

## Chapter Two (2:1-52)

### THE BIRTH OF THE SON OF MAN

#### IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. Is there really a need to tell which Roman Caesar and which Syrian governor was ruling when Jesus was born (2:1-2)?
2. How could Jesus be of the lineage of David since Joseph was not His real father (2:4)?
3. Did the angels really "sing" at Jesus' birth (2:13)?
4. Why did Mary keep to herself all the miraculous things about her baby's birth (2:19)?
5. How could an old Jewish man acknowledge that the birth of Jesus was a light for revelation to the "Gentiles" (2:32)?
6. Wouldn't it be precocious and disobedient for Jesus to stay behind at Jerusalem when his parents left for Nazareth (2:43)?
7. How is it possible that the Divine Son of God could "increase" in wisdom and in favor with God and man (2:52)?

#### SECTION 1

##### Portents (2:1-21)

**2** In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. <sup>2</sup>This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup>to be enrolled with Mary his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup>And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

<sup>8</sup> And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. <sup>10</sup>And the angel said to them, "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; <sup>11</sup>for to you is born this day in the city of David

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a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>And this will be a sign for you: you will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

<sup>15</sup> When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

<sup>16</sup>And they went with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. <sup>17</sup>And when they saw it they made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

<sup>21</sup> And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

**2:1-7 Swaddling Cloths:** A little under six months passes between chapters 1 and 2 of Luke's record. Mary returned to her home in Nazareth after visiting with Elizabeth about 3 months (1:56). About six months later Mary's time for delivering her first born arrives. Micah the prophet (5:2) had predicted the Messiah's birth would be in Bethlehem of Judea, but Mary was at her home in Nazareth of Galilee—80 or 90 miles apart. God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform. Caesar Augustus, emperor of the Roman Empire, made a decree for a world-wide census to be taken. This census evidently required Jews to travel to the hometown of their tribal ancestors; probably because genealogical records and property titles were kept there. Bethlehem was the city of Joseph's ancestors since he was from the lineage of David, (see Ruth 1:10; 2:4; I Sam. 16:1-4; 17:58, etc.).

Caesar Augustus (born Gaius Octavius, Sept. 23, 63 B.C.) had been adopted by his great-uncle, Julius Caesar, as his heir. Octavian's grandmother, Julia, was the younger sister of Julius Caesar. When his uncle Julius was assassinated, March 15, 44 B.C., Octavian was a young man of 19. By skillful political manipulation of friends and family in high places he was able to become one of the three most powerful men in the empire. At the battle of Actium, Sept. 2, 31 B.C., Octavian defeated Mark Antony his only remaining rival to complete political control of the empire. Octavian pretended at first that he wished the republican form of government to be restored. He kept certain formalities of the

republic outwardly and at first declined the titles *rex* (king) and *dictator*. By adoption he had the famous name "Caesar" and after his victory over Antony the Roman Senate declared him "Augustus." He soon consolidated all the power of rule into his hands and became in fact, Emperor. He reigned until his death in A.D. 14. Augustus married Livia Drusilla in 38 B.C. She had previously been married to her cousin Tiberius Claudius Nero but Augustus compelled her to divorce her husband and marry him. She and Augustus had no children but Livia had a son, Tiberius, by her first husband. Livia was noted for her beauty and powerful political influence—even over Augustus. Some historians believe Livia poisoned her emperor-husband so that her son, Tiberius, could become emperor.

The reign of Augustus, and especially the *census* mentioned by Luke is one of the critical points relating to the historical accuracy of this Gospel. If Luke is inaccurate about this census in the reign of Augustus, then his entire record is suspect. For a long time enemies of the Bible pointed to this "enrollment" as an example of its inaccuracies, for there were no Roman records to substantiate Luke's claim that a world-wide census took place in the days of Augustus. However, Sir William Ramsay (and others) investigated and found that Clement of Alexandria (200-300 A.D.) made reference to such a system of enrollment in the Roman empire. Recent archaeological discoveries have remarkably confirmed and illuminated Luke's record, attesting his reliability *in detail*: (1) a number of papyrus documents have been discovered showing that a census was made every 14 years and also pointing back to one taken about 9-6 B.C. Josephus shows that these "enrollments" (one in 6 A.D. specifically) often caused rebellious uprisings in Palestine and that Jewish rulers often delayed carrying out these orders of Rome as long as they could in order to placate the people. The census ordered 9-6 B.C. in Syria was undoubtedly delayed by Herod in Palestine until 5-4 B.C. and so Luke's accuracy is verified, (2) early historical records *seemed* to show that Quirinius (Cyrenius) was governor of Syria in 6 A.D., 10 years too late for the birth of Christ. However, an inscription was found in Rome in 1828 by archaeologists indicating that Quirinius was also governor in Syria in 10-7 B.C. Ramsay found a monument in Asia Minor which confirmed the discovery in Rome, so Quirinius was twice governor in Syria and he was occupying this office when Augustus ordered the first enrollment, which is exactly what Luke says, (3) and last, historians found an edict made in 104 A.D. by the governor of Egypt (which was under the Roman rule just like Palestine) which showed that at the time of the census people were to return to their ancestral homes. Luke's gospel record is accurate in minute detail! The critics are wrong!

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G. Campbell Morgan focuses on the apparent insignificance of these two peasants, Joseph and Mary, down in a remote and despised corner of the Roman Empire bending their necks to the decree of the great and powerful Augustus. Two individuals amid the massed millions of the Roman world, as unknown to Caesar as you and I to the rich, powerful and famous today. But things are oftentimes not what they seem. Look at this scene from God's perspective through Luke's record. Look at Mary—her womb is the residence of the Son of God as she travels. Look at the edict of Augustus—was it really the only sovereign edict being fulfilled? Almost 700 years before Augustus, the sovereign Creator decreed that His Son would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Morgan writes, "When I read that (prophecy), uttered six hundred and fifty years before these events, I see that the really insignificant person in the drama is the little puppet in the city on the seven hills, called Caesar Augustus; and the significant personalities are the woman in whose womb tabernacles the Son of God, and the man who is guarding her."

