Who Were the Ruling Authorities?
By Timothy Boyd
FROM THE TEAM

I always like being in the short line. Whether at the bank or grocery store, I look for the shortest line, thinking that it’s going to be the fastest. As you know, it does not always work out that way, though, does it?

Since 2003, I have had the privilege of being in a short line, the line of men who have served as editors of Biblical Illustrator. In its forty-seven-plus years of production, only five have served in this role. These are the men who served before me.

- Nobel Brown 1974-1975

Early this year, we began hearing about the COVID-19 virus. My initial thought was, “This is not going to be a big deal.” I could not have been more wrong! Indeed the coronavirus mushroomed into a world-wide threat and epidemic. As people got sick, quarantined, and lost their jobs and as churches and Bible study groups met online, offerings suffered. Churches were forced to make serious and dramatic changes to the way they ministered. Church budgets were cut, which affected curriculum orders. This caused LifeWay to have to make serious and dramatic changes to the way they serve churches, including the products we can offer.

The sad news is that Biblical Illustrator is having to go away. Indeed you are holding in your hand the last issue of the magazine—news which breaks my heart and the hearts of those who had to make this difficult decision.

Not only have I stood in line behind good and godly men who have edited this magazine, I have had the privilege of working beside two of the finest men that I have ever known—Tim Lynch, who has served as the magazine’s production editor since 2009, and Brent Bruce, who has been the graphic designer on the magazine since 1992. Each of these guy’s knowledge of Scripture and passion for history has helped Biblical Illustrator maintain the excellence you have come to expect from the magazine. This being the magazine’s last editorial, I have asked them each to say a word.

From Brent Bruce:

To all the loyal readers of Biblical Illustrator, I want to say thank you. For twenty-eight years, you have allowed me to work on a publication I’ve been passionate about. It has been my joy to interpret God’s Word visually through design, photography, and illustration. My prayer is that the articles will continue to serve God’s people and give greater depth to biblical knowledge for years to come.

I also want to thank our writers. Without you, there would have never been a Biblical Illustrator. You have ministered to thousands upon thousands through your biblical scholarship for almost forty-eight years. Only eternity will reveal the impact you have made for the kingdom. And thank you for ministering to me. I can’t begin to express the impact you have had on my depth of understanding and my spiritual growth. Some of you I have gotten to know very well. Others I have known only through your writing. All of you I will greatly miss.

And to my two team members, thank you for allowing me to walk this road with you. I will always treasure the journey we’ve had together and the friendship we’ll have forever.
About the Cover:
Caesar Augustus crowned with an oak wreath; 1st cent. AD; found at Herculaneum. Augustus was Rome’s first emperor (27 BC–AD 14).

Illustration Photo: Brent Bruce/Naples Archaeological Museum/Naples, Italy (173/B/1830)

From Tim Lynch:
I have spent about 23 years of my life at LifeWay, and over 10 of those working on Biblical Illustrator. These years have been a great blessing from God. During this time, God has gifted me with many of the best friends I have had in my life, two of whom I have worked with on Biblical Illustrator. I have been blessed by GB’s and Brent’s friendship in ways I could never have imagined. I am and always will be thankful for them and how they have greatly enriched my life.

Biblical Illustrator magazine has also been a great gift from God, as I’m sure many of you would agree. As with any job, some days have been harder than others, but I have never once regretted working on this great magazine with so many great people. Thank you to all those who have had a hand over the years in producing the magazine, all with the same purpose—to glorify God and help the people of His church in their journeys through this life.

As editor, let me say how much I appreciate our writers, who have enthusiastically taken writing assignments, have researched, and have written on such a broad range of topics. Their commitment to scholarship has shined on every page and in every issue. Working with them has been such a blessing. I am privileged to know them not only as writers, but as friends.

Finally, let me say that it has been my honor and privilege to serve you, our readers. I trust the magazine has helped deepen your understanding of Scripture and your love for our Lord. Let me encourage you to continue your pursuit of gaining an ever-deeper understanding of the people, places, customs, and history of the Bible.

