

JESUS AND CHILDREN IN THE GOSPELS

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Divinity in
Grace Theological Seminary
May 1982

Title: JESUS AND CHILDREN IN THE GOSPELS
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Degree: Master of Divinity
Date: May, 1982
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The gospels are rich in principles concerning children. Jesus' attitudes and actions toward them and His example as a child along with other God-inspired records come together to make considerable impact on the world today. However, good Biblical exegesis of the passages on children are lacking greatly and Christians have of late been content in turning to secular principles for guidance in raising their children. As a result an increasing tension between practices of modern child developmental psychology and the Biblical record has developed. While recognizing the lack of Biblical input and the need for more in this area, the present writer seeks to understand what the gospels say by investigating contextual considerations, key passages and application of the principles found.

An understanding of life as it was for children in the first century along with a basic knowledge of the many words used for children by the gospel writers, lay a base for understanding the various passages involving children. Through the exegesis of twenty passages children are viewed from many perspectives, yielding numerous principles. These principles are from a historical/cultural era different from today's but when applied to twentieth century American culture, the principles remain unchanged in their basic thrust.

The gospels were not written to children but to adults, and the passages about children, apart from being a historical record of events, are a challenge to adult Christians everywhere. They challenge Christians to act toward children in a way that conforms to the Biblical mandate and to the example of Christ Himself.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity

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INTRODUCTION

Before any thesis can be developed a case for argument must be stated to show the necessity of that particular thesis. Therefore, the introduction seeks first to state the problem that centers around Jesus and children in the gospels. Second, the line of approach that the thesis takes is given.

Statement of the Problem

In today's Christian society there is a growing concern as to how to raise children to be godly men and women. But surprisingly enough, as one reads the majority of Christian books on the market, one finds that something is desperately missing. The search for good workable principles has resulted in a turning to secular principles rather than Biblical ones. To be more specific, Christians have, with open arms, accepted the principles of secular sciences such as: educational psychology and human development. Little if any thought is given to the Biblical model especially as it is set forth by Jesus Himself. To illustrate this, one need only to page through some of the most popular books which are at the top of the Christian bookseller list for books on children. For example, in James Dobson's Dare to Discipline, out of two hundred and twenty-four total pages

only the last four pages specify Scripture references and in only two other places where Scripture is quoted no specific reference is given.¹ Also in his book Hide or Seek, out of one hundred and fifty-nine total pages only two Scripture references are mentioned specifically and one other time a Scripture passage is alluded to.² In the educational field one can turn to the popular ICL series and read such statements as,

Educators classify all of man's needs into five basic groups. They are: physical, security, social, self-respect and achievement. Christian educators add one more group: spiritual needs. . . . A learner's spiritual needs cannot be met until his other basic needs have been quieted.³

Although these are just a few examples of the many works available they do begin to show that there is a total lack of reliance on Scripture for what the writers claim are "Christian principles." This, of course, has created an increasing tension between the secular sciences and Scripture. William Hendricks, noting this tension, writes, "There seems indeed to be a world of difference between the perspectives of modern child developmental psychology and the

¹James Dobson, Dare to Discipline (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), pp. 118, 199-21, 221-24.

²James Dobson, Hide or Seek (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1974), pp. 47, 82, 103.

³Bobbie Reed and Rex E. Johnson, Bible Learning Activities: Youth--Grades 7 to 12 (Glendale: G/L Publications, 1974), p. 6.

general and casual insights about children found in Scripture."¹ As for the results of this tension Hendricks goes on to say,

These two different worlds are separating the experiences of our children and are creating a number of practical problems in church life today. The following is a list of practical problems in the lives of our churches which grow out of the unresolved relationships of our views of child development and biblical theology.

- 1) There is the parental tension between admired and trusted specialists, i.e. the physician, the psychiatrist, the pastor, the Sunday School teacher.
- 2) There is the separation of religion from life.
- 3) There is counterproductivity between church educational materials which are developmentally oriented and much church evangelism which is not.
- 4) There is a staff problem between childhood education specialists and pastors who do not integrate conversion and development.
- 5) There is the growing dilemma of the converted child who cannot or has not related his/her conversion to all of his/her life.²

And to this list could be added even more, but the problem is clear and these will suffice.

Now, the problem intensifies when one begins to look for a solution to this tension. First, it could continue on separate lines. That is, in secular areas children would be directed by developmental perspectives and religion would be unrelated to those areas. Second, one could determine to do away with all developmental insights and place children in a predetermined religious context as the Amish do. Third, one could totally accept the findings of child developmental

¹William L. Hendricks, "Theology and Children: Remarks on Relationships Between Christian Theology and Childhood Developmental Psychology," Southwestern Journal of Theology 20 (Spring 1978):62.

²Ibid., p. 63.

psychology to the exclusion or toning down of theological distinctives as the liberals are doing. Fourth, as Hendricks would advocate, "We could, by conscientious and intentional study and reflection, determine how developmental psychology and conversionist theology can correlate."¹

But as Hendricks goes on, one can begin to see that what he is trying to do is to create a balance between Scripture and science. And where science is an authority it has the precedence, but where Scripture has the authority then it takes precedence.² This, of course, cannot work because what happens when the findings of science go against what the Bible says, then which is the authority? Well, naturally science would have to be based on the concept of integration and correlation. Mary LeBar comes closer to the final solution in at least general terms, when she says,

However little Scripture may say to enlighten educators as to preschool education, the Christian leader must be aware that all so-called laws of human development are God's laws. The discovery of the process of wholesome maturation should be the province of the Christian who is thinking the Creator's thoughts after Him. Using discrimination and testing and testing, the Christian can therefore gratefully accept the findings of secular research, and build on them.³

LeBar's solution comes close but fails again to specify which is the authority. The final solution, which the author believes is the proper one, is to construct a

¹Ibid., p. 65.

²Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³Mary E. LeBar, "Teaching Preschool Children," in An Introduction to Evangelical Christian Education, ed. J. Edward Hakes (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), p. 136.

Biblical grid through which all the laws of child developmental psychology must pass before they are accepted. And although it is not the purpose to defend this solution here, it is necessary as a basis for the thesis. In other words, the author believes that even though a partial grid has been established and used as a sieve for the secular sciences, this grid has not been completed in regards to children. This can be seen by the fact that certain select verses have been quoted over and over again--verses like Ephesians 6:1-3, Proverbs 22:6, and Deuteronomy 6:4-9. But is this all that the Bible has to say about children? And of these things that it does mention, what is the emphasis? Surely discipline is not the main thing that the Bible teaches concerning children, is it? And what is the proper balance that Scripture gives with regard to raising children and what responsibilities do both parents and children have?

In response, the author believes that the Bible has much to say to the family, to teachers, to the church and even to children about the matter of children. And he believes along with Hayes that, "A theology of conversion, particularly as it relates to the child, is desperately needed."¹ In that light, this research was undertaken. However, a thorough inspection of Scripture would be so massive that the limits of this work would not suffice to give

¹Edward L. Hayes, "Evangelism of Children," in Childhood Education in the Church, eds. Roy B. Zuck and Robert E. Clark (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 154.

adequate treatment to it. Therefore, the author will attempt to discover what the gospels have to add to the Biblical grid concerning children.

Line of Approach

The focus of this thesis will be limited to the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. It will deal with all the passages that mention or allude to children and will have an especially heavy emphasis put on Jesus' relation to children. The purpose of which will be to show what the Gospels record in the way of attitudes and actions toward children and then from that to discover how and in what ways the family and the church can reflect those attitudes and actions in their ministry to children. However, it should be made clear that the paper will not attempt to deal with spiritual childhood as Jesus teaches it or as it is exemplified by Jesus' relationship to the Father. Rather it will be concerned mainly with real children in real life situations.

In order to do that, it is necessary to first look at some important contextual considerations particularly with regard to the general family background of the gospels and also with regard to the words used for children in the gospels. Second, it is imperative to consider all the passages in the gospels that relate in any way to children. This will be done under three separate headings, namely, those passages that contribute only by example or

observation, those passages that deal with the healing of children, and those passages which are actual teaching passages in which the majority of material is found. And it is in these gospel passages that specific principles regarding children can be found. Third, and last, will be the application of the principles found, especially as they relate to children, parents and churches.

CHAPTER I

CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter on contextual considerations centers around two important factors in understanding children in the gospels. The first is Old Testament family backgrounds which survey family life which existed in the time of the gospels. The second is word studies of all the words used for children in the gospels. These two factors will lay a base for the explanation of individual passages.