While in Bethlehem, Mary delivered the Child conceived in her womb by the Holy Spirit and she wrapped Him in swaddling cloths. *Swaddling* is from the Hebrew word *chethullah* and the Greek word *sparganoo*. These are bands of cloth in which new born babies were wrapped (cf. Ezek. 16:4; Job 38:9; Ezek. 30:21—bandages). The child was placed diagonally on a square piece of cloth which was folded over the infant's feet and sides. Around this bundle swaddling bands were wound. The idea that the word *sparganoo* means "rags" is without foundation.

The Greek word for *hotel* (as we think of it) is *pandocheion*, but that is not the word Luke uses for *inn*. That word is *kataluma* which was merely an enclosure, just walls into which travellers might drive their cattle for the night, and in which sometimes there were apartments where the travellers themselves might rest; but no traveller could obtain food there. There was water, always water, but no food, no host, no entertainment. *There was no room even there* for Mary and Joseph. So Jesus was literally born in some shed or lean-to where only cattle were tethered. His crib was a *phatne* (manger), a feeding-trough for animals. What humiliating pathos! The Lord of All That Is, born in a smelly, insect-infested barn!

Someone has observed that most of us have inherited a Christmas story purged of some of its "uglies" and transformed and beautified by the Christian *traditions* surrounding it rather than having seen it according to the facts. Note the following:

- a. A poor, pregnant, unmarried (virgin) woman of Nazareth
- b. rode and/or walked 60-70 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem while in the last stages of pregnancy;

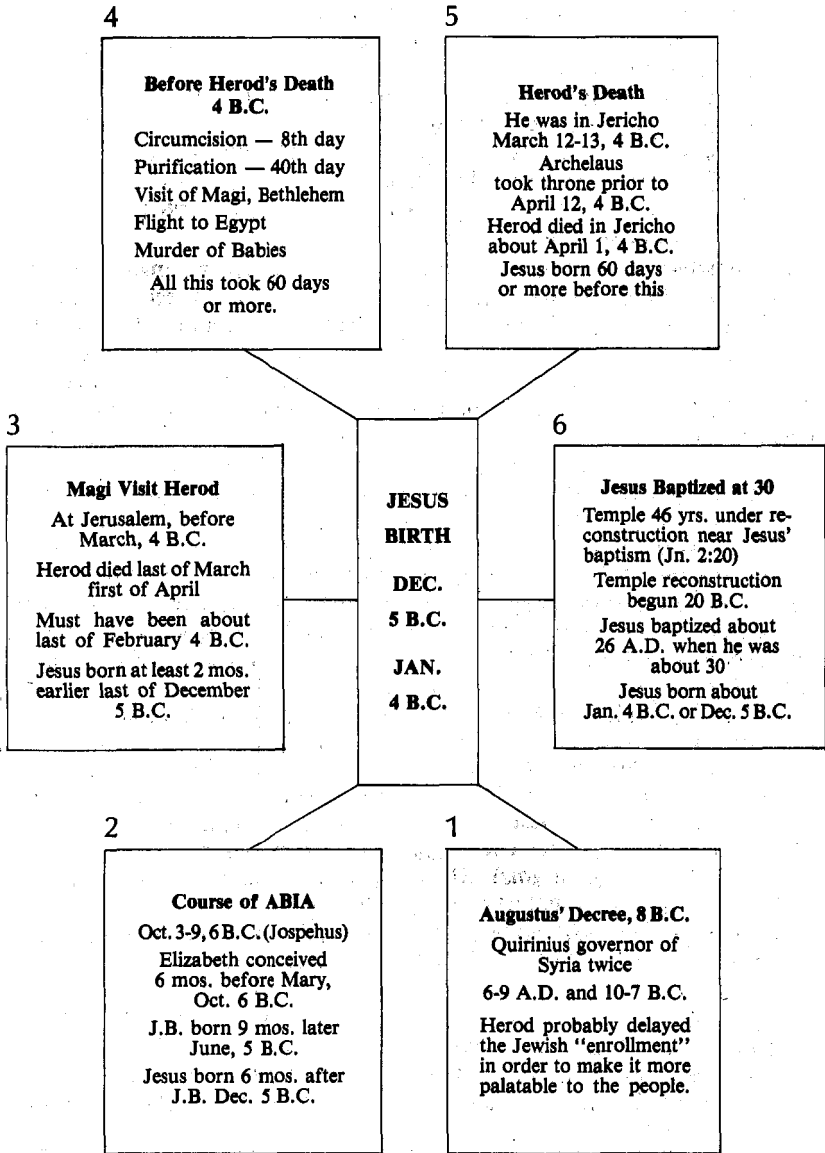
- c. had her baby delivered in a smelly, unsanitary barn
- d. without doctors, anesthesia, nurses or midwives; in fact, with only her husband present.
- e. There was no baked-turkey and dressing, carols, tinsel, or family reunion at this first "Christmas."
- f. First visitors were rough, smelly shepherds who had been out in the fields for weeks with their flocks.
- g. Forty days later an old man in the Temple predicted dark, ominous words about the baby.

Our tendency at Christmas time is to take away all these "uglies" so believing in Christmas becomes the easiest thing in the world. All that is asked is that we accept a beautiful and touching story as it is presented in carols, nativity dolls, and pageants. It is easy for most of the world to get misty-eyed over a sweet little baby surrounded by so much glitter. Everyone sees himself as a believer at Christmas time. Perhaps the real Christmas event was filled with "uglies" just so serious-minded men would have to "grapple with it and agonize over it—and in the very process of that grappling have their faith tested, exercised, strung taut, and made strong."

