

## THE VERY HUMAN CHILDHOOD OF THE SON OF GOD Luke 2:39-40

(NASB) "When they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city of Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."

### INTRODUCTION

**Matthew 13:55-56** reveals Joseph and Mary had at least six children after Mary gave birth to **Jesus**, four brothers and at least two sisters. Imagine for a few minutes you are one of the younger siblings of eight-year old **Jesus** living in Nazareth, a community of but 400 residents located 12 miles from the Sea of Galilee, one of the most fertile farming areas in the world. You awake at 6:00 a.m. on a winter morning. Name some things you could *not* have done in Joseph & Mary's home that any child in a typical American home can do today [turn on electric light/furnace, use inside restroom, open frig., fresh water from tap, turn on radio, TV, PC, cell phone, use microwave, take shower/bath, look in mirror]. These conveniences were lacking in most U.S. homes just 100 years ago; over ¼ of the world population lack them today. These are chores you *would* have been expected to do as a child in Joseph & Mary's home: helping feed and/or milk the animals, collect eggs, get "fuel" (usually dung & grass) for the inside fireplace and outside oven, or fetch water from the community well. You would also probably have to crawl over a sibling or two to get out of bed. And no one ate until the morning chores were done. As the eldest son, **Jesus** would have been expected to take the lead in the morning chores and then, beginning at age five or six, go to school for the day. Would **Jesus**, or you, have gone to middle school or high school in New Testament Israel? No.

Just 100 years ago, only 30% of all children in the United States ages 14-17 attended some form of high school. When most people lived in small farming communities, children helping with endless farming chores were more needed than children with advanced education. Learning the basics of the "three R's"—reading, writing, and 'rithmetic—served our nation well until we shifted to a nation of industry and a mostly urbanized nation. In 1800, 95% of Americans lived on farms and in small, farming communities. By 1900, this remained true of more than 60% of Americans. Today, 82% live in cities and towns; just 18% on farms and in farming communities. This background helps us to appreciate the world into which **Jesus** was born, when over 95% of His fellow Jews lived in small villages based on agriculture and fishing.

A career teacher prepared a list of answers from actual test papers and essays submitted to science and health teachers by elementary, middle school, high school, & college students. She states, "It is truly astonishing what weird science our young scholars can create under the pressures of time and grades." If these "young scholars" spouted such "gems of wisdom" in their homes to parents with an elementary education, these parents would have scratched their heads while trying to understand their supposedly better educated children. You will hear just four of the 32 examples she lists: (1) "The body consists of three parts – the branium, the borax, and the abominable cavity. The branium contains the brain, the borax contains the heart and lungs, and the abominable cavity contains the bowels, of which there are five – a, e, i, o, and u"; (2) "For a nosebleed: Put the nose much lower than the body until the heart stops"; (3) "When you smell an odorless gas, it is probably carbon monoxide; and (4) "To keep milk from turning sour: Keep it in the cow."

If a child ever asks you how to tell the smell of one odorless gas from another; or how long we must make our heart stop to cure a nosebleed; or if George Washington was as honest as people say, why do they close the banks on his birthday, you would be polite to smile without saying a word, or to act as if you had not really heard what you were asked. Educator John J. Plomp (1919-93) observed, "You know that your children are growing up when they start asking questions that have answers." Another person said, "If children did not ask questions, they would never learn how little adults know." Can you imagine the questions Joseph and Mary must have been peppered with by the boy **Jesus**? It is often easier to believe in

the supernatural powers **Jesus** possessed as the Son of God than to accept His very real limitations as "the Son of Man," **Jesus'** favorite name for Himself, as in **Matthew 8:20**: "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head." Two weary parents once advertised: "WANTED, AT ONCE—Two fluent and well-learned persons, male or female, to answer the questions of a little girl of three and a boy of four; each to take four hours per day and rest the parents of said children." We could understand if this is how Joseph & Mary felt at times, trying to grasp the questions or to give meaningful answers to **Jesus** as an unusually bright and perceptive child, even aside from the questions and needs of their other six children. Michael Card has written *Joseph's Song*, in which Joseph prays, "Father show me where I fit into this plan of Yours. How can a man be father to the Son of God? Lord for all my life I've been a simple carpenter. How can I raise a king, how can I raise a king?"

We will draw closer to our Savior if we gain a better understanding of The Very Human Childhood of the Son of God. **Jesus'** human development was Normal, Physical, Mental, and Spiritual.

