

I. Introduction

- A. Because there is no better pattern for children and young men and women to obey than Jesus Christ, we will examine the young life of Christ and be instructed by it.
- B. Let us review His home life, young adulthood, and manhood.

II. Jesus Christ's life

- A. Home life
 - 1. Joseph-
 - a) He was of the line of Abraham - David, i.e. Mes-siah (Matthew 1:1-17).
 - b) He was a righteous man.
 - (1) In the Law-Luke 2:21--24, 39.
 - (2) In the heart-
 - (a) He obeyed the angel-Matthew 1:20-21; 2:13-14, 19-23.
 - (b) He cared for Mary-1:18.
 - (c) He worked hard-Matthew 13:55.
 - 2. Mary-
 - a) She was of the line of Adam, Abraham, and David as well-Luke 3:23-38.
 - b) She was righteous
 - (1) In the Law-she followed her betrothed husband-Luke 2:1-7.
 - (2) In the heart-
 - (a) She obeyed the angel-Luke 1:38
 - (b) She was a help to Elizabeth for three months-1:39-45, 56.
 - 3. History

The first education was necessarily the mother's. Even the Talmud owns this, when, among the memorable sayings of the sages, it records one of the School of Rabbi Jannai, to the effect that knowledge of the Law may be looked for in those, who have sucked it in at their mother's breast. b And what the true mothers in Israel were, is known not only from instances in the Old Testament, from the praise of woman in the Book of Proverbs, and from the sayings of the son of Sirach (Ecclus. 3), but from the Jewish women of the New Testament. 3 If, according to a somewhat curious traditional principle, women were dispensed from all such positive obligations as were incumbent at fixed periods of time (such as putting on phylacteries), other religious duties devolved exclusively upon them. The Sabbath meal, the kindling of the Sabbath lamp, and the setting apart a portion of the dough from the bread for the household,—these are but instances, with which every 'Taph,' as he clung to his mother's skirts, must have been familiar. Even before he could follow her in such religious household duties, his eyes must have been attracted by the Mezuzah attached to the doorpost, as the name of the Most High on the

Youth Advance-Jesus' Homelife

*outside of the little folded parchment was reverently touched by each who came or went, and then the fingers kissed that had come in contact with the Holy Name.^d Indeed, the duty of the Mezuzah was incumbent on women also, and one can imagine it to have been in the heathen-home of Lois and Eunice in the far-off 'dispersion,' where Timothy would first learn to wonder at, then to understand, its meaning. And what lessons for the past and for the present might not be connected with it! In popular opinion it was the symbol of the Divine guard over Israel's homes, the visible emblem of this joyous hymn: 'The Lord shall preserve thy going out and coming in, from this time forth, and even for evermore.'*¹

But it was not only through sight and hearing that, from its very inception, life in Israel became religious. There was also from the first positive teaching, of which the commencement would necessarily devolve on the mother. It needed not the extravagant laudations, nor the promises held out by the Rabbis, to incite Jewish women to this duty. If they were true to their descent, it would come almost naturally to them. Scripture set before them a continuous succession of noble Hebrew mothers. How well they followed their example, we learn from the instance of her, whose son, the child of a Gentile father, and reared far away, where there was not even a Synagogue to sustain religious life, had 'from an infant known the Holy Scriptures,' and V 1, p 230 that in their life-moulding influence. It was, indeed, no idle boast that the Jews 'were from their swaddling-clothes ... trained to recognise God as their Father, and as the Maker of the world;' that, 'having been taught the knowledge (of the laws) from earliest youth, they bore in their souls the image of the commandments;'^b that 'from their earliest consciousness they learned the laws, so as to have them, as it were, engraven upon the soul;' and that they were 'brought up in learning,' 'exercised in the laws,' 'and made acquainted with the acts of their predecessors in order to their imitation of them.'²