The question always arises, "When was Jesus born—what day is really Christmas?" In the first place, Christmas (the birth of Christ) apparently was not celebrated by the first century church. There is no record in the N.T. of Christians making the birth of Christ a special day of worship or celebration. About the earliest Christian celebration of Christmas is the order of Bishop Liberius of Rome in 354 A.D. that December 25th should be celebrated as Christ's birthday. It is, of course, impossible to determine the precise day of Jesus' birth. The exact date is not essential to any man's salvation. (See Rom. 14:1-23; Col. 2:16-23.) However, with all the data available, it may be said with historical accuracy that Jesus was born sometime between December, 5 B.C. and January, 4 B.C. The birth dates of some moderns cannot be determined as accurately! The chart on the next page summarizes the cumulative historical data upon which we base our conclusion. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons," (Gal. 4:4-5).

**2:8-14 Seraphim:** Actually the Hebrew word *seraphim* is found only once in the Bible (Isa. 6:2ff). The Greek word used by Luke here is *aggelos*, transliterated *angel*, meaning literally, *messenger*. Angels are created beings, essentially spiritual and invisible, given powers that transcend the natural order of creation, and sometimes they are sent by the Creator in forms visible to men to carry the Creator's messages. Angels have intellectual and moral capacities. Some chose at one time or another to

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disobey their Creator's will and were cast out of His presence (cf. II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Although angels are said to continue to "minister" to the saved (Heb. 1:4), God does *not* now *speak* to men through angels (Gal. 1:8-12; Heb. 1:1-4; Acts 9:5) as to what to do to be saved. (See the author's Special Study on angels in *Daniel*, pg. 386-403, pub. College Press.)

An angel prophesied the conception and birth of Christ; an angel named Him, Jesus; angels heralded His birth to shepherds; angels directed Joseph about the Child's safety; angels ministered to Christ after His temptation; an angel strengthened Christ after His agony in Gethsemane; angels were witnesses and messengers of His resurrection; angels attended Him at His ascension; and angels will attend Him at His Second Coming.

After the angel's message was delivered to the shepherds, there appeared suddenly a *plethos stratias ouraniou*, that is, "a multitudinous army from heaven." The Greek word *stratias* is translated *host* and is related to the word *stratiotes* which is translated *soldier* in Mt. 8:9; 27:27, etc. The Hebrew for *heavenly host* is *izeva hashamayim* and denotes sometimes *stars* (Dt. 4:19; 17:3, etc.) and sometimes *angels* (I Kings 22:19; II Chron. 18:18; Neh. 9:6; Psa. 103:21, etc.). God's word does not tell us how many angels exist. Jesus said he could call for more than twelve "legions" to aid Him (Mt. 26:53) and a Roman army legion contained approximately 6000 men. John saw (*muriades muriadon*) "myriads of myriads" of angels and other beings around the throne of God (Rev. 5:11). We do not know how many heavenly beings appeared with the angel to the shepherds. Luke uses the word *plethos* which simply means a multitude.

The glory (*doxa*) of the Creator, in one degree or another, usually accompanied angels when they appeared to men. This glory often caused men to be overcome with fear (cf. Isa. 6:1ff; Dan. 10:2-21; Rev. 22:8-9). When the glory of the Lord surrounded these shepherds they "feared a great fear" (*ephobethesan phobon megan*). This glorious creature from heaven did not hover over the shepherds, but came near and stood right by them (*epeste autois*). God announced other births by angelic messengers but only the birth of His Son was praised by the angelic army. The point of the angelic appearance to the shepherds does not have to do with the glory or the number of the angels themselves, but the glory of the One whose birth they announce and praise. "Glory" in Hebrew means "heavy," or "abundance."

Angels were sometimes messengers of bad news and sometimes messengers of good news. This angel had a message (*euaggelizomai*) of *good news*; the same Greek word is also translated *evangelize*. To *evangelize* is simply to announce with compassion and persuasion the *good news* concerning Christ and let men decide their own response. The angel's announcement is the gospel in miniature: (1) to man is born

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the Anointed Savior (atonement); (2) He is Lord (incarnation); (3) joy to all people (reconciliation).

Why did God send His messenger to shepherds? Why not tell the theologians and politicians first about the birth of the Messiah? Most of the theologians and politicians would be emotionally, intellectually and morally opposed to such a Messiah. No amount of supernatural signs and angelic announcements would bring Herod or the Pharisees to a cattle-shed to *worship* a baby whose crib was a cattle-trough! These shepherds had learned from the hard and humble life they lived to guard against the pride and arrogance that causes men to deny reality. When they were visited by an angel and an army of heavenly beings, they were honest-minded enough to realize God had spoken and they should respond with obedience to the divine message.

The shepherds were told how to recognize the Anointed Baby—He would be newly-born (wrapped in swaddling), His birthplace would be an animal-stall and His crib a manger. This would be unique! How many newly-born babies in Bethlehem would be lying in an animal feed-trough? This sign was not to convince the shepherds of the deity of the Baby—it was simply a sign by which they might find the one baby out of all the others that might be in Bethlehem that night. The appearance of the angel and the acclamation of the heavenly host proved the supernatural character of the Child.

The heavenly host praised God. The Greek phrase is, *ainounton ton teon kai legonton*. The verb *ainounton* is related to the noun *ainos* which means primarily a *tale, narration, spoken praise*. The word *legonton* is from *lego* which means, *to speak, to say*. We usually think of the heavenly host singing praise to God here, but this was definitely a “verse choir.” There are three Greek words which mean to praise God through singing (*ado, psallo, humano*) but none of these words are used by Luke here. Perhaps, as with so much modern “church music,” the impact of the message the host spoke might have been lost had it been sublimated to the tune and the rhythm, so the heavenly “host” was really a “verse choir.” A dramatic technique known as “choral speaking” was employed by the Greeks hundreds of years before Christ. It is sometimes referred to as “choric reading” or “verse choir” and when such a group stood and spoke as one compelling voice, with shades of meaning and color that not even music commanded, its audience was totally captured!

