



THE QUIET YEARS

Course 4, *The Promised One*, Lesson 2

The Problem: To understand the struggles of the child Jesus, and His continuing conflicts with human and demonic forces during His ministry, we need to know something about the political, social, and religious environment in which He was raised. Who were the rulers of Palestine in Jesus' day? What kinds of divisions were there in the society in which Jesus was brought up? What religious parties were prominent? Why would these groups pose problems for one with Jesus' convictions? What kind of place was His hometown? Were the citizens of His town favorable or unfavorable to His divine mission?

Although the Gospels do not tell us much about Jesus' immediate family, it is interesting to learn what they do tell us. Would there be likely conflicts with family members with which we can identify? What about the involvement of the child Jesus in the educational and religious life of the Jewish people? Did He follow the teachings of the rabbis? How did He react when first exposed to the services of the temple in Jerusalem and to the instruction of the religious scholars who taught there?

Some of the evidence is sketchy because the Gospels pass quickly over the childhood and youth of Jesus. Even so, there are some important principles for us to learn as we study this phase of His life. And we can better appreciate how it was that "*He was in all points tempted like as we are*" (Hebrews 4:15), when we view Him in the particular political, social, and religious environment to which He was exposed.

Objectives

- I. To consider the world of Jesus' day.
- II. To learn indications from Scripture of what Jesus like as a child.
- III. To consider the town of Nazareth and the kind of people who lived there.
- IV. To discover indications from Scripture of what was Jesus' immediate family was like.
- V. To learn from His first visit to the temple at the age of twelve.

I. THE WORLD OF JESUS' DAY

The New Testament highlights the religious conflicts in Palestine during Jesus' time, frequently referencing tensions between factions and their opposition to Roman rule. Secular history fills in some of the details for us. Let us begin with the Bible account.

The Word:

1. What do the Gospels say about the Pharisees? Matthew 15:1-9; compare 23:1-11.
2. What are we told about the Sadducees? Matthew 22:23; Acts 4:1-3; 23:8.
3. What is revealed concerning the Samaritans? John 4:9, 19-20.
4. What other Jewish parties are mentioned? Matthew 22:16; compare Mark 3:6; 12:13; Luke 6:15.
5. What was the attitude of the Jews to their Roman rulers? John 11:48.

Explanation: The Romans ruled Palestine in Jesus' day. The Roman Emperor had appointed a Roman procurator who ruled Judea. Despite this, the Jews had a certain degree of freedom in conducting their own national affairs. Their leaders feared that a further loss of liberty and independence would follow if Jesus were to become a king. In fact, Jesus had no aspirations towards an earthly kingdom. See John 18:36. The Jews despised their Roman overlords and wished to be free of foreign interference in the affairs of their nation.

Judea had been under foreign control from the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. until the Maccabean revolt in the mid-second century B.C. In this period, the Jews were controlled by a series of foreign nations: Babylon, Persia, Greece, Egypt, and Syria. Under the Syrian kings in the second century B.C., Hellenistic thought and religion became strongly influential in Judea. The Syrian ruler Antiochus IV, Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.) tried to force his religion and political ideas on the Jews. In 167 B.C., they rebelled under the leadership of Judas Maccabeus. "Maccabee" means hammerer. Judas was so-called because he and the army he raised hammered away against the Syrians. They were finally successful in driving the Syrians out and establishing Jewish independence. The Maccabean rulers took over the high-priestly office, but they were increasingly influenced by Hellenistic ideas and were motivated by purely political ambition. (The term "Hellenistic" refers to the blending of Greek culture with local traditions, particularly in regions such as Egypt, the Near East, and Central Asia.)

In 64/63 B.C. Rome made Palestine a Roman province. Between 63 B.C. and 4 B.C. Herod the Great, a half-Jewish adventurer, was made a vassal king under Roman overlordship. Herod the Great was a Jew by citizenship and religious profession. He improved the prosperity of the land, renovated the temple, and courted favor with both Jews and Romans. Because the Jews regarded him as a tool of the Romans, they disliked his rule. When he died in 4 B.C. the kingdom was divided between three of his sons. Archelaus became ruler of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea (4 B.C. to 6 A.D.) Herod Antipas took Galilee and Peraea (4 B.C. to A.D. 41). Phillip ruled the region east and northeast of the Sea of Galilee (4 B.C. to A.D. 33/34). Archelaus was deposed by Augustus Caesar and was succeeded as ruler of Judea by a Roman Procurator. Pontius Pilate was the procurator at the time of Jesus' trial and death. The Herod on the throne when Jesus was born was Herod the Great. Herod Antipas was the one to whom Jesus was sent by Pilate during the trial.

The Jews at the time of Jesus were looking for a Messiah to set up an earthly Jewish kingdom. He would conquer the enemies of Israel, gather the dispersed, and rule in Jerusalem. The dead would be raised, and the final judgment would take place. The idea of a suffering, sin-atoning Messiah was largely forgotten.

