

Bite Size Bible Study

Jesus' Upbringing #86

By Pastor Lee

The Bible tells us very little about Jesus as He is growing up. Aside from the single event recorded in Luke of his speaking with the elders at age 12, we have no clues about how He spent His childhood. But we are not without extra biblical information of how male children spent their youth. Since we are told that Jesus experienced what it was like to be a human being, we can surmise that He lived a typical life as a youth.

Education is highly regarded in the Jewish community. It is regarded as one of the highest forms of the worship of God. It is no surprise then that this education begins early in a child's life. The Mishnah tells the typical ages at which a child should be ready for a specific study.

- At 5 years of age, one is ready to study the Scripture (Written Torah), meaning to memorize it.
- At 10, one is fit for the study of Mishnah (the Oral Law, the rabbinic commentary on the Written Torah).
- At age 13, one is fit for the fulfillment of the commandments. At this age children become morally accountable to the Law.

All children study the Scriptures through age 12 or 13; it is considered what we would call elementary school. Formal education ends here for most. But the more gifted continue on to study further. At the age 15, one begins studying Talmud (rabbinic legal decisions).

The most gifted from here often leave home and study with a famous rabbi. Some have speculated that Jesus may have studied under one of these famous rabbis. At the age of 30, one is ready to enter into one's full vigor. Jesus at this point would have been deemed a recognizable teacher and one who now speaks with certain authority. This is why His ministry did not begin until the age of 30. In doing so, it gave the opportunity for the people of His culture to embrace His teaching with confidence.

Joseph and Mary raised Jesus in Nazareth, located on a mountain ridge between Cana and the Jezreel Valley in the Lower Galilee. The city during the days of the New Testament was only a small Galilean village of perhaps only a few dozen extended families. Estimates of the population range from 480 to as much as 1600. The town was located only four miles from Sepphoris, the region's most prominent city.

Joseph was a carpenter, and worked in wood and masonry. Carpenters were highly ranked in the building trades and were right up there with the

architects and master builders. During Jesus' youth Sepphoris was being rebuilt and carpenters were needed to complete the city. Jesus probably accompanied His father to Sepphoris on occasions to learn the trade.

"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Matthew 13:55 (NIV)

The land in Nazareth was rugged hillsides. It has been estimated from archeological digs that each family may have had 10 to 12 acres of land. On that land a family would have vineyards, wheat and barley fields, olive groves, and fig trees. In addition to the crops they would have flocks of sheep and goats, oxen and cows, and possibly mules or donkeys for a pack animals.

All of these had to be cared for constantly. This meant that it was "all hands on deck", men, women, and children. As a child grew up he/she would be given more and more responsibility. This was a subsistence economy and it has been estimated that each family during this time would be short on minimum nutrients by an average of 30 to 60 days a year. The cause for this was largely due to high taxes and corruption in the Roman government.

Jesus, during his youth would no doubt have assisted in the maintenance of these valuable assets. During the grain harvest, He may have helped cut and bundle the grain or helped in separating the wheat from the chaff. During the planting season He would help with the planting of the seeds. In the fall He would have helped harvest the grapes and maybe even helped in pressing the grapes. At other times He would have helped tend the vines and gathered the figs from the fig trees, as well as the olives from the olive trees. He would have fed and tended the animals, shepherded the sheep and milked the goats and cows. Helped during the sheering and as a small child may have even had a chance to clean the wool and have a hand at spinning the yarn.

The Gospels don't tell us much about this period of Jesus' life, probably because the writers knew that the people reading these letters would automatically know what would be a normal childhood, and it wasn't particularly pertinent to the greater story. But knowing this brings a greater understanding of the sayings and parables that Jesus taught. He was intimately familiar with these things and was speaking from experience and not just what He had seen or heard.

Cornerstone Community Church

PO Box 654 Lemon Grove, CA 91945-0654 – www.cornerstonecommunityonline.org