The host said: “Glory in the highest places to God, and upon earth, peace in men of good will.” The KJV translates, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” The earliest and best Greek manuscripts indicate the former rendering to be more accurate. The peace of God is promised to men through their good-willed response to The Savior. Robertson translates the phrase, “among men in whom



He is well pleased." The will of man must be good in its relationship to God's will if man expects to have true peace. The angelic message has been saturated with a mushy humanism proclaimed profusely once a year in Christmas cards and songs: "If there is good will among men on earth, there will be peace." Humanism refuses to accept the truth that there can be true good will from man to man *only* when men are first good-willed toward God.

**2:15-21 Shepherds:** The angel and the host returned to heaven. The shepherds decided among themselves to go to Bethlehem to verify the announcement of the angels. *Bethlehem*, the town where the Bread of Life came to earth, is a Hebrew name meaning "House of bread." The English versions represent the shepherds as saying, "Let us go see the *thing* . . ." The word translated thing is *rhema* in Greek and literally means, *word*. The shepherds said, "Let us go see the *word* . . ." All they had so far was the angel's *word* that a Savior had been born. They quickly decided they would all go *see* if these words had really happened! They hurried (*speusantes*, hastening) to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph and the baby wrapped in swaddling lying in a feed-trough, just as the angel had said. They told Mary and Joseph about the angel standing by their side, the message he gave them about the Child, the message of the heavenly "verse choir" and their hurried and excited trip to Bethlehem to find them. These shepherds were so impressed with the literal, physical encounter they had with the supernatural and with its meaning concerning the Child in Bethlehem, they told everyone they met about it all. Those who heard the story of the shepherds marvelled (*ethaumasasan*) but apparently were not interested enough themselves to go to the inn and see the Child. At least Luke does not record any other visitors to the Bethlehem cattle-shed. Perhaps the shepherd's story seemed rather far-fetched to everyone who heard it. After all—a Savior and Lord born in a cattle-shed?!

Mary did not go about telling all the wonderful, supernatural things she knew about her baby boy. She hid them in her heart (*suneterei* means an intense, protective keeping), and set each event and thing she knew about Him side by side in her mind so she could compare (*sumballousa*, ponder) one with the other. While a number of people were given momentary glimpses of the wonderful nature of the Child, Mary gathered *all* the glimpses comparing them and keeping her thoughts about them all to herself. Any other course of action would most certainly have endangered the life of Jesus long before the time God had appointed for Him to begin His public ministry. Apparently, Mary was also aware of the danger to her baby boy should she make a determined effort to publicize all the things she knew about Him.

The shepherds returned to their flocks speaking praises (*ainountes*)

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to God for the supernatural, heavenly things they had seen and heard. Eight days later, Mary and Joseph performed the God-ordained rite of circumcision on the baby Jesus (see comments on Lk. 1:59). Circumcision took place in the home where the baby was born. It was at this time the Hebrew child was given a name. Mary's Child had already been given a name from heaven (Mt. 1:21), Jesus, or *Yeshua* in Hebrew, which means, "The Lord Saves."

### STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. What was the most significant event that occurred in the reign of Caesar Augustus? Are there things happening right now known only by Christians which are more important than "headline" news events? What are they?
2. Can Luke's historical accuracy be verified or must we accept the accusations of destructive critics that "we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus"?
3. What do you think and feel when you learn that the Lord of Glory was born in a barn?
4. Do you think all the importance placed on Christmas coincides with what the N.T. teaches about observing it? What does the N.T. teach about it?
5. Can you suggest ways Christians might enter more into the "spirit" of Christmas than is currently done?
6. When was Christ born? Does it make any difference?
7. What is an angel? Would you know one if you saw it?
8. God's choice of shepherds to receive the angel and the heavenly host is not the way man would have announced to the world the birth of God in the flesh. How would man have done it? Why didn't God do it that way?
9. Why doesn't the Christmas cliché, "Peace on earth, good will toward men," carry through in other seasons of the year?
10. Would you have "kept" all these wonderful things about the baby Jesus secretly in your heart as Mary did, had you been Mary or Joseph?

## SECTION 2

### Prophecies (2:22-38)

22 And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him

to the Lord <sup>23</sup>(as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") <sup>24</sup>and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." <sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup>And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup>And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, <sup>28</sup>he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, <sup>29</sup>"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;

<sup>30</sup>for mine eyes have seen thy salvation

<sup>31</sup>which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel."

<sup>33</sup>And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him; <sup>34</sup>and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,

"Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against

<sup>35</sup>(and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

<sup>36</sup>And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, <sup>37</sup>and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup>And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

**2:22-24 Homage:** For forty days after childbirth, a Hebrew mother was considered ceremonially unclean by the Law of Moses (Lev. 12:1-8). The regulation was for hygienic reasons to start with. If the mother and child are isolated from everyone else (as those who were ceremonially unclean must be) for forty days the chances for survival are greatly increased. This regulation had nothing to do with making the mother sinful because she had given birth. The really fundamental purpose of all the Levitical laws of ceremonial purification was to develop the sensitivity of the human being to his sinfulness and God's holiness and to also develop the habit of obedience to the laws of God whether man understood them or agreed with them or not. When a Hebrew became ceremonially unclean he was unable to worship God or have

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fellowship with God's covenant people until he purified himself according to the rituals of the Law. This emphasized to him the necessity for the grace of God in providing a way for him to be restored to covenant relationship. For Mary to be declared ceremonially clean again, she was required to offer to the priest for sacrifice a lamb and a young pigeon. If she were poor she could offer two pigeons or two turtledoves (costing about sixteen cents). So, about the first week in February, Mary, with her husband Joseph, traveled the five or six miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and presented herself with two turtledoves to receive cleansing from the priest.