Old Testament Family Backgrounds

Since the gospels center around the Jews who were living according to Old Testament standards it is necessary to understand what those standards were that the Old Testament set up for the Jew. This will be especially helpful in understanding the customs and ways of life that the gospels portray. With that in mind, this chapter will briefly try to explain some of the more important standards that played such a major role in the lives of children of that day, namely, with regard to parents, children, living conditions and education.

Parents

In general the parents were completely responsible for their children and both the father and mother played

vital roles in their upbringing. More specifically, the father, who was the spiritual leader in the home, had complete authority in the family and he was usually the one who provided financially for the family through agriculture and/or a specific trade which he practiced in the home such as: carpentry, leather-working, tent-making, pottery and others. And it was usually the father who decided about the marriage of his children, especially the sons. As for the mother, she was to serve the husband and provide for the domestic needs of the family such as: cooking, sewing, washing and bearing and caring for the children. She was usually the first teacher of the children and was undoubtedly a very influential person in a child's life.¹

Children

Children themselves were looked on as a divine favor from God and were greatly desired by parents. This is especially noted in Psalm 127:3-4,

Children are an heritage of the LORD, and the fruit of the womb is his reward. As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man; so are the children of thy youth. Happy is the man that has his quiver full of them.²

One reason children were so important was that they were the ones who inherited the father's property. Another is that

¹Joseph E. Nass, "The Unknown Years of Jesus," (Unpublished M.Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1980), pp. 45-46, 51.

²The New Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); hereinafter this version will be used for all Scripture quotations unless otherwise designated.

they were vital to the functioning of the home. From the very earliest a child was responsible to work with the father and mother in doing the chores of farming and everyday housework. Thus, the more children the more work that could be done in less time.

Living Conditions

Because of the environment of Palestine most family living was carried on outside the actual house although it centered around the family property. Usually there were three main things on the property. The first was a farm, garden, vineyard, orchard or a combination of these where the family grew their own food as well as food for sale in the market. Second, was the father's workshop where he and his sons would practice their particular trade. Third was the actual house itself. This usually consisted of a large one-room building made out of sun-dried bricks and white-washed to reflect the heat of the sun. Within the house there were two sections, one for the animals and the other for the family itself. Needless to say, this created cramped conditions for the normally large family.¹

Education

The key to understanding Jewish education is that it was thoroughly religious from start to finish. And this education took place in three main institutions: the home, the

¹Nass, "Unknown Years," pp. 44-47.

synagogue or temple, and the school. Most early education was done in the home by both parents, especially the fathers who were to pass on the religious traditions. Both Exodus and Deuteronomy are full of exhortations to explain the meaning of the Passover and other great saving deeds to children (Exod 12:14; 13:8; Deut 6:4-7). This teaching-learning process took place mainly by the question and answer method in the normal everyday conversation.¹ But religious education, as such, was not the only type of education that took place in the home. For both mother and father would teach their children their special skills. And for the most part the girls would be taught by the mother and the boys by the father. Another type of education taught in the home was that concerning social relationships. Not only were children taught the skills of communication as they interacted with brother and sister and mother and father, but also the home became the source of entertainment, and the typically large family was very conducive to this.

The second institution that was an educational source was that which was the focal point of religious worship, namely, the temple and the synagogue. In Jesus' time religious worship was "a family affair."² Thus, whole families would take part in the major feasts, in weekly

¹Lawrence Boadt, "The Child in the Bible," The Bible Today 103 (September 1979):2084.

²Ibid.

attendance at the local synagogue, and in regular pilgrimages to the temple in Jerusalem. And this instilled in children a sense of identity and security as a type of object lesson about God and his people until they were old enough to understand more abstract lessons.

The third institution was the school. For the most part the boys were the only ones who received any type of formal education. And for the Jewish boy this centered around the Scriptures. Most of the boys were sent to the local school at age six or seven. And classes usually met in the morning and allowed the boys to return home to help their fathers in the afternoon. During this time, they were required to read and write the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. And, "the children's principal task was rote memorization and worship,"¹ with special emphasis on the Pentateuch.²

Word Studies³

The emphasis of these studies are concerned primarily with the words that the gospel writers used to refer to

¹Nass, "Unknown Years," p. 65.

²Ibid., pp. 58-72.

³The following four sources were very helpful in construction of these brief word studies: Walter Bauer; William F. Arndt; and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed. revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol. 1, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975). J. B. Smith,

actual physical children as opposed to spiritual children. It should be mentioned, that most of these words will have broader meanings since they are used outside of the gospels or in some instances in reference to other than a literal child. And for the most part an indepth explanation will be needless for our purposes.¹ Therefore, the following is a list of these terms, in the order of the Greek alphabet, with the basic meaning they had as used in the gospels.

βρέφος

βρέφος is used five times in the gospels and four of those times in the first two chapters of Luke and once later on in Luke. This word refers to a baby or a little child and even of an already conceived, but as yet unborn child.

θηλάζων

This word, the participle of the verb θηλάζω, is only used once in the gospels. And it refers to "one who sucks" or a "suckling," usually translated as "babe."

θυγάτηρ

This is the common word used for a daughter. In the gospels it appears some twenty-four times although less than half of the time it is applied to actual children.

Greek-English Concordance to the New Testament (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1955). W. E. Vine, A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Original Greek Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Co., n.d.).

¹For a more indepth analysis of these terms, see the excellent study, "New Testament Terms for the Child," by

θυγάτριον

A diminutive of θυγάτηρ, and used twice by Matthew alone, this word indicates a little or young daughter.

κορδάσιον

Similar to the previous word, this word is the diminutive of κορή, meaning "girl," a common Greek term not appearing in the New Testament. It means "little girl" and occurs eight times usually translated by damsel or maid.

νήπιος

νήπιος is used three times in the gospels and refers to an infant. It many times carries with it the idea of helplessness, inexperience and simplicity.

παιδάριον

παιδάριον is a double diminutive of παῖς used for added emphasis. It is used only once in the whole New Testament in John 6:9 in reference to a young lad.

παιδίον

παιδίον is used forty-five times in the gospels and has a variety of meanings normally determined by the context. Because it is a diminutive of παῖς it has a basic meaning of little or young child and is used of an infant just born or recently born up to the age of seven. Also, it

is used of a more advanced child, a boy, a girl, a son or as a reference to children in general.

παῖδισκη

παῖδισκη is the female diminutive of παῖς, used only six times in the gospels. It usually refers to a young girl and is translated: damsel, maid or maiden.

παῖς

Derived from the root for "small" or "little," this word, παῖς, has a broad range of meaning in the New Testament. In the gospels it is used five times with reference to a child in relation to age. Once it is used with reference to a child as a descendant, namely, a son. And twice in Luke 8 it is used in relation to the condition of a person such as a maid or servant.

τέκνον

This word, used forty-one times in the gospels, has special reference to a child as the offspring of his parents and forefathers. It gives special emphasis to the fact of birth as opposed to the character of the relationship.

Summary

Although the contextual considerations, both the Old Testament family backgrounds and the word studies, have been brief, they have given a broad overview of many areas. The key to understanding the thrust of certain customs and individual words will not be dependent so much on the basic

meaning as it will on the context of a passage and the usage within that context. However, this chapter has laid a basic foundation for understanding the details of the passages.

CHAPTER II

KEY PASSAGES

This chapter is the most important one because of the vital place it plays in determining the principles which will be applied to life situations. Also this chapter is the largest because of the volume of material with which it has to cover. In all there are twenty separate accounts including thirty-five separate passages, many of which are parallel to each other. It must be stated that because of the nature of this thesis it is not necessary to deal with every parallel passage individually. Instead, a representative passage will be chosen and dealt with. And when it is necessary to bring in added light for a proper understanding of the account at hand, then the author will refer to the parallel passages. The specific categories to be discussed will be those example passages where principles are gained only by one's example or by observation of a particular incident. Also to be discussed are those passages in which Jesus heals a child. And last, will be the many passages where Jesus is teaching a specific truth about or involving children in one way or another. From these passages principles will be drawn and stated.

Example Passages

There are seven accounts in the gospels in which children can be observed in various life situations. Briefly stated these passages are: 1) Matthew 2:1-23--Jesus taken to Egypt, 2) Matthew 14:1-12--Herod's daughter and the killing of John the Baptist, 3) Matthew 14:21--children fed in the feeding of the 5,000, 4) Matthew 15:38--children fed in the feeding of the 4,000, 5) Luke 1:1-25, 57-80--the birth and childhood of John the Baptist, 6) Luke 1:26-56 and 2:21-52--the birth and childhood of Jesus, and, 7) John 6:5-14--a lad bringing food for the feeding of the 5,000. These passages present a variety of principles both positive and negative that contribute very heavily to the whole matter of one's understanding of the gospel record in relation to children.

