

## **Proposed Childhood of Jesus**

There is little written about the early life of Jesus other than His birth, flight to Egypt, and the Temple incident at age 12.

Why wouldn't scripture provide any additional information about Jesus' childhood years? Scripture, I believe, gives us some other insights into Jesus' childhood from what is called the Messianic passages. If they are indeed referring to Jesus, these passages open a door to understanding a lot about His early childhood. There are two specific passages that we will focus on.

Before we view those passages, let's examine some attributes that Jesus displayed in the Biblical accounts of His childhood.

Regardless of culture, there are certain realities in life that will always hold true. Some of those realities took place with Jesus before the Temple episode and after the trip.

There are a few attributes about Jesus which, I believe, appear very early in His life. These are the types of attributes that appear in the general population and are not special to Jesus alone.

The first attribute is that it appears that Jesus had a perfect memory recall. This combined with high intellect allowed Him to astound the doctors, rabbis, and learned men in the temple. Jesus both asked questions and gave answers to the men in the temple. Being able to do both implies not only a knowledge of the whole Old Testament but also the writings of other teachers of the time. In our day, we would call Him a 'gifted child' and so He was. (Luke 2:41 ff) Nor are such children rare by any means.

The second attribute is hidden in this passage and is another suggestion which has huge ramifications. The text says He was there in the temple for 3 days by Himself. What is that? Three days? Jesus was able to fully care for Himself at this age. This would include Him being able to make His way around a large city and basically make decisions about Himself. I suspect this was the first time in His young life that He was exposed to acceptance, and that by strangers.

How is this possible? Some would say that you would expect the Son of God to do these things. In reality, I think there is another reason.

He had been taught His stepfather's trade; some say the trade was carpentry, others say it was masonry. He would be physically strong. He would have had responsibilities towards His brothers and sisters. Now, this becomes a significant piece of information.

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Jesus had four brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. (Matthew 13:55) He also had several sisters according to tradition.

There is little doubt that Jesus' siblings had some negative feelings towards Him. Considering the nature of Mary's pregnancy before marriage, Jesus would have become a source of scorn by His siblings and adults alike. In fact, I would suggest that Jesus endured significant distress at the hands of others. These attitudes and behaviors were not new. Rather Jesus is exposed to rejection and jealousy all of His life.

Are there any scriptures which may indicate any of this? I believe so.

Let's begin with Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 should be accounted for because His ministry years do not answer the questions raised by the passages concerning Jesus' childhood. This is a passage that conservative theologians would insist is a reference to the coming Messiah.

Starting with verse 2, notice these traits. The NIV states, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." The RSV reads, "He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him." The JPS version says, "He had no form or beauty that we should look at him, no charm that we should find him pleasing." So first, He was not attractive, like King David.

Second, look at the next verse; "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Our tendency is to apply this to Jesus' ministry. I do not think so; this context is in His early life. Sure, during His ministry there were some who hated Him, but the vast number of people loved Him.

It makes good sense that during those early years, the passage is saying Jesus was despised and rejected first by His brothers and sisters and then followed by the general population. Why would it be this kind of rejection?

Examining the nature of Jesus' birth, Mary was not married at the time of her pregnancy. Jesus' family knew it and the community had to have known it as well. It is apparent that the family was slow to accept the specialness of Jesus. Even being aware of the birth story does not ensure belief in divinity.

In fact, a close reading of Luke 4:22 reveals the amazement that this is the same Jesus that grew up among them. His family did not believe that He was special. (John 7:3ff) Even before this, we find the family of Jesus wanting to declare Jesus crazy and take Him away. (Mark 3:31-35, Matthew 12:46ff, Luke 8:19-21)

I believe that Luke 4 may even give another perspective that might help us understand what is happening. To see it we must look at what happens when we translate verse 22 back into the original language that Jesus spoke. First, the translation of Luke 4:22 in the RSV, “And all spoke well of him and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.” If we translate this back into the original language look what happens. “And they all testified against him and were shocked at the disgraceful words that were coming out of his mouth, and they said this is the son of Joseph.” It is too complex to go into why this whole conversation comes out differently, but it does provide context. The text is now compatible with the attempted stoning of Jesus. He is disliked and rejected by those He grew up among, regardless of all His miracles.

Also, the family of Jesus grew up with Him. To them, He was nothing special and He was an embarrassment. Nowhere do we find them supporting Him. We must remember none of Jesus’ family were followers of Him and they did not experience what the disciples experienced. His family did not live through moments like the calming of the storm and the transfiguration, nor were they anywhere near his trial or crucifixion. They grew up with Jesus and disliked Him.

Returning to Isaiah 53, we find that He was not attractive. Jesus probably, to some extent, kept to Himself because of the behavior of others towards Him. The text points out that He was a person of sorrow and grief. These attributes are experienced in childhood. They were lifelong experiences, not just the last week of His life.