May the Father continue to bless you in this endeavor!

G.B. Howell, Jr.
Content Editor

Dwayne McCrary
Team Leader

Ken Braddy
Director of Sunday School

Brandon Hiltibidal
Director, Group Ministry

Send questions/comments to Team Leader by email to: Dwayne.McCrary@lifeway.com by mail to: Team Leader, Biblical Illustrator, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0175 Or make comments on the Web at lifeway.com
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WHO WERE THE RULING AUTHORITIES?
BY TIMOTHY N. BOYD

Rome had existed as a powerful republic for several hundred years prior to Augustus transitioning it to an empire in 27 BC. During the republic, Rome had established government positions to control and administer its sprawling territory as it expanded. When Augustus established himself as the supreme power, he was careful not to tamper with the external structures that already existed. Rather, he modified them to his benefit, ensuring he maintained control of the empire.

In the Republic, the Senate had been the center of power. Old patrician or aristocratic families whose lineages went back to the beginnings of Rome dominated the Senate. Civil wars were prevalent in the century before Jesus’ birth; these broke the back of this patrician control. Many of these aristocratic families were destroyed during this time. The Senate’s size also changed as more senators came from the equestrian (or business) class. Strong leaders such as Julius Caesar added members to the Senate body to support their efforts.

Augustus kept and honored the Senate, but he was determined that it would no longer be a source of opposition to his goals. He gradually reduced the Senate from 1,000 to 600. Membership became hereditary although Augustus reserved the right to nominate new senators. Augustus himself sought the advice of the Senate and listened to them, but they continually lost power to the emperor. By the time of Augustus’ successor, Tiberius, the Senate had lost all real power.

During the period of the republic (ca. 508–27 bc), the chief executive leaders were the two consuls who were elected annually. They held much power during their one year in office, which was considered to be the culmination of a political career. Although Augustus kept the office, its real power was gone. The position became largely ceremonial. Real administrative power was lodged in the bureaucracy that surrounded the emperors from Augustus onward.

One of the other significant changes that Augustus brought to Roman government was in the way he handled provinces; these had existed for a long period of time. Augustus separated them into two types, Senatorial and Imperial.

Senatorial provinces were long-established districts that did not require the presence of large bodies of troops. The Senate appointed the governors of these provinces. Because these governors were usually former consuls or other high-ranking members of the Senate, they were called proconsuls.

These appointed governors maintained Roman law and the Roman peace and collected taxes. These positions were highly valued—their occupants were in a position to become wealthy. Paul was brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia, because of charges Jews brought against him. Gallio rejected the Jews’ appeal because he considered it a matter of religion and not his concern. Paul was set free (Acts 18:12-17).

Within some provinces were free cities. These cities had a limited amount of self-government, but they were subject to the governors in the province in which they were located. When Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten with rods, and thrown into jail in Philippi, this was an example of the exercise of local authority. But when the people discovered that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens, the local magistrates became fearful because they had exceeded their authority in treating Roman citizens in this manner (16:19-24,35-39).
Imperial provinces came under the emperor’s direct control; these had Roman troops stationed there to maintain order and control. Leadership in these provinces varied through the years. In 63 BC, Rome’s General Pompey had annexed Judea. He deposed the Hasmonean rulers in Judea—although he let the priesthood continue. He turned to Herod the Great’s father, Antipater, who was an Idumean, to rule on behalf of Rome and gave him the title of “guardian.” Rome often gave these titles and authority to loyal allies. When Herod the Great succeeded his father, he had the Senate vote him “King of the Jews.” In reality, these kings such as Herod held their positions as long as they maintained stability and control on behalf of Rome. They were free to do whatever was necessary to accomplish this. When Jesus was born, Herod the Great was king over all of Judea.