But while the earliest religious teaching would, of necessity, come from the lips of the mother, it was the father who was 'bound to teach his son.' To impart to the child knowledge of the Torah conferred as great spiritual distinction, as if a man had received the Law itself on Mount Horeb.^f Every other engagement, even the necessary meal, should give place to this paramount duty; nor should it be forgotten that, while here real labour was necessary, it would never prove fruitless.^h That man was of the profane vulgar (an Am ha-arets), who had sons, but failed to bring them up in knowledge of the Law. Directly the child learned to speak, his religious instruction was to begin^k—no doubt, with such verses of Holy Scripture as composed that part of the Jewish liturgy, which answers to our Creed. Then would follow other passages from the Bible, short prayers, and select sayings of the sages. Special attention was given to the culture of the memory, since forgetfulness might prove as fatal in its consequences as ignorance or neglect of the Law. Very early the child must have been taught what might be called his birthday-text—some verse of Scripture beginning, or ending with, or at least containing, the same letters as his Hebrew

¹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), 228.

² *Ibid.* pp. 229-230

Youth Advance-Jesus' Homelife

name. This guardian-promise the child would insert in its daily prayers.² The earliest hymns taught would be the Psalms for the days of the week, or festive Psalms, such as the Hallel, or those connected with the festive pilgrimages to Zion.

The regular instruction commenced with the fifth or sixth year (according to strength), when every child was sent to school. There can be no reasonable doubt that at that time such schools existed throughout the land. We find references to them at almost every period; indeed, the existence of higher schools and Academies would not have been possible without such primary instruction. Two Rabbis [V 1, p 231](#) of Jerusalem, specially distinguished and beloved on account of their educational labours, were among the last victims of Herod's cruelty. Later on, tradition ascribes to Joshua the son of Gamla the introduction of schools in every town, and the compulsory education in them of all children above the age of six.^b Such was the transcendent merit attaching to this act, that it seemed to blot out the guilt of the purchase for him of the High-Priestly office by his wife Martha, shortly before the commencement of the great Jewish war. ¹ To pass over the fabulous number of schools supposed to have existed in Jerusalem, tradition had it that, despite of this, the City only fell because of the neglect of the education of children. It was even deemed unlawful to live in a place where there was no school.^e Such a city deserved to be either destroyed or excommunicated.

It would lead too far to give details about the appointment of, and provision for, teachers, the arrangements of the schools, the method of teaching, or the subjects of study, the more so as many of these regulations date from a period later than that under review. Suffice it that, from the teaching of the alphabet or of writing, onwards to the farthest limit of instruction in the most advanced Academies of the Rabbis, all is marked by extreme care, wisdom, accuracy, and a moral and religious purpose as the ultimate object. For a long time it was not uncommon to teach in the open air; but this must have been chiefly in connection with theological discussions, and the instruction of youths. But the children were gathered in the Synagogues, or in School-houses,² where at first they either stood, teacher and pupils alike, or else sat on the ground in a semicircle, facing the teacher, as it were, literally to carry into practice the prophetic saying: 'Thine eyes shall see thy teachers.' The introduction of benches or chairs was of later date; but the principle was always the same, that in respect of accommodation there was no distinction between teacher and taught.³ Thus, encircled by his pupils, as by a crown of glory (to use the language of Maimonides), the teacher—generally the Chazzan, or Officer of the Synagogue—should impart to them the precious knowledge of the Law, with constant adaptation to their capacity, with unwearied patience, intense earnestness, strictness tempered by kindness, but, above all, with the highest object of their training ever in view. To keep children from all contact with vice; to train them [V 1, p 232](#) to gentleness, even when bitterest wrong had been received; to show sin in its repulsiveness, rather than to terrify by its consequences; to train to strict truthfulness; to avoid all that might lead to disagreeable or indelicate thoughts; and to do all this without showing partiality, without either undue severity, or laxity of discipline with judicious increase of study and work, with careful attention to thoroughness in acquiring knowledge—all this and more constituted the ideal set before the teacher, and made his office of such high esteem in Israel.

