

## THE PURPOSE OF THE PASSION

Read Luke 2:40-52 and 24:1-12

Anger and fear, behaving like one ton puppets intermittently popping up and down within Mary's chest, caused her to groan. Anger because this was not the first time her son had wandered away from the caravan of friends as they had traveled to and through the festive streets of Jerusalem--it was the feast of Passover. Fear, though, was replacing anger again as she imagined the worst. A full scale search had erupted amongst their co-travelers when twelve year old Jesus' disappearance was supposed, and they decided to return to the city to seek him. Had Jesus been harmed? Was he lying sick in the house of a stranger? Would they find him? Barely able to contain pent-up passion, Mary asked, "Son, why have you treated us this way?"

The sandaled feet of Mary and Joseph, as they stepped through the doors of the Temple on the third day of their hunt for Jesus, were worn-out and cramped from little rest. Darting eyes finally rested on the one they had been seeking.

Then, "after **three days** they **found** Him in the temple" (v. 46). There is an anxious inquiry, "Son, why have You treated us this way?" which elicits a startling response from Jesus. He reveals that "I must be about My Father's business" (v. 49). This narrative, purposefully placed at the beginning of the Lukan gospel, suggests that Jesus' aim in life would be to do "His Father's business." Furthermore, near the completion of the gospel, Luke affirms this implication through his report of Jesus' resurrection (Luke 24). The account repeats some of the same key wording that the author used in telling the story of Jesus' childhood experience at the Temple. The resurrection story, thereby, completes a set of brackets around the book of Luke. The Passion Week of Jesus is the focus of six of the twenty-four chapters of the gospel of Luke. In other words, a significant amount of space, a full quarter of Luke's account of Jesus' life, deals with His last week. Even prior to the middle of the book, Luke has begun to prepare the reader for the inevitable conclusion. He marks Jesus' progression toward His destiny in Jerusalem with words such as "Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Of course, Luke has a purpose in providing so much space to Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, as well as to His progress toward these culminating events. This purpose is to highlight Jesus' goal to "save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Yet, a further implication concerning Jesus' death may be obtained when we notice two parallel narratives around the gospel of Luke. The first is the story of the boy Jesus in the Temple placed near the beginning of the book of Luke. The second is the Resurrection story situated close to the conclusion of his book. These two parallel stories form brackets that frame Luke's gospel. In previous articles we noted that watching for duplicate wording at both extremities of a story is one of the "keys" to a dynamic Bible study. The Biblical author sets the brackets around a psalm, narrative, or book to instruct the reader in the way he wishes a text to be interpreted.

An illustration of this technique is found in Psalm 103. The brackets around this psalm are "Bless the LORD, O my soul" (vv. 1 and 22). Thus, the psalm is to be read in the context of blessing the LORD constantly in our minds throughout the whole psalm.

The childhood story of Jesus being “lost” in the Temple at Jerusalem marks essential introductory material in Jesus’ life. As was customary for a religiously dedicated family, Jesus’ parents went up with Jesus to **Jerusalem** at the feast of the **Passover**. When the “full number of days” had passed, they began the long trek home to Nazareth (Luke 2:42). But, “the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem” and “His parents were unaware of it” (v. 43). With so many friends and relatives traveling caravan-style, they had failed to notice His absence on the first day of their journey. When they did, a full-scale search erupted and they began “**seeking** Him among their relatives and their acquaintances” (v. 44). But, “when they could not **find** Him” they returned to the city “**seeking** Him” (v. 45).

At the resurrection scene, we are, again, at **Jerusalem**, just outside the city walls. As at the original scene, it is just past the time of the **Passover**. Women are at the tomb of Jesus but they do not “**find** the body of the Lord Jesus” (24:3). As they stand there perplexed, “two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing” asking, “Why do you **seek** the living One among the dead?” (v. 4). People are **seeking** Jesus but cannot **find** Him. Hence, two angels greet the women and prompt them to remember that Jesus was to rise “**on the third day**” (v. 7). This is the second time Jesus is sought and found on the third day.

Elements in the first story are intentionally duplicated at the end of the gospel in order to form brackets. Both His family and the women are **seeking** Jesus and cannot **find** Him until **the third day**. Consequently, the explanation for Jesus’ disappearance in both stories may be identical. Jesus claims in the encounter with His family, “I must be about **My Father’s business**.” Therefore, through the use of the brackets, we may presume that Jesus’ goal in “traveling toward Jerusalem” (9:53) and toward the Passion Week, was to do His “**Father’s business**,” which was to “save that which was lost.”