Matthew 2:1-23--Jesus Taken to Egypt

This is the account of an incident in Jesus' childhood that took place soon after His birth. The circumstances begin when the wise men come to Jerusalem seeking Jesus whom they call "The King of the Jews." Word of these wise men reaches the evil ears of the Herod, the king, who being extremely jealous of his own kingship, plots to eliminate any who would venture to threaten that position. For this reason he sends the wise men to find the young child Jesus with strict instructions to return and tell him where Jesus was. This he does under the pretense that he also

might come and worship the child. However, God warned the wise men not to return to Herod, so they returned to the east by another route. When Herod found out that the wise men had not followed his orders he decided to kill Jesus. And the only way to get rid of Jesus without knowing where exactly to find Him was to have all the children under two years old in the area of Bethlehem killed. But again God acted on behalf of Jesus and warned His father Joseph in a dream, and instructed him to flee to Egypt until it was safe to return. This Joseph did, taking Jesus and Mary as God instructed. And when Herod had died God instructed Joseph to return with his family to Israel, to a city called Nazareth.

The principles that this passage teach with regard to children begin with the fact that God is in total control in the lives of this young family. This can easily be seen because without God's help, Jesus would have died. The second principle is that Jesus was in the full care of His parents. That is, His parents were totally responsible for His well-being, especially as it relates to the protection of His life. God just takes it for granted that Jesus is not old enough to act on His own in this situation and that His parents would, in fact, naturally protect Him. A third principle is that it was the father who held the ultimate responsibility not only for the child but for the whole family. Notice that God worked exclusively through Joseph in guiding

the family. And as the head of the family Joseph was the one who was ultimately responsible.

Matthew 14:1-12--Herod's Daughter and the
Killing of John the Baptist

In this passage, which is also recorded in Mark 6:14-19, is found the story of the death of John the Baptist. The events leading up to John's death begin with his imprisonment by Herod for speaking out against Herod's unlawful marriage to his brother's wife Herodias. And it came to pass on Herod's birthday that the daughter of Herodias, dancing before Herod and his guests, was promised whatever she asked. Being prompted by her mother, she asked Herod for the head of John the Baptist. And faithful to his word Herod fulfilled her request.

It is in the midst of the details of this story, that the thrust of this examination is aimed. For it is a child, Herodias' daughter, who is injected into this murderous account. There has been some disagreement as to whether this daughter of Herodias was an actual child or whether she was a young woman. Calvin, for instance, calls her a "marriage-able young woman"¹ and Lenski seems to think that such a

¹John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark and Luke, trans. by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), vol. 2, p. 225.

promise would not have been made to a mere child.¹ However, the textual evidence seems to suggest differently. Notice that in verse six she is called "the daughter of Herodias." This is the common word, θυγάτηρ, a diminutive word meaning "little girl."² Contrary to Lenski, this, in fact, would be a good reason for Herod to make such a promise to his little daughter. For how could he ever suppose her to make such an evil request? Rather, he made the promise expecting a child's request.

With these facts in mind, note the principles that come from this story. First, notice the power of a parent to influence the decision of her daughter, even to the point of murder. Second, notice the ease in which this girl is able to be influenced, again, even to the point of murder.

Matthew 14:21--Children Fed in the Feeding of the 5,000

In this familiar but outstanding miracle which is recorded in all four gospels, only Matthew takes the time to mention the fact that women and children were present. He does so in the very last verse, the very last words, "And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, besides women and children" (Matt 14:21). One point that needs to

¹R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, in Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), pp. 360-61.

²This word is used three times in the parallel account in Mark. Vine, Expository Dictionary, p. 268.

be explained is made clear by Meyer when he says, "But observe here the diminutive παιδῶν, little children, whom their mothers either carried in their arms or led by hand."¹ Why Matthew mentions the women and children is a difficult question to answer although it may have something to do with Matthew's purpose in presenting Christ as king over all; all have a share in the benefits of His kingship. If this be the case, then the principle observed from this passage is that children who were the recipients of the miracle-working power of Christ, are in fact important in God's program.

Matthew 15:38--Children Fed in the
Feeding of the 4,000

Contrary to the previous account this miracle is mentioned only one other time (Mark 8:1-9). Similar to the previous account, Matthew is the only one to make any mention of women and children. Because of the similarities in the details and the main principle, nothing more needs to be said concerning it.

Luke 1:1-25 and 1:57-80--The Birth and Childhood
of John the Baptist

Although there are many verses that make up the whole story of John's birth and childhood, only about five of those verses have to do with the actual childhood of

¹Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, Critical and Exegetical Hand-Book to the Gospel of Matthew (Winona Lake, IN: Alpha Publications, 1979), p. 273.

John. In Luke 1:57-63 mention is made of John's birth, circumcision and the giving of his name. In verse eighty is the only reference to his actual childhood. The remainder of the verses center around Elisabeth and Zacharias and the person John was to grow up to be. Out of these verses come two main principles. The first is stated best by Lockyer: "The godliness of the parents provided the foundation of their child's separation unto God."¹ This is quite evident from verses six and thirteen through seventeen. It was the upright character which God rewarded by the promise of a great son. The second grows out of verse eighty and the words used for John's growth, "And the child grew and became strong in spirit." Concerning this Lenski comments,

The imperfect, "kept growing," without a modifier, refers to bodily growth. . . . The second imperfect, "kept gaining strength," might also be understood regarding bodily growth, but it is also made the counterpart of that by the dative of relation πνεύματι; his gain of strength was in relation to his spirit. . . .²

The principle is that John's growth was a daily, continuous growth and that bodily growth was proportionate to the growth of his spirit.

¹Herbert Lockyer, All the Children of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 184.

²R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel, in Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 113.

Luke 1:26-56 and 2:21-52--The Birth and
Childhood of Jesus

The most important passage of this whole study is the one at hand. For Jesus was the perfect child and through His childhood He left an example of what perfect childhood should be, of what every child should strive to be and of what every parent should strive for their children to be. These verses center around three stages of development in Jesus' life. The first is Jesus' birth and the events surrounding it. The second is from His birth to adolescence. And the third is from adolescence to adulthood. Before beginning the discussion of each of these stages note the qualification that Nass makes concerning Jesus' development.

Though each stage of the Lord's development was not final, it was still perfect for the level of attainment reached. This means that each level of maturity in His process and growth was everything Jesus was intended to be for that point in life. He was subject to and felt all the conditions of human life, yet He was perfect in them, not stumbling from the approved standard.¹

Birth

The birth of Jesus in this passage includes His birth plus the events related to His birth such as: the announcement and preparation, the actual birth, the circumcision and naming, and the presentation in the temple. The announcement and preparation for Jesus' birth mainly concerns the parents of Jesus, and in this passage of Luke's only Mary is mentioned. God had chosen Mary because she was

¹Nass, "Unknown Years," p. 13.

avored by God (1:28) and the truth of this is seen in Mary's response to the angelic announcement. Her reply was one of faith and obedience to God's plan. The principle made clear by Lockyer is, "The surrender of Mary teaches every mother to yield herself to God, that in and through her, His purpose and glory may be made manifest."¹ As far as Joseph is concerned this principle is also true of him (Matt 1:18-25). He also was obedient and trusted in God's plan for his child.

The actual birth of Jesus reveals some of the simplest and most natural of all the principles. After having traveled to Bethlehem and finding no room in the inn, all that Mary and Joseph could find was a stable in which to stay. There Mary gave birth to the baby Jesus. But notice two very important facts: first, in 2:7 and 12, Jesus is said to be "wrapped in swaddling clothes," and second, in those same verses, He is "lying in a manger." These two things may not mean much to some but even as poor and in such primitive conditions as Mary and Joseph were, they still provided clothing for their baby's warmth and protection and a place where He could sleep undisturbed.

Concerning Jesus' name the same principle of the parents' obedience comes in here since in chapter two and verse twenty-one it says the angel named the child before He was conceived. However, concerning Jesus' circumcision, the principle is more than a simple act of obedience to the Law

¹Lockyer, All the Children, p. 82.

(Lev 12:3). It was a dedication of the child by the parents that He might qualify for the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:2-14).

The presentation of Jesus in the temple after forty days, as the Law stated (Lev 12:3), was for the sole purpose as chapter two, verse twenty-two says, "to present Him to the Lord." This presentation was especially for the parents' benefit. As Lockyer writes, "The object of the presentation in the temple was an acknowledgment of God's claim upon the children presented, and of the necessity of devoting them to God as His property."¹

Birth to adolescence

There is only one verse that tells us anything about this period of Jesus' life, apart from the events of Matthew 2:1-23. The relevant verse, chapter two of Luke, verse forty reads, "And the child grew, and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." The reason this is said to be speaking of His childhood, is that chronologically in the text this verse appears after His presentation in the temple and return to Nazareth. And it appears before He goes to Jerusalem for the Passover, at age twelve (2:41-42). The verse itself is very much like Luke 1:80 which speaks about John the Baptist. The concept of growth as is stated in this verse is explained by Morgan.