The Law of Moses also required that each first-born male, animal or child, must be "set apart" or "called holy" to the Lord. The Hebrew word *avar* (Ex. 13:12) means literally, "to pass over." The first-born were also to be "Redeemed" (Heb. *padah*), that is, a "ransom" payment had to be made to the temple of five shekels (about \$5.00 now) (Num. 18:15-16). "Redeeming the firstborn" was (1) a memorial to Israel's redemption from Egypt; (2) and a *response* and repayment to God for sparing the firstborn of Israel in Egypt (see comments by Wilbur Fields, *Exodus*, pgs. 277-284, College Press). Christians are all called "first-born" in Hebrews 12:23, thus all Christians are redeemed and set apart unto the Lord.

The word "homage" means to "honor with submission and obedience." This is exactly what Mary and Joseph were doing when they took the baby Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem to observe these two laws of the Old Testament. They were devout and God-fearing people. Besides, this Child was *special*. They both knew He had some kind of uniquely divine mission. He must be set apart unto the Lord according to the Lord's revealed will. They would do all in their power to dedicate Him to Jehovah's service. It was predicted that the Messiah would be obedient to the Law of Jehovah (cf. Psa. 45:6-7; Heb. 1:8-9; Isa. 50:4-9; Phil. 2:5-7; Gal. 4:4). Although the Messiah was the Incarnate God and the One who was the Lawgiver Himself, He humbly observed His own law (cf. Mt. 17:24-27; Heb. 5:7-9).

**2:25-35 Heraldry:** Simeon, or *Shime'on* in Hebrew, is from the word *shama'* which means "to hear, to obey." He was righteous and devout, filled with faith and hope that he would see the Messiah because the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that before he died he would see the "consolation of Israel." Consolation in Greek is *paraklesin* from the word which may also be translated comforter. *Comfort*, *consolation* in Hebrew is *menuchach* (from the root *nacham*) from which also the proper names *Nahum*, *Menahem*, and *Menachem* are formed. This is the Hebrew word used in many messianic passages of the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 40:1; 49:13; 51:3; 52:9; 54:11; 61:2; 66:13; Jer. 31:13). Simeon, the obedient,

was obeying the prophecies of God's Old Testament and the revelation he had from the Holy Spirit. He was eagerly looking (every day) for the Christ (*kristos*, "anointed") of the Lord. The Messiah is called *mashiyach*, "anointed" in Daniel 9:26. The aged Simeon was directed by the Holy Spirit to go to the Temple and when Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus arrived there, he was guided by the Spirit to take Mary's baby into his arms and pronounce what is called the *Nunc Dimittis* (Latin for, "Now dismiss . . .").

Simeon's righteous and devout character is manifested by his attitude toward the Lord. His salutation, "Lord," is *despota* in Greek and is the word from which we get *despot* in English; he accepted the Lord as the *absolute sovereign* of his life. Simeon referred to himself as *doulon*, or slave, absolute servant. Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that when he saw the Anointed One (the Messiah), he would be "loosed from" (*apolueis*, Greek) this life. Simeon had been told that he would be the Lord's bond-slave in this life until the coming of the Anointed One. This Christ, whom Simeon would live to see with his own eyes, would be not only the Consoler of Israel, He would also be the Light to those who sat in darkness (the Gentiles). This Christ would bring salvation to the whole world. Now Simeon is ready to be released from this life, apparently looking forward to "peace" and "glory" in the next life because God's Anointed One has come. Simeon's phraseology echoes the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2 (cf. Lk. 4:16-19). There the Messiah is predicted as coming to usher in the Jubilee of God when all the slaves will be set free (see our comments, *Isaiah, Vol. III*, pgs. 410-411, College Press). Simeon has come to his own Jubilee and now asks permission from his Master to be set free. Paul was anxious to leave this life and be with the Lord in the next life (cf. Phil. 1:19-26; II Cor. 5:1-10), and so should we. But we must also be ready and willing to serve the Lord here in this world so long as He provides us the life to do so. If we do so devoutly, obediently and faithfully, we will someday be released and hear the trumpet signal our own Jubilee. Simeon announced that the Babe in his arms was Savior of the whole world. He was the Revelation (*apokalupsin* in Greek; the word from which we get the English, *apocalypse*) to the Gentiles. The Gentiles had tried to discover God in their philosophies and other cultural disciplines (cf. I Cor. 1:18-31), but man cannot discover God—God reveals Himself to man, in order that no man should boast! That is just as true today as it was then. God has chosen to reveal Himself in Nature and in His Word (for the purpose of salvation, in His Son alone). If any man wishes to know God in a saving relationship, he must know His Son through the agency of His Spirit, in the Bible!

Simeon was a herald of bad news too. While Joseph and Mary were

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caught up in a reverie contemplating the marvelous things said about this Baby, the old man brought a sudden chill upon the mother's heart with a prediction of the dark clouds of persecution and suffering that would characterize this Child's life. It would all end in a soul-piercing tragedy for the mother. The shadow of the cross fell across the life of this Child even before He was born. Isaiah the prophet indicated in no uncertain terms that the Messiah-Servant of God would suffer and die (and be raised from the dead) (cf. Isa. 52:13—53:12). Daniel, too, had predicted that the Anointed Prince of God would be "cut off" (cf. Dan. 9:24-27).

The Temple courts were always crowded with worshipers, sight-seers and priests. How many were within hearing of the aged Simeon we are not told. Those who would have believed his predictions about the Baby Jesus would have been very few, if any! Most Jews (even including Jesus' apostles) stumbled over any prediction that their Messiah would be of such humble origins or suffer such an ignominious death. Mary could hardly be expected to comprehend the full impact of these words then. But the day would come (33 years later) when the terrible reality of Simeon's predictions would stab her heart as she saw her first-born nailed to a cross.

