

Exegetical Notes - Luke 2:41-52

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Luke 2:41-52

Verse 41

⁴¹ Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.

- There are three feasts that all Jews were commanded to keep each year (see Exodus 23:14-17 and Deuteronomy 16:16). While distance made it difficult for all Jews to attend these feasts in Jerusalem, most devout Jews wanted to do so. As Passover was the most important of the feasts, if only one annual visit to the Temple could be arranged, it would have been during this feast. It was Mary and Joseph's custom to go to Jerusalem each year for Passover.

Verse 42

⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.

- At 13, Jewish males assumed full status in their local synagogue. They became full members of the congregation. The twelfth year was the year when Jewish boys were prepared for their new status in the life of the community. Though Jesus would have gone with Mary and Joseph to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem, this one would have been exceptionally important as it occurred during the year of his preparation (see Leviticus 12:2-8, 5:11, Exodus 13:12-13, Numbers 3:11-18 and 8:17-18. These passages explain the period of purification and the laws concerning the firstborn.).

Verses 43-44

⁴³ After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends.

- When it was time to return to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph were traveling in the company of other people they knew. This large company of people would have been safer than a single family traveling alone. When they set out, they thought Jesus was with them. During the day, his parents assumed that he was with them, somewhere in the group, although they did not see him directly. But when they stopped and attempted to find Jesus, they discovered that he was not in the group.

Verses 45-47

45 When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him.
46 After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

- When Mary and Joseph discovered that Jesus was missing, they returned to Jerusalem to find him. On the third day (*remember the importance of the third day in Jesus' life*) they found him in the temple.
- Jesus was sitting respectfully listening to and questioning the teachers of the law.
- Given his young age, the teachers were astounded (*the Greek word literally means that they were beside themselves*) by his ability to grasp their teaching. His ability to understand was beyond his years.

Verse 48

48 When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you."

- The word translated “astonished” is a very powerful Greek word. It literally means to “strike” or to “strike out in panic.” It implies that either verbally or physically, Mary struck Jesus. This is an indication of the level of her emotional distress over what had happened.
- The word translated “anxiously” is also a very powerful word in Greek. It means to be caused to suffer intense pain. It is sometimes translated to grieve.
- The English translation loses the intensity of this scene. At finding Jesus sitting quietly in the temple, Mary’s emotions exploded. This is a moment of huge confusing emotional release. Mary is happy that Jesus has been safely discovered but she is very angry at him because he caused this disturbance.

Verses 49-50

⁴⁹ “*Why were you searching for me?*” he asked. “*Didn’t you know that I had to be in my Father’s house?*”⁵⁰ *But they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

- Again the words convey a deeper emotional content than is apparent in a quick reading of the verse. In verse 48 Mary says, probably with great emphasis, YOUR father and I...” When Jesus responds to her emotional comment he, very pointedly says, “MY father’s house.” Jesus was very clearly declaring that even at the age of twelve he understood his place and his calling before God. He was reassuring Mary that she need not be concerned because his place in God’s plan was absolutely secure and totally independent of her. But Mary and Joseph did not understand.

Verses 51-52

⁵¹ *Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.* ⁵² *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.*

- The words imply that Jesus understood that Mary and Joseph did not understand what he had said in verse 49. However, he did not attempt to expose or change their misunderstanding. Instead he did as they required and was obedient to them because he understood that they did not understand.
- The word translated “treasured” means to “gather together.” Mary gathered all these things that happened together and thought about them.
- Charles Ryrie, the great Bible scholar, says that after these events happened a veil was drawn so that we have no other record of the events of Jesus’ life until his public ministry began. All that we know is that he grew in wisdom and stature and that he attained favor with God and with other people.

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