The Pharisees were a strict, legalistic religious party that laid great stress on the observance of rites and ceremonies. They pretended superior piety and separated themselves from the common people. They believed in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which they had borrowed from philosophical sources. They also believed in the resurrection of the body and the existence of angels and spirits.

The Sadducees were the aristocrats among the Jews who ingratiated themselves with their heathen rulers. The High Priest was traditionally a Sadducee. The Sadducees denied the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, the existence of angels and spirits, and the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. They were deists, denying divine activity in human affairs.

The Samaritans were the remnants of the northern 10 tribes, left behind after Assyrian captivity of 722 B.C. They intermarried with the heathen peoples transported to Palestine. Zerubbabel had refused their aid in rebuilding the Jerusalem temple; hence they erected their own temple on Mt. Gerizim. They were outcasts from Judaism, even though they accepted the Pentateuch, which they interpreted much as did the Jews.

The Herodians were a political party that had accepted the subservient position of the national government to the Romans. They courted favor with the half-foreign court that ruled the greater part of Palestine.

The Zealots were opposed to the Herodians. They were fiercely patriotic and would acknowledge no king but Yahweh. National Jewish independence was their goal.

Relevance: Jesus was born into a culture that was being torn asunder by conflicting religious and political interests. He espoused none of the prevailing parties but devoted His entire life to living and teaching the principles of the holy Scriptures. Against the Pharisees, He taught salvation by faith. In opposition to the Sadducees, He emphasized the certainty of the resurrection. He manifested disdain for Jewish pride and prejudice by showing love and mercy to Samaritans and foreigners, including Romans. He disappointed the Herodians and Zealots by disclaiming any interest in establishing an earthly kingdom. In opposition to the scholarly rabbis, Jesus insisted on God's Word as the sole source of faith and practice, rejecting the man-made traditions that had emerged in the centuries prior to His birth.

II. WHAT WAS JESUS LIKE AS A CHILD?

We shall consider the Gospel record of Jesus' development physically, intellectually, socially, and spiritually.

The Word

6. What was Jesus' spiritual state at birth? Luke 1:35.
7. Read Luke 2:40, 52 and list the phrases that describe Jesus' development:
 - a. Physically
 - b. Intellectually
 - c. Socially
 - d. Spiritually
8. What was Jesus' trade for the first 30 years of His life? Mark 6:3.
9. Was He obedient to His parents? Luke 2:51; Hebrews 5:8.
10. Did the child Jesus ever sin? Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 1:19; 2:2.

Explanation: Think of a child and youth who never sinned, never disobeyed, or acted selfishly! The world has seen only one such life. He learned a trade, worked faithfully, and brought joy and happiness to His family and acquaintances. Physically He always obeyed the laws of health. Intellectually He constantly grew in wisdom and knowledge of the Scriptures and the laws of nature. Socially, Jesus increased in favor of man. He was not a recluse. His concern was the happiness and healing of other people. He must have been gentle, submissive, and always more thoughtful of others than of Himself. No doubt He was despised by some because of His integrity. Yet he never retaliated or harbored bitterness.

Spiritually Jesus was born holy, and He always remained so. At every stage of His growth, He was perfect, in the image of God. The indications are that Satan was unwearied in his attempts to entice Jesus to sin, but by prayer, meditation, and Bible study He was strengthened to resist. Even though in a mysterious sense He bore human sinfulness (Isaiah 53:6; 2 Corinthians 5:21) and was tempted in every area as we are (Hebrews 4:15), Jesus never sinned.

Relevance: The youthful Jesus was in every sense the model and example for children and youth. As He overcame, so may they. To them as much as to adults His promise applied: "*To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne*" Revelation 3:21.

III. THE TOWN OF NAZARETH

The record indicates that Jesus was a humble peasant boy brought up in a town of peasants who were noted for their wickedness.

The Word:

11. Where did Joseph and Mary return to after having fled to Egypt with the baby Jesus? Matthew 2:22-23.

12. What was the attitude of Nathanael toward Nazareth? John 1:46.
13. What was the attitude of the inhabitants of Nazareth toward Jesus' teaching? Matthew 13:54-58; compare Mark 6:1-6
14. On another occasion what did the people of Nazareth try to do to Jesus? Luke 4:28-30.

Explanation: Nathanael's reaction to Nazareth reveals much concerning the people and their reputation. On at least two occasions the people consciously rejected Jesus, even trying on one of those occasions to take His life.

The town of Nazareth today is called *en-Nasirah*. It is located in Lower Galilee, about 64 miles north of Jerusalem, and about 17 miles west of the Sea of Galilee.

Relevance: What a contrast the life of Jesus was to the lives of the people of Nazareth! He was like a lily in a swamp. And what a struggle it must have been for Him to maintain the purity of His life, surrounded as He was by so much degradation! The message to us is that poverty and depressed surroundings can be overcome by the grace of God. Jesus never allowed His living conditions to mold His character. Heaven was in His heart!

