

“It is remarkable that this is all that is recorded of the infancy of Jesus; and this, with the short account that follows of his going to Jerusalem, is all that we know of him for thirty years of his life. The design of the evangelists was to give an account of his "public ministry," and not his private life. Hence, they say little of him in regard to his first years. What they do say, however, corresponds entirely with what we might expect. He was wise, pure, pleasing God, and deeply skilled in the knowledge of the divine law. He set a lovely example for all children; was subject to his parents, and increased in favor with God and man” (Barnes’ Notes).

41Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.

“His parents went to Jerusalem.—The law of Moses required the attendance of all males at the three feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“As it was usual for those families to do that were remarkably religious, though only the adult males were, by the law, obliged to appear before the Lord on that occasion. *And when he was twelve years old*— And so, according to the Jewish maxims, came under the yoke of the law; *they went up to Jerusalem,*— And thought it proper to take him with them, to celebrate that glorious deliverance which God had so many ages before wrought for his people, when he brought them out of Egypt; the memory of which was carefully to be transmitted to every succeeding generation. *And when they had fulfilled the days*— Eight days in all, one the passover, and seven after.” (Benson Commentary).

42And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.

“**When he was twelve years old.**—The stages of Jewish childhood were marked as follows:—At three the boy was weaned, and wore for the first time the fringed or tasselled garment prescribed by [Numbers 15:38-41](http://biblehub.com/context/numbers/15-38.htm), and [Deuteronomy 22:12](http://biblehub.com/deuteronomy/22-12.htm). His education began, at first under the mother’s care. At five he was to learn the Law, at first by extracts written on scrolls of the more important passages, the Shema or Creed of [Deuteronomy 2:4](http://biblehub.com/deuteronomy/2-4.htm), the Hallel or Festival Psalms (Psalms 114-118, 136), and by catechetical teaching in school. At twelve he became more directly responsible for his obedience to the Law, and on the day when he attained the age of thirteen, put on for the first time the phylacteries which were worn at the recital of his daily prayer. (See Note on [Matthew 23:5](http://biblehub.com/matthew/23-5.htm).) It was accordingly an epoch of transition analogous to that which obtains among us at Confirmation. It was, therefore in strict accordance with usage, with perhaps a slight anticipation of the actual day, that the “child Jesus” should, at the age of twelve, have gone up with His parents to Jerusalem” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

43And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not *of it*.

“*And Joseph and his mother knew not of it*— It appears, they supposed that he had set out with some of his relations, or acquaintance, and was *in the company” (Benson Commentary).*

**The child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem.**—The words do not imply that He intentionally stayed behind. If we deal with the history on its human side, the probable course of things was this:—The Passover Feast lasted seven days; on each of those days, after the first, we may well believe the *“*child Jesus” was seeking wisdom to do His Father’s work at the hands of the appointed teachers who “sat in Moses’ chair.” This had become habitual. He went, as usual, when the Feast was over; but Joseph and Mary, instead of seeking Him there, took for granted that He had started with the other boys of the same age who had come from Nazareth. He was therefore left in the strange city by Himself, finding shelter for the night, probably, in the house where Joseph and Mary had lodged during the feast, and spending the day, as before, in drinking in the wondrous things of God’s Law, and asking questions which showed that He demanded more than traditional or conventional explanations. His question, “Wist ye not . . .?” implies that they ought to have known where He would be (Ellicott’s Commentary).

**“**Twelve years old - All males among the Hebrews were required to appear three times a year before God, to attend on the ordinances of religion in the temple, and it is probable that this was the age at which they first went up to Jerusalem, [Exodus 23:14-17](http://biblehub.com/exodus/23-14.htm); [Deuteronomy 16:16](http://biblehub.com/deuteronomy/16-16.htm).

“To Jerusalem - Where the feasts of the Jews were all held. This was a journey from Nazareth of about 70 miles.

“After the custom of the feast - According to the usual manner of the feast” (Barnes’ Notes).

44But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day’s journey; and they sought him among *their* kinsfolk and acquaintance.

“**Supposing him to have been in the company.**—The company was probably a large one, consisting of those who had come up to keep the Passover from Nazareth and the neighbouring villages. It is not certain, but in the nature of things it is sufficiently probable, that the boys of such a company congregated together, and travelled apart from the others” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“Supposing him to have been in the company - It may seem very remarkable that parents should not have been more attentive to their only son, and that they should not have been assured of his presence with them when they left Jerusalem; but the difficulty may be explained by the following considerations:

“1. In going to these great feasts, families and neighbors would join together, and form a large collection.

“2. It is not improbable that Jesus was "with" them when they were about to start from Jerusalem and were making preparations. Seeing him then, they might have been certain as to his presence.

“3. A part of the company might have left before the others, and Joseph and Mary may have supposed that he was with them, until they overtook them at night and ascertained their mistake.