## I. NORMAL

The Bible gives us few specific details about **Jesus** from the time He's born until His ministry begins at "about 30 years old" (**Luke 3:23**). But our knowledge of life in New Testament Israel allows us a much fuller understanding of **Jesus'** "hidden years." Those were years when He experienced humanity to the fullest extent. He lived in a fishbowl for His final three years; but **Jesus** undoubtedly had a normal childhood. It seems God deliberately chose an obscure village for this very reason. Few then knew Him as anything but "the carpenter' son." **Matthew 13: 54-56** records His hometown's reaction after **Jesus** began His ministry as Israel's Messiah: "They were astonished and said, 'How did this wisdom and these miracles come to Him?' <sup>55</sup> Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't His mother called Mary, and His brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And His sisters, aren't they all with us? So where does He get all these things?"

By His incarnation, the Son of God set aside the use of His own Divine attributes to submit Himself fully to the Father's will. **Philippians 2:6-8** (NLT) explains, "Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. <sup>7</sup> Instead, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When He appeared in human form, <sup>8</sup> He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross." Only as one who is fully human, and "has been tested in every way as we are, yet without sin" (**Hebrews 4:15**), could **Jesus** fulfill the life of obedience to God as "the last Adam" and undo the harm done to the human race by "the first man Adam" (**I Corinthians 15:22**). **Hebrews 2:17** (NLT) clarifies, "[I]t was necessary for Him to be made in every respect like us, His brothers and sisters, so that He could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then He could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people." These are deep mysteries that no one can fully explain, but we can accept God's word by faith that this is what happened.

"The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." This is Dr. Luke's way of reporting that **Jesus** as a child developed physically, mentally, and spiritually, as we did. **Jesus** did not perform any miracles as a boy, despite fantastic accounts of such miracles in non-Biblical literature, such as modeling 12 sparrows out of clay, at age 5, then clapping His hands to make them come alive, or commanding a date palm to bend down to refresh Mary with its fruit. **John 2:1-11** (NIV) makes clear that His first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding feast at the start of His public ministry. "What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which He revealed his glory; and His disciples believed in Him."

## II. PHYSICAL

"The Child continued to grow and become strong." What we mean today by our "home" never entered the mind of New Testament Jews. The Hebrew word for "house" simply meant "a shelter"; a place to retire when ill or to sleep. Their goal was to spend as much time as possible in "God's outdoors." As a boy,

**Jesus** would have lived an active life. Aside from family chores, Jewish children had several types of balls for various games, possibly including a form of field hockey. In younger years, wooden hoops were rolled on the ground or rotated around their body. Children may have owned clay marbles or engaged in a game similar to hopscotch. As they grew, boys would often engage in wrestling, archery, or become proficient in using a sling, as their boyhood hero David who used a sling to slay Goliath (**I Samuel 17:40-50**). **Jesus** would also have begun work at an early age with Joseph in His Dad's carpenter shop. A Jewish father would start to teach his trade to his sons as early as possible. The sons would then become his apprentices and then his journeymen. The Rabbis taught a father cursed his son if he failed to teach him a trade.

### III. MENTAL

"The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom." By the time of **Jesus'** birth, primary schools for boys were common throughout Israel (girls were taught privately by parents in their home; many references to Scripture in Mary's spontaneous song of praise for the privilege of being **Jesus'** mother, found in **Luke 1:46-55**, confirm the education of girls was not neglected). These schools were affiliated with the neighborhood synagogue. Children of the poor and rich were enrolled in school at age five or six (depending on their maturity). In schools under 25 students, the Rabbi served as school master. Larger schools would appoint a special school master. Teachers were so highly respected they were referred to as "messengers of the Almighty." The children's main task, as they sat on the ground around their master, would be to repeat from memory the sentences they were taught. A variety of memory aids were utilized, including parallelism, repetition, alliteration, and songs. Their main textbook was the Torah, the five books of law written down by Moses. This was used even for teaching children Hebrew ABCs, such as *aleph* is for *abaq* (the dust of the earth); *bet* is for *bachan* (a watch-tower). When combined, these "alphabet words" could be made into a story by the children to help turn their learning into a game. Did **Jesus** as a boy need to pay close attention to His school master and to work at memorizing His lessons as any child? Yes. Do you think He would interrupt history lessons by supplying an "eyewitness account" of the events being discussed, like describing the color of Moses' eyes, or fierce details of David's encounter with the "lion" or "bear" when it "took a lamb from the flock," or the particular dinosaurs aboard the Ark, or anything else that came to His mind or struck His fancy? No! At that time, He lacked such knowledge.

