

BaptistWay Press® Premium Commentary

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Studies in GSI: Gospel Story Investigator (Luke)

Lesson Three

Jesus' Developmental Journey

Focal Text

Luke 2:39-52

Background

Luke 2:21-52

Main Idea

Jesus grew up as a typical Jewish boy, but his words revealed uncommon wisdom.

Question to Explore

What can we learn from Jesus' developmental journey.

Quick Read

Jesus grew up like any typical Jewish boy. On a trip to Jerusalem, he worried his parents, but the situation was a big misunderstanding. He was spending time in the house of his Heavenly Father.

Introduction

Watching our children grow can be amazing, exciting, and frightening...all at the same time! Sometimes the words that come out of their mouths contain profound truth. Jesus' words in Luke 2 surprised the religious teachers as well as his earthly parents. The words he uttered revealed uncommon wisdom.

Commentary

Setting the Stage (Luke 2:39-40)

Having been obedient to the decree of the emperor in traveling to Bethlehem for the census (Luke 2:1), Mary and Joseph are now obedient to the law of Moses in traveling to

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Jerusalem to fulfill their religious obligations.¹ Even at the earliest age, everything about Jesus is an extension of Judaism.² Forty days after Jesus' birth,³ the new "parents" travel with their infant son for their "purification according to the law of Moses" (2:22). This process ordinarily involved three steps: (1) Mary's purification which involved the offering of a pair of doves or pigeons in the Court of Women (Leviticus 12:8; cf. Leviticus 5:11); (2) the redemption of the first born (Exodus 13:1-2) involving the payment of five shekels (Numbers 3:47-48; 18:15-16); and (3) the consecration of the first born (1 Samuel 1:11, 22, 28).⁴

Luke, however, does not mention the second element, the payment for the redemption of Jesus (first born). Some scholars have argued that Jesus was already holy and, thus, had no need to be redeemed (Luke 1:35).⁵ Either way, the main emphasis is clear: the family was both pious and obedient, fulfilling the commands of God.

Following Simeon's and Anna's revelations concerning the identity of the infant (2:26-38), the family returns home to the village of Nazareth. Luke summarizes the earliest years of Jesus' life when he writes: "The Child continued to grow and became strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (2:40; cf. 2:52). This section, which begins with Jesus' obedience to the law (2:22), concludes with a word about God's grace.⁶

Journeying to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41)

In accordance with the piety of the family expressed in fulfilling the obligations of Mary's purification, the redemption of the first born, and the consecration of the first born; we now learn that Mary and Joseph also made an annual trek to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. The law, in fact, required that adult males make three feasts each year in the holy city (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:23; Deuteronomy 16:16). In addition to Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles were the other two.⁷ This trip would have been made during the Jewish month of Nisan (late March and early April).⁸ This "year-by-year" rhythm of traveling to Passover reminds us of Samuel's parents' family trips (1 Samuel 1:3, 7, 21; 2:19).⁹

Passover was the opening feast of the seven-day festival known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.¹⁰ Passover called on God's people to remember God's liberating them from Egyptian bondage. Despite God's demand that Pharaoh let God's people go free, Pharaoh hardened his heart. This obstinate attitude brought plagues upon the Egyptians. As the last of the ten plagues, the death angel passed through the land, claiming the lives of all the first born of Egypt—including Pharaoh's own son (Exodus 11:5). The death angel, however, "passed over" the homes of the ancient Israelites because they obediently smeared the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts.

The Exodus was at the center of Israel's faith, and the observance of the Passover allowed parents to teach their children about God's deliverance of his people. Exodus 12:24-27 says,

And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. When you enter the land which the Lord will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'

The trip to Jerusalem was necessary because Passover was never to be observed outside of Jerusalem. We should take note that the next celebration of Passover in Luke's Gospel occurs at its end. This first Passover journey from Galilee to Jerusalem by young Jesus, therefore, may be employed by Luke to foreshadow the future journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, where he also arrives to observe the Passover and spend several days teaching in the temple.¹¹ On this last occasion, the death angel will not pass over the first born of God, as he dies on a cross. His death as the Passover lamb,¹² however, will lead to a greater liberation—deliverance from death.¹³

Coming of Age (Luke 2:42)

At the age of thirteen, a Jewish boy became obligated to observe the law. At age twelve, a Jewish lad was to enter a phase of discernment, preparing himself to become a son of the covenant/law (*bar mitzvah*) the next year. In providing his readers with a story from Jesus' twelfth year, Luke was surely aware that several stories about famous men and events in their twelfth year were circulating at the time. Such stories include the twelfth year for Cyrus, Samuel, Epicurus, Solomon, Daniel, Alexander the Great, Moses, and Cambyses.¹⁴

Losing the Lord (Luke 2:43-44)

I recently officiated the funeral for Ted Roberts who served in numerous Baptist communities and positions, including the Baptist Convention of New Mexico. When sharing stories about her deceased dad, his youngest daughter, Karla, recalled being left at church by her parents. Because he was often the last one to pick up his preschooler, the nursery worker didn't think it unusual that the minister of music, Ted, was a bit late in claiming Karla from the nursery.

