

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Thirty-Second Week -- Monday

JESUS AMAZES THE SCHOLARS

*"And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast. When they had finished the days, as they returned, the boy Jesus lingered behind in Jerusalem. And Joseph and His mother did not know it . . . Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:42-46).*

The alarmed parents soon found their Son. It is said to have been "after three days," meaning three days from the first departure from Jerusalem; and as one day was spent in going out, and another in coming back, this implies that they found Him on the day after their return.

And where did they find Him? In the temple; and that they sought Him there doubtless was the reason that they found Him so soon. It is very probable that Jesus had evinced so much delight in visiting the temple during his residence with them in the city, that this was almost the first place where they sought Him. When they came back the previous evening, they would naturally return to the place where they had lodged not only for a night's rest but as the most likely place where they could hear of their Son, and it may be thought that the people there had informed them of his movements. But this was not the case, for it would appear that He had not returned to this place for his meals or to sleep, for in that case they would have found Him the previous evening when He came there.

They found Him "in the temple." That is, they found Him not in the temple itself (to which none but the priests were admitted), nor in the court of the priests (for He was not among the priests), but found Him among the doctors--the teachers of the law--and therefore in some of the chambers or halls connected with the temple.

There were many doctors who taught in the colleges or schools of the city, and there were three learned bodies authorized to sit within the enclosure of the temple itself. These were the great Sanhedrim, the lesser Sanhedrim, and the bench of three members, which respectively sat in the chamber called Gazith, at the gate of the court of Israel, and at the gate of the court of the Gentiles. It is difficult to determine in which of these assemblies our Lord was discovered or whether it may not have been in the synagogue, for there was one within the temple-enclosure, where, after service, one might be admitted to conversation with the learned doctors connected

with it. It was, however, certainly in one or the other of these assemblies that Joseph and Mary found their lost Son, "sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions; and all that heard Him were astonished at his understanding and answers."

It may be observed that it was the custom for the doctors of the law to be seated on chairs or benches while the scholars sat on the ground before them. Hence the scholar was said to *sit at the feet* of his master, as Paul did of Gamaliel. The Sanhedrim, however, which when full comprised no less than seventy persons, sat in a semi-circle upon a bench and the students, arranged according to their proficiency, *sat* on three benches or forms one behind another in front of this arc. Behind these benches *stood* the common or occasional auditors. We must suppose that it was in one of these senses that Jesus "*sat* among the doctors," unless it happened that they invited Him near and gave Him a place among themselves, being struck by the profundity of his remarks, that they might hear and observe Him better. In that case, however, Joseph and Mary would scarcely have been able to approach Him to converse with Him in an undertone, as they did.

As to the questioning, great liberty was allowed to hearers and students in this respect, the system of instruction being to a great extent interrogative, and students being encouraged to propose their doubts and difficulties and to put any questions which the thirst of knowledge suggested to those supposed to be able, from their position and attainments, to afford an authoritative solution. The questions of the young Jesus, founded upon what He heard from the doctors, were so acute and profound that these learned persons were greatly amazed; and in their turn, and in order to test the actual depth of his knowledge, they put deep questions to Him. This was an unusual course, and as such shows how strongly the learned and venerable persons composing the assembly were impressed and interested by this extraordinary child. His answers to the designedly trying questions proposed by the doctors afforded them new matter for astonishment.

It is, however, surely a grievous misrepresentation of this striking scene to call it "Christ *disputing* with the doctors." It is little likely that He would be forgetful of his tender years and engage in eager disputation with the sages of the land, but we rather suppose Him, in a quiet and becoming manner, putting questions tending to direct their attention to the inner spirit of the Law and the Prophets, and in the same manner and to the same end answering the searching questions put to himself. We cannot doubt that all had special reference to the Messiah and to the real nature of his kingdom and his work, and that much of the amazement of the doctors was excited by views so much at variance with those commonly entertained.

The admiration which this wondrous child excited might have led to more (and probably inconvenient) inquiries about Him had not Joseph and Mary made their appearance at this point. Persons of such obviously humble condition of life claiming to be his parents abated somewhat their regard for Him and helped to cast a veil over the eyes of such indolent seekers after truth as they were. The holy child Jesus had, however, left his testimony among them.

Joseph and Mary must have been greatly astonished at what they beheld, and at least Mary herself could not but receive some increase of that mysterious reverence with which she regarded her God-born son. We cannot doubt that Jesus, when he perceived them, arose dutifully out of his place and came to them, taking the occasion of withdrawing himself from that admiring assembly. When they were together, the mother of Jesus asked Him gently, not as rebuking Him but as seeking a reason for His proceedings, why he had remained behind, informing Him that she and his father had been seeking Him with great trouble of mind. Our Lord's reply intimated that they needed not to be thus solicitous on his account, for they should have surmised the occasion of his tarrying behind--that the time must come when the business of his real Father must engage him wholly.

They did not understand his meaning very well, or only caught glimpses of it. But Mary, as was her custom, laid up these words of her Divine Son in her heart of hearts, which had become a treasury wherein his sayings and doings were most carefully preserved and pondered over.