The phrase ". . . set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against. . ." echoes the prophecies of the Psalmist and Isaiah concerning the despising and rejection of the Messiah (Isa. 53:1-12; Psa. 22:1-18, etc.). It was also predicted that the Messiah would become a stumbling block over which many in Israel would fall (cf. Isa. 8:14; Psa. 118:22; Lk. 20:18; Rom. 9:32-33; I Cor. 1:23; I Pet. 2:8, etc.), and The Cornerstone upon which many *true* Israelites (Christians) would build (Isa. 28:16; I Pet. 2:5; I Cor. 3:11, etc.). All of the "good and bad" to come to and through this Child was in order ". . . that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." The Incarnation (God coming in flesh in Christ), the Atoning Death and the Resurrection was witnessed historically by some, believed by many, and has brought millions to a mental and emotional confrontation with the reality of God. It has caused multitudes to repent and come into saving, regenerating fellowship with God through the completed work of Christ. What people think of Christ reveals the true thoughts of their hearts! Men in rebellion against the Creator take a relativistic, self-centered attitude toward everything. Once men are confronted with the historical Christ and His Absolute Deity, they are compelled to make a decision. They must either deny His historicity and lordship (which would reveal intellectual and moral dishonesty of heart) or they must accept both (which is repentance and salvation). Confronted with the truth of Christ, men cannot hide from God, from themselves or from others.

**2:36-38 Hope:** Another aged Israelite who had maintained hope that God would send His Messiah as He promised was Anna daughter of Phanuel (which means "face of God"), a prophetess. After a marriage of seven years she had lived in widowhood eighty-four years. If she married at 15 she would have been 106 years old and born about 110 B.C. Julius Caesar was born about 100 B.C. Anna had lived through the declining years of the Maccabean rule of Israel which brought relative freedom for the Jews for the first time in over 200 years since the days of Ezra and Nehemiah; she grew up in the days when Alexander Jannaeus (once pelted by his own people with rotten fruit and vegetables) was king and high priest; she lived when a woman, Alexandra, the widow of Alexander Jannaeus, ruled Palestine; she would have been about 40 years old when the illustrious Roman general, Pompey, conquered the mid-East for the Roman empire; she saw the Romans appoint the hated Idumeans (Edomites) of the Herodian family rulers of Palestine; during all this she saw the development of two strong religious factions (Pharisees and Sadducees) and two antagonistic political parties (Herodians and Zealots) within her own people. These factions with their legalisms on one hand and libertinisms on the other plus political compromise versus political fanaticism caused many of the common people, oppressed by heavy taxation and religious legalism, to wish for messianic redemption. It appears that this aged saint never missed a service in the Temple night and day! Coming into the Temple at the very time Simeon was heralding the birth of the Messiah, she gave thanks to God and *kept on speaking (elalei, Greek imperfect tense)* to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel.

After these experiences in the Temple in early February, Mary and Joseph returned to Bethlehem with the Baby. They were lodging in a "house" when the wise men from the East came and presented their gifts and worshiped Him (Mt. 2:1-12). The wise men had stopped in Jerusalem to ask about the birth of the "king of the Jews." The cruel and crafty Herod sent them to Bethlehem hoping they would find Jesus so he might kill Him. The wise men returned to their homes in the East without reporting to Herod the whereabouts of the Child. Immediately, an angel appeared to Joseph and directed him to flee with the Child to Egypt (Mt. 2:13-23). The trip to Egypt would be about 100 miles but Mary and Joseph fled there with Jesus. Back in Bethlehem Herod was having every baby two years old and under slain, hoping to eliminate this announced "king of the Jews" as a threat to his throne. When Herod died, an angel of the Lord spoke again to Joseph telling him it was safe to return to Israel, so they began their return. Hearing that a son of Herod (Archelaus) reigned over Judea, they did not return to Bethlehem or Jerusalem but went directly to Nazareth in Galilee their original home.

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Herod the Great died at the end of March or during the first few days of April, 4 B.C. Jesus was, therefore, about three or four months old when He was brought back to live in Nazareth.

### STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. Why were women declared "unclean" for 40 days after childbirth?
2. What is involved in the "dedication" of the Hebrew child after 40 days?
3. How does that Hebrew ritual relate typically to the Christian experience?
4. What did Simeon mean by calling the baby Jesus, "the consolation of Israel"?
5. What did Simeon mean by calling God, "despot"?
6. If man cannot discover God, how is man to know God?
7. Why did Simeon tell Mary a sword would pierce her heart?
8. How does Christ reveal the thoughts of man's hearts to them?
9. What had the aged prophetess Anna lived through in history that would cause her to wish for a Messiah?
10. After their presentation of Jesus in the Temple, where did Mary and Joseph reside with the Child?

### SECTION 3

#### Puzzles (2:39-52)

39 And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. <sup>40</sup>And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. <sup>42</sup>And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom; <sup>43</sup>and when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, <sup>44</sup>but supposing him to be in the company they went a day's journey, and they sought him among their kinfolk and acquaintances; <sup>45</sup>and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. <sup>46</sup>After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; <sup>47</sup>and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>And when they saw him they were



astonished; and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."

<sup>49</sup>And he said to them, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" <sup>50</sup>And they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them. <sup>51</sup>And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man.