¹Ibid., p. 83.

In the first twelve years He grew. Growth, whenever it is used in the realm of life, indicates an activity of life. In growth there is no responsibility in the realm of the will. In growth, pure and simple growth, will has no place and no power. None grows by trying to grow. Growth is life without responsibility.¹

The idea that he is trying to get across here is not that children do not have a will until they are twelve or older. Rather, he is saying that children are not responsible for their growth in this stage of life. Their growth is a passive not active one. This is very much in contrast to the growth of Jesus as it is described in verse fifty-two.² The principle brought out of this passage is again stated by Morgan.

The one business of every child from birth until twelve or somewhere around there, until the period of adolescence, is to grow, and nothing else. The child should grow without any sense of responsibility except obedience to authority; and obedience in the case of the child is always in order to give the child perfect freedom from everything else, without any sense of responsibility. That is the story of Jesus; He grew!³

But the verse does not stop here; it continues to describe that growth just mentioned. Not only was there bodily growth but there was mental and spiritual growth also. The construction of the verse using clauses connected by *καὶ* refers to each of these types of growth and is seen in somewhat the same light as Luke 1:80.⁴ As applied to this verse the verb

¹G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Luke (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1931), p. 44.

²For a more detailed discussion of this matter see pp. 31-32.

³Morgan, Luke, p. 44.

⁴See the quote by Lenski in the section on John the Baptist, p. 22.

ηὕξανεν is the growth described above and is mainly physical in nature. The second kind of growth is separate from physical growth. And just as πνεύματι modifies ἐκραταιοῦτο in Luke 1:80 so also σοφία modifies ἐκραταιοῦτο πληρούμενον in this verse. And the concept is the same here as it was there. But in this verse the present passive participle, πληρούμενον, points more directly to the fact that this growth in wisdom was, like His bodily growth, a progressive day by day process. The third kind of growth is spiritual growth, mentioned in the last clause. This also is a continuous kind of growth as indicated by the imperfect form of εἰμύ. Summarizing these points of Jesus' growth Morgan writes,

Thus Luke, in describing those twelve years, has taken the essential things and not the incidental. That is to say, Jesus is presented in the things that are common to all childhood, and not in the things that separate one child from another.¹

The principle then is that physical, mental and spiritual growth are essential to every child and that they must take place on a continuous and proportionate basis.

Adolescence to adulthood

Luke 2:41-52 records the final stage of Jesus' childhood, namely, His adolescence. There are two incidences of this stage that Scripture reveals. The first incident occurs in the transition time when Jesus was first becoming an adolescent. This is the story of Jesus in the temple when He was twelve years old (2:42). The fact that a change has

¹Morgan, Luke, p. 44.

taken place in Jesus' growth is clearly seen in the change in the words used to refer to Him. In verse forty the word $\mu\alpha\iota\delta\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$, "little child," is used. But when one gets to verse forty-three there is a change; instead of the diminutive form just used, the word used is $\mu\alpha\tilde{\iota}\varsigma$, simply meaning "child." Now, $\mu\alpha\tilde{\iota}\varsigma$ used alone would not be that significant since it is more of a general term. But as it is used in this context, in contrast to $\mu\alpha\iota\delta\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$, it does take on a special significance. Another point that indicates a change is that verse forty-three records the very first act of Jesus, "And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child, Jesus, tarried behind in Jerusalem. . . ." Up to this time Jesus never acted on His own, at least according to Scripture; He was either "brought" by His parents (2:22), or His identity was assumed in His parents. That is, prior to verse forty-three, Jesus is never said to have actively done a thing; He is either the object of action or His action was directly related to his parents' action. This is seen in verses forty-one and two, because the subject of the verses is "His parents," and Scripture says, "they went up to Jerusalem." But in verse forty-three one realizes that Jesus must have gone with them, if He was able to tarry behind when they left. Having established the change that the Scriptures apparently make in Jesus' growth, one can continue on in the story of Jesus in the temple with a clearer understanding of what is happening. So then, having discovered that Jesus was not with them, Mary and Joseph return

to Jerusalem to find Him in the temple talking with the teachers. Then Mary questions Jesus in a reproving tone of speech saying, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing." As normal parents would be, they were concerned with the well-being of Jesus. However, they had failed to realize that Jesus was now capable to take care of Himself since He was no longer a "little child." Also they had failed to communicate that they were leaving. Because of their failure, Mary's reproof to Jesus was certainly unfair to Jesus. But the response of Jesus was gracious, gentle and tactful, for in His reply He reminded His parents of what they should have known, "How is it that ye sought me? Knew ye not that I must be about my father's business?" (Luke 2:49). The principles that this account yields with regard to children begin with the recognition that sometime around the age of twelve there is a transition period in which a child goes from childhood to adolescence. And because of this parents must begin to be very careful to recognize a child's ability to act on his or her own and they must begin to allow a child to begin to take on his or her own identity as a responsible person.

Another principle in conjunction with this is that parents must take care not to sin against their children by reproving or punishing them when they just naturally are beginning to take on the responsibilities of life. A final principle is that children may instruct their parents

concerning this new change if they do it respectfully as Jesus did. And regardless of their parents' response, children must continue to be obedient to their parents as Jesus was, when His parents did not understand what He was saying.

The second incident in this stage of Jesus' life is recorded in Luke 2:51 and 52, "And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them; but His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." There are two points that need to be looked at in these verses. The first is the fact that Jesus went back with His parents to Nazareth and "He was subject unto them." This verb, ὑποτασσόμενος, is a present middle participle. The present tense shows that this was a continuous action and the middle voice emphasizes the subject of the participle in performing the action. The meaning then including the present tense and middle voice, would be "He Himself was daily being subject to them." This was a voluntary act of Jesus' will. Now that He was an adolescent He was responsible to do God's will and that meant submitting Himself to the authority of His parents. This subjection is defined by Lockyer, "The word 'subject' is a military term implying the obedience of a soldier to his superior officer."¹ Jesus, as clear from verse fifty-one, is a perfect model to all of

¹Lockyer, All the Children, p. 197.

obedience to parents, that is both a daily and continuous act, and a volitional personal act.

The second point in this adolescent stage is described by verse fifty-two. The key to understanding is the verb προέκοπτεν, and the way it contrasts with the verb ηύξανεν, used in verse forty. In defining this word Morgan writes,

If we examine the make-up of the word, it means to chop forward, to beat forward, to hack on. The idea of the word, then, is that of strenuous activity rather than passive development. The child grew for twelve years, passive development, no volitional responsibility; but He was now a Son of the Law, and had to hack His own way on. Life now became responsible. For the future, development must be not merely the passive growth that answers life, but the bringing of all life under control.¹

The imperfect tense of the verb would further add to the meaning in that it was also, like the other kinds of growth, a daily continuous "increase." This increase is said to be in four areas: wisdom, stature, favor with man, and favor with God. Note that the construction of this verse demands that each of these four areas increased on a daily, continuous basis. So then, evidently these are areas that Jesus needed to actively grow in to the point of adult maturity. One of the best explanations of these four areas is by John MacArthur in which he points out numerous principles that relate to children. For that reason the author will end this discussion with the following quoted in full,

¹Morgan, Luke, p. 46.

Children have a basic problem--they are children, and as such, lack in four areas. These areas are delineated in Luke 2:52. In this verse we see Jesus Christ, from the perspective of His humanness, as a 12-year-old child. He was all that a child could be--apart from being sinful. Now, according to Luke 2:52, from the time He was twelve, until He began His ministry, He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Thus, the four areas that children lack in are: wisdom (mental needs), stature (physical needs), favor with man (social needs), and favor with God (spiritual needs).

1. CHILDREN LACK WISDOM

Children are ignorant. They lack discretion, instruction, and knowledge. When a baby comes into the world, his brain is void of information. So, whatever he's going to know must first be taught to him. Also, they have no discretion--they don't know what's right and what's wrong: they don't know the right foods to eat, they don't have enough sense to stay out of the street, they don't know not to put certain things in their mouth, etc. These things must be taught!

2. CHILDREN LACK STATURE

Children have problems in the physical area. They are weak and unable to support or sustain themselves. Parents have the responsibility of feeding them, nourishing them, and making sure they get the proper rest and sleep. Children can't fend for themselves; they can't make it in the world alone, and they can't defend themselves . . . so the parents must protect them.