So, we see a summary of Jesus’ early years in Isaiah. One may ask why was there this depth of rejection and why did the Father allow His son to experience this abuse? Simply how else would Jesus come to know the depth of man’s hatred? He knows men are not to be trusted. Now He is indeed prepared to love His enemy and to practice forgiveness.

Turning from Isaiah, let’s examine Psalm 69. This is one of the Messianic Psalms, several passages are quoted in the New Testament. It is my contention that this passage gives us the view into the heart of Jesus’ early life, and it is not pleasant.

Here are the first twenty verses:

Save me, O God!

For the waters have come up to my neck.

I sink in deep mire,

where there is no foothold;

I have come into deep waters,  
and the flood sweeps over me.

I am weary with my crying out;  
my throat is parched.

My eyes grow dim  
with waiting for my God.

More in number than the hairs of my head  
are those who hate me without cause;  
mighty are those who would destroy me,  
those who attack me with lies.

What I did not steal

must I now restore?

O God, you know my folly;  
the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me,

O Lord God of hosts;

let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me,

O God of Israel.

For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach,

that dishonor has covered my face.

I have become a stranger to my brothers,

an alien to my mother's sons.

For zeal for your house has consumed me,

and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting,

it became my reproach.

When I made sackcloth my clothing,

I became a byword to them.

I am the talk of those who sit in the gate,

and the drunkards make songs about me.

But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord.

At an acceptable time, O God,

in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness.

Deliver me

from sinking in the mire;

let me be delivered from my enemies

and from the deep waters.

Let not the flood sweep over me,

or the deep swallow me up,

or the pit close its mouth over me.

Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good;

according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

Hide not your face from your servant,

for I am in distress; make haste to answer me.

Draw near to my soul, redeem me;

ransom me because of my enemies!

You know my reproach,

and my shame and my dishonor;

my foes are all known to you.

Reproaches have broken my heart,

so that I am in despair.

I looked for pity, but there was none,

and for comforters, but I found none.

In this first section, the Psalmist begins with a plea for help. This is not a reference to actual drowning in the sense of water or mud. This passage is referring to drowning in hatred. Whose hatred? That becomes clearer as we proceed through the material.

One may ask why is God, His father, not paying attention to His plea? Just as God would not intervene in the crucifixion years later, He could not intervene here. Jesus had to grow; He had to mature mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. There are no shortcuts to life. Isaiah proclaimed that He would be acquainted with sorrow and now we see just how much sorrow He endured.

So, the passage declares that Jesus would be hated without cause.

After age 12 or before? My suggestion is that it began at an early age and the assaults came from within His family and from the community.

Proceeding to the next section in Psalms 69, we find a host of accusations occurring against Jesus. We find Jesus begging the Father to protect others; He is pleading that they not be brought down or dishonored by the accusations against Him. The psalmist goes on to point to the family, not only as the accuser but also the ones who might be shamed through Him.

Evidently, even His family is bearing criticism because of Jesus. Following criticism comes the spread of the gossip. Now it is the talk of the elders of the city, and it has even grown to the point that the drunkards of the city proclaim songs of ridicule.

#### Conclusion:

Now we have a better understanding of the passage in Philippians 2:6-7; “who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of man”.

Jesus made the decision to leave the Father’s side and to become human. He left omniscience, knowledge, and godhood to become one of us. Until He was 30, in all respects, He was like us. Even the gifted mental ability is a human trait.

When He was baptized and received the Spirit, other gifts were bestowed upon Him which would allow Him to complete His mission. His miracles? Does He not tell us that we will also be able to do mighty acts in His name? Our sorrows, in all respects, are His sorrows.

It is neither reasonable nor practical to think that Jesus led a trouble-free life until He was 30 years old when He began His ministry. It is easy to proclaim that His divinity made everything easy for Him and He had all wisdom and knowledge, but this is just not the case.

In fact, even in the 3 years of his ministry, Jesus found Himself amazed by men. Jesus marveled at the centurion’s replies. (Matthew 8:10ff) We find Jesus astonished at the disbelief of his hometown in spite of all his miracles. (Mark 6:6) These passages do not reflect omniscience. Even when it came to His upcoming arrest, He is found pleading with the Father if there is another way. (Mark 14:32ff)

The writer of Hebrews insists that in every way Jesus experienced what we experience. (Hebrew 4:14ff). He learned obedience just as we must learn obedience. He suffered just as we suffer, not just during the last 3 years of His life, nor just the 40 days in the wilderness. His strength of character, trust, and faith was built on the sorrow and trials of childhood, and even into manhood. Even if Psalm 69 is not a detailed description of Jesus early life, and I believe it is, He would have to have gone through this if indeed he suffered in every way as we do.

So, I offer a decidedly different view of Jesus before His ministry, His early childhood was filled with disbelief, hatred, and rejection. This is why He is able to understand us, because He walked in our shoes, tasted the bitterness of family and friends from birth until death.

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