**2:39-40 Progress:** Luke omits the trip to Egypt, since Matthew had duly recorded it, and follows the progress of the Divine Infant from His presentation in the Temple directly to His boyhood home in Nazareth. It was more important to Luke's purpose to record certain information about the Baby's boyhood. He uses some interesting Greek grammar to describe the first twelve years of Jesus' boyhood. The verbs "grew" and "became strong" are both in the imperfect tense which indicates continued development, or, action in progress. As a youngster Jesus grew gradually but continuously in physique and strength. The present passive participle *pleroumenon* (filled) may be translated literally, "And the child . . . *being filled* with wisdom." In other words, His learning was concurrent with His physical development. Hobbs aptly says, "We should not be shocked by these statements about Jesus. They do not in any sense detract from His deity. Rather they emphasize His complete humanity. Apart from sin, He completely identified Himself with man. He grew, gained strength, and learned as did any other child. It is just as great an error to deny Jesus' humanity as to deny his deity."

Nazareth of Galilee was about 15 miles west and slightly south of the Sea of Galilee. Sepphoris, capital of Herod Antipas and the strongest military center in Galilee, was only five miles to the northwest. Many traders, soldiers, and emissaries of the Roman government were to be found in the stream of travelers going back and forth on this road. It was about fifteen miles to Tiberias, the city named in honor of the Roman emperor the "Riviera" of Palestine, and about as heathen as its namesake. Nazareth was nestled on the side of a Galilean hill in an area known for its fertility and beauty. It is estimated that some three million people lived in the surrounding cities and villages. The more learned and orthodox Jews of Jerusalem were contemptuous of Galileans considering them to be *am-ha-eretz* (Hebrew for "people of the land") or "ignorant hillbillies" because of their colloquialisms, lack of formal education, cultural crudities, and questionable genealogical background. Most of the Galileans were, in fact, a genetic mixture of Jew and Gentile (a result of the importation of Gentiles into Galilee at the captivity of the Ten Northern Tribes by Assyria, see II Kings 17:24). They

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were a vigorous, homey, hard-working, liberty-loving people, however, and Jesus grew up in their midst. Jesus' hometown was located at the cross-roads of commerce and politics. At the foot of Mt. Tabor (across the valley and only about 5 miles east of Nazareth) passed the Roman road, "the Way of the Sea," connecting Damascus (capital of Syria) with Palestine's sea-ports. Another road near Nazareth ran southward to Egypt. Circling round the eastern base of Mt. Tabor was the caravan route to Jerusalem. Perhaps Jesus spent some of His boyhood hours watching the travelers on these roads, maybe even talking to them. From such observations and daily experiences He later drew illustrations for His divine message. Jesus did not isolate Himself from life as it was lived by man when He was an adult and we may assume He did not do so in His youth.

**2:41-50 Precociousness:** The word *precocious* is from Latin, *prae* and *coquere* which means to "ripen beforehand" or "exceptionally early in development." Jesus astounded the adult scholars in the temple and His mother and step-father later with His *precocity*.

In verse 40 Luke calls Jesus *paidion*, "little child"; in verse 43 he calls Him *pais*, "boy" or "lad." Jesus is now twelve years of age. At that age all Jewish male children became *barmitzvahs* (*bar* means "son" and *mitzvah* means "commandment"). They were declared "men" and required to know the law and keep it, learn a trade, and attend the greatest of the Jewish festivals (Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles). This was probably Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem since being taken there as a baby for "presentation."

What an exciting experience for a lad of twelve. The journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem would take about three or four days. They would come in large groups or caravans of Jewish pilgrims from all over the Roman empire headed toward the holy city. Jerusalem would be jammed with almost two million people, laughing, talking, buying, selling; sleeping on the flat roof-tops of the houses, in the alleys, in the animal shelters or anywhere safe lodging might be found. There would be the sights and smells of the temple court where thousands of animals poured out rivers of blood at sacrifice and the smell of burning flesh as the columns of black smoke floated to the sky. Family reunions with heated conversations of politics, economics and religion would permeate the city. We can imagine the wonder of it all to Jesus as He gathered with His family and listened as Joseph told the story of the Passover observance and the history of Israel. He would experience for the first time the roasted lamb and the bitter herbs (see comments on Luke 22:1ff for more details on the Passover feast). As impressive as all this might have been to Him, Jesus was deeply interested in another aspect of the goings on in Jerusalem—the *didaskalon* ("teachers").

After seven days the feast ended and Mary and Joseph began the journey back to Nazareth. At the end of the first day's journey, when they stopped for the night, they realized Jesus was not with the caravan. How could they have missed Him all day? In such caravans the men and women usually traveled separately. A boy who has become *barmitzvah* should be capable of caring for himself during a day's travel. Mary probably presumed He was with Joseph and Joseph thought He was with Mary. But Jesus, fascinated by the aged scribes and teachers of the Law, and so immersed in listening and questioning about God's Word, chose to "be about His Father's business" rather than leave Jerusalem at that particular time. It is doubtful that Jesus forgot or made a mistake about the time of departure, for when chided by His mother, He indicated His actions were deliberately chosen and exercised. One day traveling from Jerusalem; one day traveling back; and one day looking throughout the city for Him; after three days absence they found Him in the temple courts (*kathezomenon*) "sitting down" at the feet of the teachers. The twelve-year-old Jesus was *hearing, questioning* and answering the teachers. The word *eperotonta* is an intensified form of a Greek word (*questioning*) suggesting that the one asking is on a footing of equality with the person whom he is questioning. It is the word used of a king in making request from another king, (Lk. 14:32). Jesus always uses this word in making request to His Father. The usual reaction of learned men toward a precocious lad would be at best amusement, if not scorn. Here they cannot conceal their amazement. Luke uses the Greek word *sunesei* to describe His "understanding" answers to the questions of the teachers. The word means "to join the skills of perception to that which is perceived." At twelve Jesus had a grasp and comprehension beyond anything these teachers had ever seen. Mary and Joseph were also astonished when they found Him amazing the scholars.