### IV. SPIRITUAL

"The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." Language, grammar, history, math, and geography were all introduced to children using the Bible. This helped Jewish parents fulfill the charge the LORD gave parents in **Deuteronomy 6:4-9** (NIV), that their children's *moral* education was even more vital to their success than their *mental* education: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord! <sup>5</sup> And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. <sup>6</sup> Keep these words in your heart that I am telling you today. <sup>7</sup> Do your best to teach them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up. <sup>8</sup> Tie them as something special to see on your hand and on your forehead. <sup>9</sup> Write them beside the door of your house and on your gates."

"Wisdom," in the education and training of Jewish children, included "knowledge" and the good sense to use this knowledge for two godly purposes: to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" and to "love your neighbor as yourself" (**Leviticus 19:17**). The extent to which **Jesus** as a youth kept "increasing in wisdom" is why "the grace of God was upon Him." "Grace" is from a Greek word with the basic meaning of "graciousness" or "attractiveness." This Greek word is translated "favor" in **Luke 1:28** (NIV), where the angel Gabriel announced to Mary, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." The gracious qualities of **Jesus'** life, as a young man devoted to pleasing His Heavenly Father, led God to surround **Jesus** with His favor and guidance. James, half-brother to Jesus, may have urged us to, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (**James 4:9**), because James witnessed **Jesus** even as a boy demonstrating such "wisdom."

## CONCLUSION

Leonard Ravenhill (1909-94) was an English evangelist and author who focused on the subjects of prayer and revival. He began preaching an 8-day crusade in a large church in Glasgow, Scotland, on September 3, 1939, which proved to be the first day of World War II for the United Kingdom. The outbreak of war shattered his meetings; no more than 50 showed, so they began meeting in a small side room of the church. Despite this setback, Ravenhill preached his heart out every night urging people to commit their lives to **Jesus**. One night, as he gave the invitation, he saw a rosy-cheeked boy calling to him. Ravenhill went to him. The boy said, "My name is Donald Wilson. Mr. Ravenhill, I am not a Christian. I believe I'm a very good boy but oh, I need Christ." Leonard Ravenhill responded, "If you know that, it's a wonderful thing. Do you come from a Christian family?" "No," said this boy, "My father is a communist, and he's a very, very vicious alcoholic." "What about your mother?" "No," the boy sighed, "She was a Christian, but she's backslidden." After Ravenhill led him to faith in **Jesus Christ**, he then told him to go home and say to his Dad, "I've become a Christian tonight."

Two nights later, despite the threat of German bombing, a burly man showed up at the meeting. He came forward during the invitation. He said he was a communist and that his son had given his life to Christ. Ravenhill said later, "He knocked me for a loop. He confessed, 'Since that time, I didn't want to drink. I thought, 'If my son needed saving, I sure need it.''" Though he looked like he could have thrown Ravenhill right through the building, he just bawled like a child. "I am a sinner," he said; "I need a Savior," and he gave his life to Christ.

Leonard Ravenhill returned to that church after the War. As he sat down with the pastor, the pastor leaned over and said to him, "Brother Ravenhill, you see that well dressed man over there on the left, the one with the white Scotch collar?" "Yes," he said. "That's Wilson." The name did not ring a bell to Ravenhill. "You remember the communist that got saved because his son came to faith? Well, that's him. He is about the strongest Christian in this church. Man, you can rely on him; he's as sure as the dawn. And he wants you to go to their home for a meal."

After services, Leonard Ravenhill went to the Wilson's house for dinner. He soon discovered the whole family had gotten saved: their teenage daughters, and even his mother. As he looked around at the house, Ravenhill noticed it was beautifully painted and kept. Wilson told him, "Mr. Ravenhill, I was the kind of guy who wanted to get the world right, and I wasn't right myself. I'll tell you how much change it makes: Jesus Christ has not only changed my life, He's changed the whole home. I wasn't content even to live in the slum I was in when I was a drunk. I thought, 'This is not the place we should be. The Gospel did this: it met me personally, it met me domestically, it met me socially. I've been able to go back in the factory and tell the men there of the miracle of the Gospel. Jesus took out the habit of cursing other people and of drinking, and all types of the other things. Since I came to faith in Christ came, He completely changed and revolutionized my life."

**Jesus**, as the Son of God who is also the Son of Man, lived a normal human life in His earliest years. He walked in our shoes in many ways, confronting the same challenges and temptations we face. Whatever our needs are, He can relate to us, save us from sin and from ourselves, and deliver us to enjoy the quality of life God created us to experience. As someone aptly said, "The Savior even stoops to the *guttermost* and saves to the uttermost." "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses," **Hebrews 4:15-16** (NIV) assures us, "but we have One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet He did not sin."<sup>16</sup> Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."