As time continued to pass, however, the call came to the Roberts home (remember, no cell phones in the 1960s): "Did you leave something at church?" Oh, my! The wife, Bo, thought that her husband, Ted, had picked up little Karla. In the same fashion, Ted was sure that Bo would bring Karla home that Sunday. While no harm was done, being left "in God's house" was something that Karla kept in her mind for all these decades (her dad lived to be ninety-six).

Perhaps Jesus being left behind happened in a similar fashion. As I envision it, the family starts out with a caravan traveling the three-day journey from Jerusalem back to Nazareth. Traveling in a caravan provided both safety and convenience. It was customary in the caravan for the kids to gather in groups, and Joseph was sure that Mary had

accounted for Jesus' presence, and Mary was likewise certain that Joseph was aware of Jesus' whereabouts.

With such a traveling caravan, the community acted as an extended family which cared for all the kids along the way. Just like the Roberts didn't miss Karla until they arrived home, Mary and Joseph were not forced to face the reality of Jesus' absence until the caravan had already traveled a day's journey and was setting up camp for the evening. There is certainly a somber sound to Luke's words, "They did not find Him," and "they were looking for Him" (2:45).

At a recent Vacation Bible School at First Baptist Church of Amarillo, we celebrated a Family Fun Night out on the First Baptist lawn. The event included about twenty different blow-up bouncy houses, 1,200 hot dogs, 400 pieces of pizza, and 200 barbeque sandwiches. As 1,600 people milled around, trying to keep up with their kids, we soon saw the frantic faces of one family as they were missing their youngest daughter.

The on-sight security team was notified. All staff received the text to begin searching for the missing child. Having already searched for some time, the parents were close to panicking. Fortunately, the child was found safe and sound. I looked to the father and mother, who had been unnerved over losing their daughter, and said, "You'll never read the story about Mary and Joseph losing and finding Jesus the same way again." They heartily agreed. I quickly reminded them, however, that Mary and Joseph had to travel twenty-five miles back to Jerusalem and did not locate him until "the third day!" The First Baptist parents had missed their child less than thirty minutes.

It is quite a mistake to imagine that ancient families cared less or would have been less troubled by the absence of a child. Clearly, as presented in this story, Mary and Joseph were both frantic and distraught.

Finding Jesus After Three Days (2:46)

While some commentators find no special meaning in Luke's language, "after three days,"¹⁵ the allusion seems too obvious to be missed. The three days would have included travel from Jerusalem on the first day, returning to Jerusalem on the second day, and finding him on the third.¹⁶ One outstanding New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, sees much more to the story. He concludes that Luke clearly wants the reader to see his whole Gospel as a story of resurrection. The designation "on the third day" is a hint of the future resurrection. Along those lines, David Garland, in fact, argues that the parents' distress at the loss of Jesus and their joyous discovery of him on the third day combine to foreshadow both the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord.¹⁷

When they finally find Jesus in the temple, he is sitting in the midst of the scribes, dialoging with the teachers. Some see Luke 2:46 as the climax of the story.¹⁸ Here, Jesus is sitting "among the teachers," amazing them with his knowledge of Scripture. Among the 170 words found in this story concerning "young Jesus," the central words (by word

count of the Greek text) are “among the teachers.”¹⁹ Having this phrase framed on each side by an equal number of words draws the reader’s attention to the fact that Jesus was known—even at the age of twelve—as one having great wisdom.

Amazing Them All (2:47)

Jesus not only asked questions, he also gave answers. Luke, in fact, uses a curious word to describe the response of the authorities who heard the answers of “young Jesus.” They were “amazed.” On other occasions in the writings of Luke, the response of amazement is used as people encounter the supernatural. In Luke 8:56, for example, the parents of the young girl are “amazed” as Jesus raises their dead daughter back to life. In Luke 24:22, moreover, the disciples on the road to Emmaus describe the women who went to the tomb as being “amazed” when they find no corpse, but, rather, have visions of angels declaring Jesus is alive. Finally, in Acts 2:7, 12 (Acts is the second volume of Luke), the crowd is amazed as the Holy Spirit falls upon the church, allowing the disciples to preach in such a way that every people group hears the gospel in its own language.