3. CHILDREN LACK FAVOR WITH MAN

Children are not socially acclimated. The most dominant thing you see about a child when he comes into the world is that he's totally selfish. He can't conceive of anything but: "I want it now," or "It's mine." It's really hard to teach a child to share, isn't it? Why? Because they don't know any of the social graces like humility or unselfishness --these must be taught.

4. CHILDREN LACK FAVOR WITH GOD

In the spiritual area, children don't just naturally grow to love God. When they are little they will comprehend God, but without proper instruction, they will drift away. This is why Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and, when he is old, he will not depart from it." This is the responsibility of the parents.¹

¹John MacArthur, Jr., Family Feuding: How to End It, ed. David Sper (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1981), pp. 79-80.

John 6:5-14--A Lad Bringing Food for the
Feeding of the 5,000

This is the final example passage that the gospels mention. And it is here that a beautiful picture of Jesus is painted by His attitude toward children. Although having already mentioned the feeding of the five thousand from another perspective, a new set of details, only mentioned by John, are the focus of attention. This is that familiar lesson of the young lad who brings the five loaves and two fishes that Jesus uses to feed the five thousand plus people. The key to the passage with reference to children is the contrast between Andrew's attitude and Jesus' attitude. Notice first, the word used by Andrew to refer to this lad. It is *παιδάριον*, the double diminutive word for child. G. Campbell Morgan tries to illustrate the force of the diminutive by a somewhat humorous but pointed translation of verse nine, "Andrew, perhaps looking into the face of Jesus, said, Well, there is a wee bit of a laddie here who has five barley loaves, and two tiny fishes, but, what is the good? What are these among so many?"¹ However, Jesus disregards Andrew's emphasis on the small and uses what the boy has to feed the crowd. So then, "the point of the story is that the insufficient from the hands of the insignificant became sufficient and significant when placed in the hands of

¹G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to John (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), p. 99.

Jesus."¹ This then becomes a beautiful picture of Jesus and His willingness to accept a child on the child's level with whatever that child has to offer the Lord for the Lord's use, and then to richly bless the offering. Thus, a child should not be afraid to bring whatever he has to be used of the Lord because the Lord will and can use it.

Healing Passages

Only four accounts are represented in this section on healing, each of which deals with the healing of a son or daughter by Jesus in response to the pleading of a particular parent. Those passages are: 1) Matthew 9:18-26--Jairus' daughter, 2) Matthew 15:21-28--the Syrophenician's daughter, 3) Matthew 17:14-21--a "certain man's" son, and 4) John 4:46-54--the Nobleman's son. In these passages one overriding principle will be found; that is, that the pleading of parents to Jesus and their faith to heal their children, has extraordinary effects.

Matthew 9:18-26--Jairus' Daughter

The miracle of the healing of Jairus' daughter is found in two other gospels than Matthew (Mark 5:21-43 and Luke 8:41-56). Both supply many more details than Matthew and will be referred to frequently. To begin, note that Mark and Luke both name Jairus while only Luke mentions that this was Jairus' only daughter and that she was about

¹James M. Boice, The Gospel of John (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), vol. 2, p. 127.

twelve years old. In the events leading up to this miracle it is Jairus, her father, who comes to Jesus pleading for help. And notice that his request is specific; he wants her to live (Matt 9:18). After Jairus received word that the child had died, Jesus comforted him and told him to believe. When they got to Jairus' house Jesus raised the child from the dead. The fact that Jesus raised the child in response to the faith of her father, who cried to Jesus for help, yields the principle that it is a parent's responsibility to trust God when a child is ill. More specifically, it is a parent's duty to bring the physical needs of their children before the Lord. But this is not the end of the story because both Mark and Luke record that after the girl was raised, Jesus told them (probably her parents), to give her something to eat. In this small detail,

Observe the sweet reasonableness of the Lord! He ordered them to give her, not the catechism, but meat--physical food. Jairus, here is your bairn. Take care of her, give her meat. We talk about the Man Jesus and blessed be His humanity; but this is God, and He robs death of its prey, and thinks about the meal of a little maiden. . . .¹

The principle here is that just as Jesus cared for the serious physical need of this girl, namely, life itself, so also He cares for the small physical need of her life, namely, her daily food.

¹G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Matthew (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1929), p. 97.

Matthew 15:21-28--The Syrophenician's

Daughter

The emphasis of this miracle, which is also found in Mark 7:24-30,¹ is definitely on the faith of the mother. As Jairus did when his daughter was sick so also this woman does when her daughter is demon possessed. She came to Jesus pleading in total helplessness and genuine faith. But, this miracle adds a new emphasis to the plea of parents for their children and that is, persistence. The mother persisted in her request to Jesus and when He saw her genuine faith, even though she was not an Israelite, He answered her prayer. Lockyer draws the following principle when he says, "Here was an anxious mother who refused to be denied, and so backed up her plea with perseverance, and by such has left all parents an example to follow."² More specifically he writes, "The lesson of the narrative for all parents concerned about deliverance of any of their children from Satan's control, is to tarry in prayer and to trust the Lord to undertake in His own way and time."³

Matthew 17:14-21--A "Certain Man's" Son

This miracle is recorded elsewhere in Mark 9:14-29 and Luke 9:37-43. Aside from the fact that Luke says this

¹Mark confirms the fact that this daughter was a young child by the use of the diminutive θυγάτριον.

²Lockyer, All the Children, p. 211.

³Ibid., p. 212.

was the man's only son (v. 38), this miracle teaches only the one main principle of the other miracles of healing. Therefore, it is a parent's responsibility to bring the physical need of their children before the Lord in simple faith.

John 4:46-54--The Nobleman's Son

Some interesting facts surrounding this miracle are: 1) John 4:46-54 is the only place where this miracle is recorded, 2) It is called the second miracle of Jesus' great Galilean ministry. That the son was a young child is clarified by the father when he calls him a παῖδ'ον (v. 49). Again, however, the principle of parental responsibility is the same here as in all the other miracles of healing.

Teaching Passages

The nine teaching passages, upon which this study centers, make up the largest category of passages in the gospels on children. All of these passages are ones in which Jesus is teaching or speaking. For the most part, though, He is speaking to everyone else but children. When He does speak of them it is in the form of an illustration, an allusion or as an example to others of a deeper spiritual truth. The specific passages with which this section will deal are: 1) Matthew 7:7-11--Children as an illustration of prayer, 2) Matthew 11:16-19--Children playing in the market, 3) Matthew 15:1-9--Children and obeying parents, 4) Matthew 18:1-14--Children and the kingdom of heaven, 5) Matthew

19:13-15--Jesus blesses little children, 6) Matthew 18:16-22 --The rich young ruler, 7) Matthew 21:15-16--Children praise the Lord in the temple, 8) John 9:1-3--Jesus and the man born blind, 9) John 16:21--Children and birth. Keep in mind, of course, that many of these passages have other parallel passages that will be included along with the respective accounts. Before beginning it is necessary to mention that there are a number of other pericopes of Jesus' teaching (Matt 10:21, 35-39, 42; Matt 12:46-50; Mark 13:9-13; Luke 15:11-32), which appear to be related to our topic. But on further inspection one realizes that they either concern spiritual children or family members in general not including actual children in terms of young in age. Because of that, these will be left out of the study.

Matthew 7:7-11--Children as an

Illustration of Prayer

In the sermon on the mount is found the first teaching of Jesus involving children. Jesus' main thrust in this short paragraph is to teach his listeners about God's perspective on prayer so as to change their perspective on prayer. To do so, Jesus chooses an illustration from everyday family life to make an analogy with spiritual life, particularly prayer life. But, with reference to the subject of children, Jesus makes a hypothetical situation of a son asking his father for food. If the son, He says, were to ask his father for some bread or some fish to eat, then the

natural, normal response of the father, out of love for his son, would be to give his son some bread and fish, not a stone or a serpent. The significance of the stone and the serpent in relation to the bread and the fish, respectively, is explained by Barclay,

The point is that in each case the two things cited bear a close resemblance. The little, round, limestone stones on the seashore were exactly the shape and colour of little loaves. If a son asks bread will his father mock him by offering him a stone which looks like bread but which is impossible to eat? If a son asks a fish, will his father give him a serpent? Almost certainly the serpent is an eel. According to the Jewish food laws an eel could not be eaten, because an eel was an unclean fish. . . . That regulation ruled out the eel as an article of diet. If a son asks for a fish, but a fish which it is forbidden to eat, and which is useless to eat? Would a father mock his son's hunger like that?¹

Jesus' implication is, no, even an evil father would not do that. Even an evil father would naturally give his son real food. Pentecost puts it this way, "Jesus said that it is a father's nature to meet the needs of his children. . . . It is a father's responsibility, as well as an expression of a true father's heart, to meet the needs of his children."² The analogy that Jesus then makes, speaking of prayer, is if a human, sinful father knows how to grant to his children their request for the basic needs of life, then how much more shall your heavenly Father grant His children their

¹William Barclay, The Gospel of Matthew, 2 vols., in The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 1:274-75.