Youth Advance-Jesus' Homelife

Roughly classifying the subjects of study, it was held, that, up to ten years of age, the Bible exclusively should be the text-book; from ten to fifteen the Mishnah, or traditional law; after that age, the student should enter on those theological discussions which occupied time and attention in the higher Academies of the Rabbis. Not that this progression would always be made. For, if after three, or, at most, five years of tuition—that is, after having fairly entered on Mishnic studies—the child had not shown decided aptitude, little hope was to be entertained of his future. The study of the Bible commenced with that of the Book of Leviticus.¹ Thence it passed to the other parts of the Pentateuch; then to the Prophets; and, finally, to the Hagiographa. What now constitutes the Gemara or Talmud was taught in the Academies, to which access could not be gained till after the age of fifteen. Care was taken not to send a child too early to school, nor to overwork him when there. For this purpose the school-hours were fixed, and attendance shortened during the summer-months.

The teaching in school would, of course, be greatly aided by the services of the Synagogue, and the deeper influences of home-life. We know that, even in the troublous times which preceded the rising of the Maccabees, the possession of parts or the whole of the Old Testament (whether in the original or the LXX. rendering) was so common, that during the great persecutions a regular search was made throughout the land for every copy of the Holy Scriptures, and those punished who possessed them. After the triumph of the Maccabees, these copies of the Bible would, of course, be greatly multiplied. And, although perhaps only the wealthy could have purchased [V 1, p 233](#) a MS. of the whole Old Testament in Hebrew, yet some portion or portions of the Word of God, in the original, would form the most cherished treasure of every pious household. Besides, a school for Bible-study was attached to every academy, in which copies of the Holy Scripture would be kept. From anxious care to preserve the integrity of the text, it was deemed unlawful to make copies of small portions of a book of Scripture.¹ But exception was made of certain sections which were copied for the instruction of children. Among them, the history of the Creation to that of the Flood; Lev. 1–9; and Numb. 1–10:35, are specially mentioned.

It was in such circumstances, and under such influences, that the early years of Jesus passed. To go beyond this, and to attempt lifting the veil which lies over His Child-History, would not only be presumptuous, but involve us in anachronisms. Fain would we know it, whether the Child Jesus frequented the Synagogue School; who was His teacher, and who those who sat beside Him on the ground, earnestly gazing on the face of Him Who repeated the sacrificial ordinances in the Book of Leviticus, that were all to be fulfilled in Him. But it is all 'a mystery of Godliness.' We do not even know quite certainly whether the school-system had, at that time, extended to far-off Nazareth; nor whether the order and method which have been described were universally observed at that time. In all probability, however, there was such a school in Nazareth, and, if so, the Child-Saviour would conform to the general practice of attendance. We may thus, still with deepest reverence, think of Him as learning His earliest earthly lesson from the Book of Leviticus. Learned Rabbis there were not in Nazareth—either then or afterwards.³ He would attend the services of the Synagogue, where Moses and the prophets [V 1, p 234](#) were read, and, as afterwards by Himself, occasional addresses delivered.¹ That His was pre-eminently a pious home in the highest sense, it seems almost irreverent to say. From His intimate

 Youth Advance-Jesus' Homelife

*familiarity with Holy Scripture, in its every detail, we may be allowed to infer that the home of Nazareth, however humble, possessed a precious copy of the Sacred Volume in its entirety. At any rate, we know that from earliest childhood it must have formed the meat and drink of the God-Man. The words of the Lord, as recorded by St. Matthew and St. Luke,^c also imply that the Holy Scriptures which He read were in the original Hebrew, and that they were written in the square, or Assyrian, characters. Indeed, as the Pharisees and Sadducees always appealed to the Scriptures in the original, Jesus could not have met them on any other ground, and it was this which gave such point to His frequent expostulations with them: 'Have ye not read?'*³

4. -----
- B. Does this mean that we must make our homes like this?
1. No, as for the structure.
 2. Yes, as for the striving after God in Jesus Christ.

III. Conclusion

- C. Jesus was raised in a home that was created under the leadership of a righteous, God-fearing, obedient man and a gentle, quiet, submissive, obedient woman.
- D. Their home was like any other home in Palestine in the first century.
1. Jesus would have learned Torah starting around age 3
 2. Jesus would, as the oldest of the children, be responsible for learning the trade of his father, Joseph.
 3. Jesus would have been living His life, in their home, until marriage.

³ Ibid. pp. 230-234