Declaring Their Desperation (2:48)

Anyone who has ever found a lost child will certainly relate to Mary’s harsh response to her once-lost son. A natural reaction to the trauma of searching for, and finally finding a lost child is a rebuke for the “runaway.” Mary makes it clear that she also speaks for Joseph. They have been anxious and tortured by the absence of their son. They discover their son is not sitting on the sidelines in all silence, but in the thick of the conversation, presumably about the interpretation of Scripture.²⁰

Unfolding God’s Plan (2:49)

In verse 48, Mary accuses Jesus of betraying his parents, that is, of betraying the calling that is his as the son of Joseph.²¹ Jesus, on the other hand, now points to a greater obligation to a greater Father. As he stands in the temple, his response could be interpreted this way: “You should have known where to find me—where God, my Father, lives.”²²

Jesus’ language, “I had to be (*dei*),” is the language of necessity that Luke often applies to God’s unfolding plan (4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44). In Luke 9:22, for example, Jesus used the same language of necessity, “The Son of Man *must* (*dei*) suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.” Sadly enough, the next time Jesus teaches in the temple, the teaching will precipitate his death.

“...in my Father’s *house*” is literally translated, “to be in the _____ of my Father.” “House” may be implied as Jesus is standing in the temple as he speaks, but it is not present in the Greek text. Another possible translation is “to be engaged in the affairs of my Father.”²³ Either translation makes clear that Jesus is on another schedule directed by his true Father and not his earthly parents.

Increasing in Favor with God and Men (2:50-52)

While we might be surprised that Mary and Joseph, who had both experienced the miraculous announcement of his birth (Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25), would not understand the necessity of Jesus to be present in the temple, we are reminded that those closest to Jesus—his family and disciples—often found it difficult to fully grasp who he was. Until they witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection, those closest to Jesus have difficulty actually “getting the gospel.”

Echoing back to 2:19, Luke informs us that Mary treasures all these things in her heart. Though she didn't immediately understand, she is open to understanding as God gives her comprehension. Standing as the second bookend, verse 52 repeats both the idea and some specific language of 2:40. Luke finishes this story just as he began: “Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

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¹ David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 135.

² Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 41

³ Seven days after the birth=circumcision; 33 days after the circumcision=purification. See Leviticus 12:3-4.

⁴ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 113.

⁵ One might also argue that although Jesus had no sin and did not need John's baptismal repentance, he submitted himself as a pious person. The parents' payment for the redemption would not have necessarily included the implication that Jesus was unrighteous.

⁶ Garland, 138.

⁷ Pentecost, Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22), was held 50 days (seven weeks) after Passover. The celebration marked the end of the grain harvest. Christians observe Pentecost because it is the day upon which the church was born, as God's Spirit inhabited his people (Acts 2:16-21; Hebrews 3:1-5). (See A. F. Glasser, "Pentecost," *The New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 757.) The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) was held in October. The week-long feast celebrated the bounty of the year's harvest. As the Israelites traveled to Jerusalem, they were to remember the nomadic character of the wilderness period (Leviticus 23:43). During the festival, the pilgrims lived in simple shelters, booths, made of interlaced branches. (See R. K. Harrison, "Booths, Feast of," *The New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* 1 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1979), 535.

⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 100.

⁹ 1 Samuel 1:3 reads, "Now [Elkanah] would go up from his city yearly to worship and to sacrifice to the Lord of hosts in Shiloh...."

¹⁰ Stein, 121.

¹¹ Garland, 143. This second journey encompasses Luke 9:51-22:38.

¹² See John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

¹³ Garland, 143.

¹⁴ John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: World Books, 1989), 129. Those stories that concern biblical characters are not from biblical sources.

¹⁵ Stein, 122. Nolland, 130.

¹⁶ Garland, 144.

¹⁷ Garland, 144-145. I further searched Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles for hints that "the third day" has much meaning. Luke 9:22: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and be raised up on the third day." Luke 18:33: "[A]nd after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again." Luke 24:7: "[S]aying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." Luke 24:21: "But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem

Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened.” Luke 24:46: “[A]nd He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day.’” Acts 10:40: “God raised Him upon the third day....”

¹⁸ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 155.

¹⁹ Green, 155.

²⁰ Garland, 144.

²¹ Nolland, 131.

²² C. F. Evans, *St. Luke*, Trinity Press International New Testament Commentaries (London, SCM, 1990), 426.

²³ See 1 Corinthians 7:32, 34; 13:11.