²Dwight J. Pentecost, The Sermon on the Mount (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), p. 175.

requests for the basic needs of life. Regarding children though, there are two viewpoints of the lesson being taught, from which principles can be seen. First, from a child's viewpoint, children should naturally have confidence in their parents when they ask for the fundamental needs of life, that their parents will supply them with everything they need. Second, from the parents' viewpoint, parents should naturally provide for their children's needs of life, especially when they ask.

Matthew 11:16-19--Children Playing
in the Marketplace

Both Matthew and Luke record the short rebuking lesson of Jesus to the multitude using the playing children as an illustration. In the illustration Jesus certainly recalls what He had seen happen many times. Children playing in the marketplace was a very commonplace event in Jesus' day since the town marketplace was the center of activity and also where many a child's parents worked. The game the children played was exactly what they had seen the grown-ups do, "as now, so then, children love to imitate their elders. . . ."¹ This game may have been some sort of mimicking of the marriage celebration and the funeral dirge. Whatever it was, in this story it ended in disaster, as children's games occasionally do, because some of the children just did not want to play. Jesus likens these children

¹Lockyer, All the Children, p. 31.

to the people of His day by making an analogy with the coming of John and Himself. There are two different interpretations of the meaning of this analogy: some say that Jesus represents the first group of children playing wedding since Jesus came with an invitation to the messianic marriage feast. And that John the Baptist represents the second group of children playing funeral since John came with an invitation to repentance. The result of which is that the others, "this generation," refused to play.¹ Others more correctly point out that "this generation" is who Jesus said is like the children playing. Furthermore,

The comparison to be made between the parable story and human reality does not concern individual actors and incidents, but the whole astonishing course of events and its typical reversals. The children and their game which failed to represent what happens when John (the predecessor of the Messiah) and the Messiah himself appear on the scene.²

With regard to the specifics of this illustration for children and the context into which it appears, Weber concludes,

At the very outset of this search for understanding, it is important to recall the parable of the children's game. This parable and its application show that Jesus did not idealize children. In that particular case, He saw in their game which went wrong an exemplary instance of how "this generation" fails to discern what really matters. . . . Thus, Jesus had a fully realistic view of children. Yet, in His originality, He always confronted such human views of people and events with the realism of God's Kingdom. This led not only to new teaching, but to Christian's confessing that in the person of Jesus, . . . God's Kingdom was actually

¹John F. Walvoord, Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 83.

²Weber, Jesus and the Children, p. 2.

anticipated. Within this anticipated reality of the Kingdom, children appear in a totally new light.¹

And this is not just limited to this passage but plays an important part in many of Jesus' teachings involving children. Back, though, to the children at hand, Tasker makes the following application,

It is the general characteristics of children at play to which Jesus directs attention. They think they know what they want, when in fact they do not. They tire so easily and so quickly at the game they are playing, and are constantly wanting to start something fresh. They are by nature restless and perpetually striving to obtain some further and more satisfying pleasure. And only too often because of their peevishness, their waywardness and their discontent, the game ends in a quarrel; and it makes no difference then whether the game has been one of weddings or funerals!²

But, for children this is normal because they are children and it is Jesus who recognizes this fact.

Matthew 15:1-9--Children and Obeying Parents

The confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees in Matthew 15:1-9 has special reference to all children regardless of age. Jesus here plainly upholds the standard that was set down by the fifth commandment in the Old Testament. Although He was using it to rebuke the Pharisees who were grown adults, the point for young children is even that much more applicable. For if adults had to abide by its standard, how much more should children? The importance of

¹Ibid., pp. 12-13.

²R. V. G. Tasker, gen. ed., The Gospel According to St. Matthew, in The Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 116.

this commandment is accentuated by the fact that "this is the only statement in the ten commandments relative to how the family is to function."¹ Its meaning in the Old Testament related to two things, both respect and financial support were required.² The Pharisees in this case were violating both those requirements because they were dishonoring their parents by their attitude and by their refusal to give financial support. Jesus condemns both their attitude and their act and points out, in essence, that just because you are a teacher of the law in God's service, that does not cancel your responsibility to your parents. The application to young children is obvious: Jesus calls for honor that is evidenced by an inward respect and an outward obedience.

Matthew 18:1-14--Children and the
Kingdom of Heaven

In the past there have been a number of different interpretations of Matthew 18:1-14. It is not the author's purpose to deal in great detail with the arguments pro and con for each view. However, briefly stated, there are two main views of this passage. The first view takes a literal approach to all of the verses, saying that Jesus is referring to literal children throughout. This approach, in the author's opinion, fails to recognize the import of figurative language and the way in which Jesus uses it in His

¹John MacArthur, Family Feuding, p. 77.

²Ibid., p. 82.

message. The second view believes that verse five makes a transition from literal children to figurative children representing believers. As one supporter states it,

It appears that v. 5 is the transitory v. that finalizes the metaphorical interpretation of v. 6-10. Here the implication is to "such a little child," a literal child and a humble disciple. Therefore, this writer believes that a literal child is implied in v. 1-4 and in v. 5-10 Jesus is referring to children and believers.¹

The key to verse five which makes this transition from literal to metaphorical is in the meaning of the word τοιοῦτο, "one such." Arndt and Gingrich point out that this word means "of such a kind."² And that meaning would definitely support a transition to a metaphorical usage of children. It is the author's belief that this is the correct view and that the implications of such a view make the remainder of these verses much easier to understand. For instance, in verse ten it is not all children who have guardian angels as some say, rather it is only those who believe.

Regarding Jesus and the real children as seen here, Walvoord writes, "The child in the arms of Jesus was a graphic illustration of loving trust, immediate obedience in coming to the arms of Christ, and in seeking only the position of being loved."³ Lest anyone make too close a

¹William John Campbell, "Interpretive Problems of Matthew 18:10" (Unpublished M. Div. thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN, 1974), p. 22.

²BAGD, p. 829.

³Walvoord, Matthew, p. 135.

connection between all the characteristics of children and the teaching of Jesus, Calvin points out,

It will perhaps be objected, that children, even from the womb, have a native pride, which leads them to desire the highest honour and distinction; but the reply is obvious, that comparisons must not be too closely or too exactly carried out, so as to apply at all points. The tender age of little children is distinguished by simplicity to such an extent, that they are unacquainted with the degrees of honour, and with all the incentives to pride; so that they are properly and justly held out by Christ as an example.¹

In review, then, of these verses with a view toward children it is noteworthy to understand that Jesus was not instructing children as such, that He did not try to convert them, and that He did not try to make them His disciples.² But the principle is that Jesus recognized that little children do have certain qualities and general characteristics, that everyone must try to emulate.

Matthew 19:13-15--Jesus Blesses

Little Children

The context of these verses is very fitting for they appear immediately after Jesus' discussion of marriage. Although this may not be that significant since in the parallel passages, Mark 10:13-16 supports this order, but Luke 18:15-17 does not. In any case, notice first that these were definitely young children, supported by the fact that

¹Calvin, A Harmony, vol. 2, p. 333.

²Donald M. Joy, "Why Teach Children?" In Childhood Education in the Church, eds. Roy B. Zuck and Robert E. Clark (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 14.

the word is παιδία. And that they had to be brought to Jesus is explained vividly by the aorist passive for "they were brought." Second, notice the purpose for which they were brought. It is so that Jesus might lay His hands on them and pray for them. Barnes unfolds the act when he writes, "It was customary among the Jews, when blessings were sought for others in prayer, to lay the hands on the head of the person prayed for, implying a kind of consecration to God."¹

Unfortunately the disciples would not allow the parents to bring their children, thinking Jesus to be too busy and too important for these little children. Surprisingly so, the course of events takes a radical change when Jesus, instead of agreeing with His disciples, rebukes them for their lack of compassion and sensitivity. He says to allow them to come to Him. Then He adds the clinching statement, "for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 14). The word for "of such" is the same as that used in Matthew 18:5, τοιοῦτων. Therefore, the meaning is essentially the same; of such a kind as these little, helpless, trusting children, is the kingdom of heaven. Then Jesus proceeds to lay His hands on them and bless them which was why they were brought. The application of this lesson to children is that Jesus recognizes the value of children in His overall

¹Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament, Explanatory and Practical: Matthew and Mark, ed. Robert Frew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1949), p. 196.

program, and that they should not be neglected because He was never too busy to take time for them, thus, leaving a rich example for all to follow.