“Kinsfolk - Relatives.

“Acquaintances - Neighbors who had gone up with them in the same company to Jerusalem” (Barnes’ Notes).

45And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.

“And when they found him not,.... In the company that came from Jerusalem with them, nor among any of their relations and friends, with whom they supposed he was:

“they turned back again to Jerusalem, that is, the next morning, for it can hardly be thought they would set out that night, after they had travelled all day, without taking some repose:” (Gill’s Exposition).

46And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.

**“Sitting in the midst of the doctors.**—A chamber of the Temple was set apart as a kind of open free school. The “doctors” or teachers—famous “doctors of the Law” ([Acts 5:34](http://biblehub.com/acts/5-34.htm))—sat “in Moses’ seat;” the older students on a low bench; the younger on the ground, literally “at the feet” of their instructor” (Ellicott’s Commentary).

“*in the temple*] Probably in one of the numerous chambers which ran round the Court, and abutted on the actual building.

*“sitting*] Doubtless at the feet of the Rabbis, as was the custom of Jewish boys when sitting began to be permitted.

*“in the midst of the doctors*] Rather, **teachers**. The most eminent Rabbis of this period—some of whom may have been present—were Hillel, his rival Shammai, and his son Rabban Shimeon, Babha ben Butah, Nicodemus, Jochanan ben Zakkai,

“*hearing them, and asking them questions*] Obviously with all modest humility (Cambridge Bible).

“After three days - This means, probably, "on the third day" after they had left Jerusalem - that is, the first day they went toward Galilee, on the second they returned to Jerusalem, and on the third they found him.

“In the temple - In the "court" of the temple, for Jesus, not being a Levitical priest, could not enter into the temple itself.

“In the midst of the doctors - The "teachers," the "rabbis," who were the instructors of the people in matters of religion.

“Asking them questions - Proposing questions to them respecting the law and the prophets. There is no reason to suppose that this was for the purpose of perplexing or confounding them. The questions were doubtless proposed in a respectful manner, and the answers listened to with proper deference to their age and rank. Jesus was a child, and religion does not teach a child to be rude or uncivil, even though he may really know much more than more aged persons. Religion teaches all, and especially the young, to treat others with respect, to show them the honor that is due, to venerate age, and to speak kindly to all” (Barnes’ Notes).

47And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.

“were amazed, not at His position among the *doctors*, or at His asking questions, but at the intelligence shown in His answers to the questions of the teachers; something of the rare insight and felicity which astonished all in after years appearing in these boyish replies” (Expositor’s Greek).

“And all that heard him were astonished,.... All in the sanhedrim, both the doctors, and their disciples, were amazed,

“at his understanding; in the knowledge of the law, and of the Scriptures:

“and his answers; which he returned to the questions the doctor's put to him, which were made with so much wisdom and judgment, that it was surprising in one of his years” (Gill’s Exposition).

48And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.

“*Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us*?] Rather, **My child, why didst thou treat us thus**?

*have sought thee sorrowing*] Rather, **were searching for thee with aching hearts**” (Cambridge Bible).

49And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?

“*Knew ye not that I must be in my Father’s house;*a translation which the words will very well bear; and, so understood, the reply of Christ will signify, that though they thought him lost, yet he was at home; he was *in his Father’s house,*[John 2:16](http://biblehub.com/john/2-16.htm); and that, in staying behind at Jerusalem, he had not left his true Father. “It is to be remembered,” says Dr. Doddridge, “that this is the first visit Christ had ever made to the temple since he was a child in arms; and it is no wonder, therefore, that the delight he found there inclined him to prolong it.” (Benson Commentary).

“Why hast thou thus dealt with us? - Why hast thou given us all this trouble and anxiety, in going so far and returning with so much solicitude?

“Thy father - Joseph was not the "real" father of Jesus, but he was "legally" so; and as the secret of his birth was not commonly known, he was called his father. Mary, in accordance with that usage, also called him so.

“Sorrowing - Anxious, lest in the multitude he might not be found, or lest some accident might have happened to him” (Barnes’ Notes).

50And they understood not the saying which he spoke to them.

“They understood not ... - It is remarkable that they did not understand Jesus in this, but it shows how slow persons are to believe. Even his parents, after all that had taken place, did not seem to comprehend that "he" was to be the Savior of people, or if they did, they understood it in a very imperfect manner” (Barnes’ Notes).

52And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. (blue citation is not in the lesson).

“In favor with God - That is, in proportion to his advance in wisdom. This does not imply that he ever lacked the favor of God, but that God regarded him with favor in proportion as he showed an understanding and spirit like his own” (Barnes’ Notes).

“This is all the record we have of the next eighteen years of that wondrous life” (Jamieson-Faussett-Brown.)