Mary uses tenderness to rebuke Jesus. *Teknon* is a Greek word for "child" but it is different from the word *huios* ("son") in that *teknon* emphasizes the special mother-child relationship of birth. Mothers always think of their children as their "babies." Yet, there was probably a chiding note in Mary's voice too. Literally translated, Mary said, "Child, why did you do us thus?" She also reminded Him of the sorrow (*odunomenio* "pain") He had caused them when they thought they had lost Him.

Jesus' reply shows surprise that His parents did not understand His uniqueness. He implies they knew or should have known He had a special mission; that His life was not going to be that of an ordinary person of His age. He was surprised they were surprised that He would be more interested in discussing God's Law than in returning to Nazareth. They already had many signs about Him. Jesus expected the Jews to recognize in Him a uniqueness not to be found in other people and was disturbed when they did not (cf. for example, Lk. 24:25ff).

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The first recorded words from the lips of Jesus are these: "Why is it that you sought me? Do you not know that in the things (affairs) of my Father it is necessary for me to be?" The word "house" is not in the Greek text. For a twelve-year-old boy to say, "I *must* be involved in the affairs of My Father" is unique among all twelve-year-old boys. And, further, Jesus used here, as He always did, the definite article when speaking of God as His Father. He never used the definite article when speaking of God as the Father of anyone else. The Sonship of Jesus is uniquely different than that of any one else. John calls Jesus the *monogenes* (Jn. 1:14, 18; 3:16). *Monogenes* is translated "only begotten" but means more precisely, "*only unique*" Son of God. We may *become* sons by being born again; He *is* Son from eternity.

Did Jesus disobey His parents when He stayed behind to question the teachers? Hobbs makes it plain that He did not: "In the first place, there is no evidence that either Mary or Joseph had told Him not to remain behind in Jerusalem. . . . In the second place, the record does not show that they had told Him to come with them. . . . In the third place, as a 'Son of the law' Jesus was responsible within Himself for His religious obligations. . . . If there was any error here, it was that of Mary and Joseph, not that of Jesus." The Bible makes it plain that children are to obey their parents "in the Lord." In other words, submission to parental authority can never mean a child must *disobey* the Lord. The will of God, when plainly revealed, is sovereign in every human life. There is no higher authority than that, and every human being capable of making moral choices rejects it at the peril of eternal damnation.

**2:51 Pliancy:** Jesus returned to His village home with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth of Galilee. There He lived in obedience to them until He began His ministry at about the age of 30. The Greek word translated *obedience* is *hupotassomenos* and is usually translated *subjection* (Eph. 5:21; Col. 3:18). *Hupotasso* was primarily a military term meaning, "to rank under; to subordinate." It is a term which stresses the "chain of command relationship." G. Campbell Morgan says, ". . . the perfect response of the Boy to the will of God meant for Him natural correspondence to ordinary conditions." Although Jesus was uniquely the Son of God, He was also son of Mary. It was God's will that The Son should experience the full gamut of human subordination (cf. Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 5:7-9; Phil. 2:5-11). In obedience to the will of God, He subordinated His life to the authority of the home. As we pointed out before, His obedience to the home was qualified by His obedience to God's authority whenever it was clearly revealed that it was proper to do so. This is evident also from two other parental confrontations (cf. Jn. 2:4; Mt. 12:46-50; Mk. 3:31-35; Lk. 8:19-21).

**2:52 Perfection:** The word *increased* is the Greek word *proekopten* and

means literally, "a striking or cutting forward, like a pioneer cutting his way through brush." Thayer says the word "means to lengthen out by hammering as a smith forges metals." The word means to go forward chopping one's way by struggle or strenuous activity. It certainly does not infer a passive development. Jesus' young manhood was a daily hammering out of His human life in the crucible of God's will. Each day He chopped through the jungle of human experience, the divine Way, Truth and Life so that all who follow might find God. Jesus "hacked out" of the wilderness of human sinfulness a life of perfect sinlessness and walked completely in the will of God. He did so in boyhood, young manhood and adulthood. He did so mentally, physically and spiritually. He mastered all of life as He pioneered the Way in human flesh. The Greek preposition *para* (translated "with") means, "along side." Jesus did not start as a youngster with less favor and, growing up, become more and more a favorite with God and man. The preposition *para* indicates that as He "cut his way forward" each day He was constantly "along side" dwelling in the favor ("grace") of God and man. The development of Jesus from Boyhood to Manhood was constantly "along side" or within the will of God and in proper relationship to man. This is manhood as God intends it for all men! Jesus demonstrated it is possible to live life in the flesh as God intended it. He suffered and experienced obedience to the will of God to bring us to the same glorious ideal manhood (cf. Heb. 2:10-18; 5:7-10). He is the "pioneer" and "author" of our salvation. Incidentally, the phrase "and being made perfect," in Hebrews 5:9 does not mean Jesus was less than perfect in the area of obedience to God. He was sinless in His relationship to God and man always. The word *teleiotheis* ("perfect") means in His case, that at His crucifixion and resurrection He "brought to completion" the will of God as far as His temporary human experience was concerned. In His human experience Jesus progressed or advanced in a forward manner toward a God-appointed goal. He was born as a baby, developed as a child, "cut forward" along side the grace of God as a young man, and completed the goal for which God sent Him at the cross and the empty tomb. Thus He "perfected" His incarnation.

### STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. Do you think God had any specific purpose in Jesus' living His young manhood (about 30 years) in the village of Nazareth in Galilee?
2. What is a "barmitzvah"?
3. Should we expect children of 12 or 13 years of age today to be held accountable for obeying the commands of the N.T. about becoming a Christian and living the Christian life?

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4. Did Jesus get lost in Jerusalem from childish inattention, or did He plan to stay and question the teachers in the temple?
5. Did He disobey His parents in staying in Jerusalem?
6. Did Jesus always do everything His parents thought He should do?
7. Was Jesus a little less than He should have been in relation to God and men as He grew up?
8. How did Jesus *increase* and become *perfected*?