Matthew 19:16-22--The Rich Young Ruler

The story of the rich young ruler, as far as this study is interested, does not center on the idea that this was a "young" ruler, because, that he is a grown man is obvious (cf. vv. 20, 22). The point of attention is on the statement of the young man that he had kept all the commandments from his youth up. This statement is not recorded by Matthew, only by Mark (10:30) and Luke (18:21). The point observed is that this man must have been taught these commandments from his youth up. And Jesus does not say that anything is wrong with his keeping of them. Therefore, the principle is that the teaching of the external laws, rules and commandments to children is not wrong at all; as a matter of fact it is necessary. But as Jesus points out to the rich young ruler it is not enough just to have the externals without the internals. Rather the external keeping of the commandments should be the result of an internal love and heart for the Lord.

Matthew 21:15-16--Children Praise

the Lord in the Temple

"One of the most beautiful things noticed concerning the great day of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem was the

presence of children in the Temple waiting for their King."¹ Matthew is the only gospel writer to relay the details of the children in the temple on that day. It is after He throws the money-changers and traders out of the Temple that Jesus, having entered Jerusalem for His final offer of the kingdom to Israel, takes time to heal those who are brought to Him. While He is doing this the παῖδες are praising Him as the King. The word used here is the plural form of the same word used for Jesus when He was in the Temple at the age of twelve. So most probably these were boys of twelve years or more who came to the Temple for their first Passover.² When the chief priests and scribes heard this they were very upset and they came to Jesus and said, "Can't you hear what they are saying?" Of course, they were expecting that Jesus should tell the children to be quiet. But Jesus, knowing that what the children sang was the complete truth, said to the chief priests and scribes, "Yea, have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou has perfected praise?" Walvoord comments, "In effect he was saying, 'The youths are right and you are wrong.' If babes who barely can speak can praise the Lord, how much more these youths now twelve years of age and older?"³ These children praising Jesus in the Temple had recognized

¹Lockyer, All the Children, p. 34.

²Lenski, Matthew, p. 187.

³Walvoord, Matthew, p. 158.

what no one else had, that the King was in their midst. They had sung while others had remained silent.¹ Thus, even a child can praise the Lord in his or her own way and when he does God is always there to receive that praise and to take notice of the one giving it.

John 9:1-3--Jesus and the Man Born Blind

In John 9 is the miracle of Jesus healing the man born blind. The reason this was not included in the healing section is that it is not the miracle that is in focus as it was for the healing passages. Rather it is in the details that can be observed and in the teaching of Jesus. From the first verse it is announced that this man had been born blind. This fact alone shows that children can and are born blind and more generally children are at times born with birth defects. This is a reality of life that no one would deny. The question that the disciples ask, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (v. 2), regards the relationship between sin and suffering. Jesus' answer, as Plummer points out, is a warning to them of assuming, like Job's friends, that a connection exists between suffering and sin.² What Jesus says in essence is that it was God's will for this man to be born blind for the specific purpose of Jesus in healing him. The concept that

¹Lockyer, All the Children, p. 34.

²A. Plummer, The Gospel According to S. John, in Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools (Cambridge: University Press, 1893), p. 204.

can be drawn from this passage is that children born with physical defects are born with those defects for a specific purpose of God. And in this particular case it was so that the works of God should be made manifest.

John 16:21--Children and Birth

The final teaching is an illustration that Jesus used of a woman giving birth, to teach His disciples about His death and resurrection. The verse itself reads, "A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." From simply observing what Jesus says here the following is clear: 1) Jesus recognized the reality of the pain of childbirth, 2) Jesus recognized the value of human life, 3) Jesus recognized the joy of a new-born baby especially to a mother. The principle here centers on the value of human life as it relates to children.

Summary

The key passages that have been discussed have yielded a wealth of material. The example, healing and teaching passages have each given varying principles on the Biblical view of children. These principles will now be used as guidelines for twentieth century living.

CHAPTER III

APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES

Having analyzed and extracted various principles from the gospel passages, it is imperative to apply them to life today. It is necessary to do so because the principles were drawn from a different historical/cultural era. This means that they must be shown to be timeless by their relevance to the twentieth century. There are three groups of people which the application will center around: children, parents and churches. The application to these groups will help to show the validity of the almost two-thousand year old principles.

Application to Children

With regard to children, there are three relationships that the gospels emphasize for children to know. The first is a child's relation to himself. From the time a child is born until he is an adolescent, it was learned that he takes a passive role in his growth and development (Lk. 1:1-80; 2:21-52). Contrary to this passive role is the active role that he assumes when he becomes an adolescent (Lk. 2:41-52). As an adolescent, the child must pursue a daily, continuous growth in mental, physical, social and spiritual activities.

The second is a child's relationship to his parents. Foremost in this relationship is a child's responsibility to be obedient to his parents. Jesus' support of the fifth commandment (Mt. 15:1-9) makes it very clear that children must honor their parents in a way that is evidenced by an inward respect and an outward obedience. This principle is enforced by Jesus' example of obedience to his parents (Lk. 2:52). The principle of obedience remains unchanged today. Children must still obey their parents. But in today's society obedience must be emphasized over and over again. The reason is that children are being bombarded through television and the tenor of this generation to be individualistic, self-sufficient, proud, and disobedient. Thus, children must be impressed as to the importance of this responsibility by the very fact that it pleases God.

Another principle for children in relation to parents is that children should naturally have confidence in their parents when they ask for the fundamental needs of life. Especially, in that their parents will supply those needs (Mt. 7:7-11). Applied to twentieth century America, this principle is often overlooked or taken for granted but it is still an essential part of a child's relationship to his parents.

The final principle relating to children's relation to parents is taken from Jesus' encounter with his parents in the temple (Lk. 2:41-52). From that it was learned that children may instruct their parents concerning their change

to adolescence if they do it respectfully as Jesus did. The key was that children must be obedient regardless of their parents response. In order for this to happen properly there must be open lines of communication between parent and child. The child, of course, cannot be responsible for his parents' reaction which may be negative but by his quiet obedient spirit not only honor God but also show his parents that he was very sincere and honest about his new responsibilities as a young adolescent.

The third relationship of a child is to God. Basic to this relationship is the fact that children are important in God's program (Mt. 9:18-26; 14:21; 19:13-15; Jn. 6:5-14). This fact should serve to give children a sense of value and acceptance before God, others and self. Because they are important, they often receive God's blessing both physical and spiritual (Mt. 9:18-26; 14:21; 19:13-15). And God cares about their needs, be they great or small (Mt. 9:18-26). Because He does, children should have confidence in God and what He will do for them. In light of these acts of God toward a child, a child can act toward God in return. A child can bring anything to the Lord for His use knowing that the Lord is willing to accept that gift on the child's level (Jn. 6:5-14). One example of this is that a child can bring praise to God (Mt. 21:15-16). And today children can still praise God, whether through song, service or testimony, whatever it is God will accept it.

In concluding this section on application to children in their relation to self, parents and God, it must be said that the only way children are able to find these things out is through reading the Bible themselves or by being taught what it says by parents or churches. Parents and churches then, become very responsible for teaching their children these key principles and applying them to life situations.

Application to Parents

The principles found in the gospels emphasize three areas of responsibility with reference to parents. The first, and not necessarily the most important, responsibility parents have is to teach their children the principles their children need to know. The guiding principle for doing this is that parents should teach their children to love the Lord first in their heart and then by their actions (Mt. 19:16-22). And never should there be an outward act unless it is done in response to an inward love for the Lord. That is, parents should teach their children external rules, but they should also teach them that external rules are to be kept because it pleases God when they are kept.

The second area of responsibility for parents is to know about their children. There are numerous principles that teach parents about how God views children, what they are like and how they grow. From God's perspective, He is in total control of every child's life (Mt. 2:1-23). Also, children are very valuable and important to God and His

program (Mt. 14:21; 19:13-15; Jn. 6:5-14; 16:21). Even children born with birth defects (Jn. 9:1-3) are part of God's plan and should not be rejected. Knowing these things can greatly affect a parent's attitude toward children, and parents can then act by committing everything that happens totally to God's care. Also, parents can begin to treat children the same way God does, especially as seen through the example of Jesus. That is, they are to value them as God does, and love them as Jesus did.