IV. THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY OF JESUS

The struggles of the boy Jesus were undoubtedly increased by the attitudes of His own family. We know very little of them, but what we are told is quite revealing.

The Word

15. What were the names of Jesus' brothers? Did He also have sisters? Matthew 13:55-56.
16. What remark of Jesus indicates that, early in His career, He was not accepted by members of His family? Matthew 13:57.
17. What evidence is there that His family tried to interfere in His work? Mark 3:20-21, 31.
18. How did Jesus' brothers show their unbelief in Him as the Christ? John 7:3-5.
19. What indications are there that Jesus' brothers later accepted Him? Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19; Jude 1:1

Explanation: Mary had no children before the birth of Jesus (Matthew 1:18, 25). Whether she had children younger than Jesus, we are not told. The indications are that Jesus' brothers and sisters were Joseph's children by a former marriage. They were more than likely older than Jesus because Semitic ethics would not permit younger brothers to taunt an older brother as Jesus' brothers taunted Him (John 7:3-5). Furthermore, when He was on the cross, Jesus committed His mother to the care of His beloved disciple John. The suggestion is that Jesus' brothers and sisters were not Mary's children and that she needed an "adopted" son to take care of her. Later Jesus' brothers accepted His claim to be the Messiah and became faithful workers in the early Christian Church.

Relevance: Four older brothers and at least two older sisters could make life uncomfortable for a child who refused to enter into their pranks and schemes. Jesus must often have been ostracized and often have been the brunt of their thoughtless jests. Even during His ministry, He was obliged to suffer their unbelief. Yet, never is there the slightest evidence that He treated them with anything but love and brotherly acceptance. His patience paid off, for they became His loyal followers.

V. JESUS' FIRST VISIT TO THE TEMPLE

The Jerusalem temple was the place for worship and the offering of sacrifices for sin. There were three annual feasts at which the presence of every male Jew was expected to be in Jerusalem: Passover (unleavened bread), Pentecost (feast of harvest), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Exodus 23:14-17). The Passover commemorated the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 12). The lamb that was sacrificed at this service pointed forward to the sacrificial death of the Messiah. Hence Jesus' first Passover was for him a time of great interest and significance.

The Word:

20. How old was Jesus when He was first taken to the Passover service in Jerusalem? Luke 2:41-42.
21. When the service was over and the pilgrims were on their way home, what did Jesus do? Luke 2:43-47.
22. What was Jesus' answer to His mother's expression of concern? Luke 2:48-51.

Explanation: What an impact the offering of the Passover lamb must have made on Jesus' mind. For the first time during His earthly sojourn, He saw a preview of His own death. See 1 Corinthians 5:7. After the service was over, His parents did what we might do; they lost sight of Him and started for home without Him. It took a relatively short time to lose Him, but a considerably longer time to find Him again.

Jesus' young mind had been filled with the Scriptures. He asked the rabbis questions and answered their questions in such a way that He captivated them. They were great scholars who tended to go beyond the simplicity and natural meaning of the Word. Jesus brought them face to face with the deep significance of the Scriptures that He Himself had given to the prophets. His answer to His mother's rebuke revealed that He now understood His relation to His heavenly Father. In His youthful way, He had begun the work that he had come to earth to perform.

Relevance: Have we, like the rabbis, forgotten the great spiritual significance of the truths of Scripture? We can know the truth and be set free by it if we keep sight of Jesus. See John 8:32. If we lose His presence in our hearts it may take us many days to regain the relationship and the peace of mind that He conveys to us. See John 14:18, 27. The early life of Jesus in Nazareth reveals that His struggles were similar to those of suffering humanity in general. He is an example for every child and youth. Jesus was born into a society that, in terms of its political, social, religious, and family relationships, was markedly disunited and far from the ideals established by God. Yet He so depended upon His Father by prayer and Bible study that at the age of twelve He was able to meet the minds of the great Jewish scholars of the day.

To know Him is to have His power to meet the challenges of life whatever your home or community environment. Jesus cares for you wherever you live, and however unpleasant your social relationships. He asks you to appeal to Him by prayer and surrender every day, in every situation. Will you commit yourself to Him in this way?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. The world of Jesus' day was more united than our world.
 - b. As a child, Jesus had advantages over other children.
 - c. The people of Nazareth were wealthy aristocrats.
 - d. Jesus' brothers and sisters were not at first supportive of Him.
2. Discuss: Jesus remained at home in Nazareth for 30 years (Luke 3:23), working as a carpenter and relating to family and fellow citizens. Yet at the end of that period, He was much better versed in Scripture than the scholars of His day. See John 7:15; Matthew 22:46. How can we also grow in our understanding of His Word, enabling us to confidently yet humbly defend our faith?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, The Desire of Ages, pp. 68-83.