Knowing what children are like can also help parents raise them better. For one, children are very easily influenced (Mt. 14:1-2), and because they are, parents must take special care to influence them for good and not bad. This means being aware of what influences them from outside the home as well as from inside. Another characteristic the gospels teach about children is that many times they think they know what they want when in fact they don't (Mt. 11:16-19). Parents who know what their children really need can be a much better judge of what is good for a child even if a child says he wants something else. The next characteristic is that children are by nature restless and are always striving to obtain a more satisfying pleasure. This was made especially clear in Matthew 11:16-19 where children were seen playing games. So when parents realize that children tire very easily when playing and constantly want something fresh, they can help meet those needs by structuring a varied schedule for them. Also in the same

passage still another characteristic was discovered. Namely, as a result of their restlessness, children oftentimes quarrel over very insignificant things. Parents who know this will not get upset but will understand that this is going to happen and will simply change the child's focus of attention, unless, of course, there is sin involved. A final characteristic is that children have qualities that Jesus said were models for the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 18:1-14). And although no specifics about those qualities were given, a parent can nurture and encourage any godly trait that the child has.

Knowing how children grow can also help parents raise children better. From studying the childhood of Jesus it was learned that children basically have two stages of growth (Lk. 2:40-52). The first stage is from birth to adolescence and in this stage children take a passive role in their growth. This means that parents are responsible for much of their growth both physically and spiritually. Around the age of twelve children go from childhood to adolescence and enter the second stage of adolescence to adulthood. Although remaining under much of their parents care during this period, children now take an active role in their growth. Knowing this, parents can prepare children to assume the full responsibility in the four areas of growth. Also, parents can prepare themselves to slowly let their children go. Further, they can guide their children in making sure that there is balanced, daily growth in each area.

The third area of responsibility for parents centers around those principles that compel parents to action regarding their children. First is that the Scriptures call for godly parents, ones who will obey God where children are concerned (Lk. 1:26-56; Mt. 2:1-23). For it is godly parents that lay the foundation for the lives of godly children (Lk. 1-2). More specifically, it is fathers who have the ultimate responsibility for children. When parents realize these things they should make sure their lives are in line with God's Word and that they are examples for their children. Second is that parents are naturally required to provide the necessities of life for their children (Mt. 7:7-11; 2:1-23; Lk. 2:1-7). This includes such things as: food, clothing, warmth and protection from harm. Related is the fact that parents should provide in such a way that children are confident that their parents will provide for them when they come asking (Mt. 7:7-11). Although these things were taken for granted then as they are today, they remain a vital responsibility of every parent. And every parent should repeatedly re-evaluate their priorities based on whether or not those needs are being met. Third is that when children are sick parents are to be the intercessors before God for their health (Mt. 9:18-26). However, results are increased when parents are persistent about their requests before God on behalf of their sick child (Mt. 15:21-28). Any parent who knows this principle and has a sick child is compelled by love for the child to beseech God on the

child's behalf. Fourth is that the Scriptures set the precedent for parents to dedicate their children publicly to God, acknowledging God's claim on them as His property (Lk. 2:21-39). Fifth, is that parents must not sin against their children by reproving or punishing them when they begin to take on the natural responsibilities of life (Lk. 2:41-52). This means that parents must be sensitive to the changes that their children, teenagers particularly, are going through. Today there is much conflict in homes because parents have failed in this very thing.

The gospels, then, have much to say to parents. Not only are they to teach their children many things, they are also to know about them and are to act in accordance with what the Scriptures teach them.

Application To Churches

Concerning the church, surprisingly enough, the gospels do have some key contributions to make in relation to children. As a supporter of the Scriptures and of the family, the church should enforce and be in full agreement with the principles of the gospels as they relate to children and parents. This means that the church is responsible to know what the Scriptures say and to teach the whole counsel of God. In doing this, the church should first put special emphasis on teaching fathers to be spiritual leaders of their families. And on teaching mothers the importance of their role in the home with children. Second the church should concern itself with the teaching and

building up of the essential areas of a child's growth with a special emphasis on balance in those areas (Lk. 2:52). And last, the church should learn to accept children on their own level of growth and not expect an adult response or level of maturity, especially in the area of salvation. These along with the many other principles will assure a healthy church with healthy families and healthy children.

Summary

The application of the various principles can be directed, as mentioned, to three groups of people; to children, to parents, and to churches. As for children, the gospels give very specific guidelines for their relationships with themselves, parents and God. As far as parents are concerned, the gospels give numerous details for their responsibilities to teach, to know about and to live properly before their children. For the church, the major responsibility is to teach what the Scriptures teach and that means instructing children and parents about what the gospels say about children. The application of the various principles that the gospels give with regard to children, have extensive effects when put to work in the life of the family and the church. But the real value is that one can depend on their Biblical validity. And based on the authority of Scripture one can have assurance that they will work in everyday life.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study are plain and clear to any reader and can have, when applied, very significant effects in the lives of children, parents and churches. And although not every passage was written to children, parents and churches, they were written for them and as 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says,

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

In general summary, the first chapter discussed the contextual considerations. The section on Old Testament Family Backgrounds sought to establish a basis of first century life during the time of the gospels, by which the key passages could be understood, especially with reference to the environment in which a child lived. The word studies attempted to briefly analyze the various words used for children. The studies were only intended to point out the primary and secondary meanings of the words as used in the gospels. The importance of these studies was realized in the discussion of the many passages where the correct meaning became a key to understanding the essential thrust of the passage.

The second chapter zeroed in on the individual passages as seen in the three categories; example passages,

healing passages and teaching passages. The example passages which were studied, provided a variety of timeless principles in relation to children. The most important ones of which were those extracted from Jesus' birth and childhood. The healing passages all emphasized one major principle regarding a parent's responsibility to children. The teaching passages as Weber summarizes, ". . . are not, in the first place, stories to be told to children in Sunday Schools. Rather, they are radical challenges to adult Christians."¹ And they present numerous principles for those who read them.

The third chapter made application of the many principles to three groups of people: children, parents and churches. And although the application was general in nature it showed that there was no change in the basic principles as set forth in another historical/cultural era and applied to today.

One caution that must be stated, however, is that this author realizes that this research only covers a portion of the Biblical record and, therefore, is incomplete. The remainder of the work is left to others who also desire to see a "theology" of children developed. But let the reader beware that this fact does not in any way diminish the value of what the gospels have to say on this subject. The fact of the matter is that the principles still stand

¹Weber, Jesus and the Children, p. 10.

and must be followed in order to develop children that are honoring to the Lord. And when they are followed, they eliminate an experience based theology or one which is totally controlled by secular, humanistic principles. That is, they filter the principles of secular science, acting as the Biblical grid in which everything must fit before it is accepted as truth and used to raise children. Thus, the tension between Christian theology and child developmental psychology is relieved. But more importantly, children, parents and churches are given specific principles that can be followed with complete assurance of success.

The author would like to close this thesis with a number of significant quotes that say in different ways what the gospels have to say about children and which complement what has been said throughout this thesis. Thus,

The gospels written by and for adults, reflect that children were allowed to be children in Jesus' day. There was no preoccupation with them as objects of prophetic or salvation utterances. A certain aloofness seemed to emerge easily from a society that completely committed itself to the processes of family and synagogue education for transmitting its treasured beliefs and life-styles.¹

and,

Jesus, who had an ideal childhood Himself, lifted our whole concept of childhood to a new plane giving it a beauty never known in the ancient world.²

and,

¹Joy, "Why Teach Children?" p. 14.

²Edith Deen, Family Living In The Bible (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), p. 236.

The gospels portray Jesus as a lover of children. Having entered the world as a child, He knew the child-heart, and thus childhood was always sacred in His eyes. What strong condemnation He had for those who outraged the rights of children, and how warmly He welcomed the little ones whom He presented as models to those aspiring to the Kingdom of Heaven!¹

and,

. . . no one thought of a child as Jesus did. It is due to His elevation of childhood that all over the civilized world today children are thought of with such tenderness. . . .²

and,

Jesus was apparently never too busy for children, and we have no record of His becoming impatient with them.³

and finally,

Jesus placed a high value on children. Jesus attributed faith and belief to the children who played in His presence and found themselves on His lap and in His stories. Their open credulity became the analogy of commitment to His discipleship. Yet He did not call them to discipleship or chide them for unbelief or draw the net for conversion. He accepted them at their stage of development for what they were, but saw beyond that to their potential as full-grown creatures made in the image of God. So He went about seeking to change the life-molding environment of those children. In our ministry, we will do no better than to imitate Him. When we do, we will provide an environment for children in which we: (a) show respect for their value to God, accepting them at their various stages of development and ministering to them in appropriate ways; (b) affirm their childlike faith, and (c) develop a rich display of faithful adherence to the traditions, values, beliefs, and life-styles which are thoroughly and honestly Christian.⁴

¹Lockyer, All the Children, p. 51.

²Ibid., p. 181.

³Joy, "Why Teach Children?" p. 14.

⁴Ibid., pp. 17-18.

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