When Herod died, his will called for his kingdom to be divided among his sons. Two of those were part of the biblical narrative. Archelaus was left Judea, Idumea, and Samaria. Herod wanted him to rule as he had. But Augustus was not willing to give him that much prestige. Instead he was appointed an ethnarch, meaning “ruler of a people.” His brother Antipas was given territory to the north including Galilee. He was given the title of tetrarch, meaning “ruler of a fourth,” which was another title of lesser prestige. Both had control over their territories as long as they maintained the stability and peace of Rome, although these territories were smaller than the area that their father had controlled.

Archelaus proved to be a failure as a ruler and was eventually deposed and exiled. At this point his territory was assigned to a Roman official called a prefect, an old military title. Eventually the title procurator was used for this type of ruler. He was directly responsible to the emperor for his control of his region. He had the authority to do anything necessary to maintain this control up to and including imposing the death penalty. Felix and Festus (mentioned in Acts 24–26) were probably called procurators by this time. Whether prefect or procurator was the official title, informally these men were referred to as governors.

While Pilate and later Felix and Festus were in overall command of the region, day-to-day governance in Jerusalem fell to the Chief Priest and Sanhedrin. That is why Jesus could be taken into custody and put on trial. But they could not impose the death penalty, which was under the authority of Pilate (prefect during Jesus’ ministry). This was why the Sanhedrin sent Jesus to Pilate. Felix and Festus also had the authority to deal with the apostle...
Paul, who was a Roman citizen. However, when Paul appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:11), Festus was obligated to send Paul to Rome.

While Paul was waiting for transport to Rome, Festus was visited by the last of the Herodians, Herod Agrippa II, and Herod’s sister Berenice. This Herod had gained the title of king by his father Agrippa I, having the favor of Emperor Claudius. Although Agrippa II had no authority over Paul, he heard his defense and gave his opinion about Paul to Festus (ch. 26). 9

In addition to these high-ranking officials, the New Testament also mentions other Roman governmental officials. The apostle Matthew was a tax collector (Matt. 9:9). He was probably collecting fees from traders who were traveling with their goods. Zacchaeus, whom Jesus called down from the tree in Jericho, was also a local tax collector (Luke 19:1-9).

The New Testament also introduces centurions (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 23:47; Acts 10; 27:1) who functioned in some ways like modern law enforcement officers, maintaining the law at a local level. 10

Jews and early Christians encountered various Roman government officials on a regular basis. Although their titles and responsibilities differed, these officials maintained control over the region and lives of those we encounter in the New Testament.

7. Ibid.
10. Mark S. Krause, “Palestine, Administration Of, Roman,” in LBD.

Timothy N. Boyd is the Strengthening Team Leader for the Kansas-Nebraska Convention of Southern Baptists, Topeka, Kansas.
BETHLEHEM

Its Significance
Up to the Time of
Jesus' Birth
Bethlehem is well known as the site of Jesus’ birth; the town’s name literally means “house of bread.” Luke’s Gospel records how Joseph and Mary, Jesus’ earthly parents, traveled to Bethlehem to participate in a census Emperor Augustus had ordered (Luke 2:1-2). W. F. Albright estimates the population to have been about 300 in the first century, which means Bethlehem was essentially a village at the time of Jesus’ birth. While there, Mary gave birth to Jesus, in fulfillment of the prophet Micah’s words (Mic. 5:2). That night, angels announced the news to shepherds, who hurried to Bethlehem to see the newborn Messiah (Luke 2:8-20).

Bethlehem played an important role in the ancient world despite its relatively small size. This article highlights Bethlehem’s location and geography, its resources, its Old Testament occurrences, and its legacy in God’s redemptive purpose.

Bethlehem’s Location and Geography
The first mention of Bethlehem outside the Bible occurs about 1300 BC in a text from El-Amarna, a city in Egypt. In the letter, the ruler of Jerusalem notified Egypt’s pharaoh that Bethlehem had fallen into enemy hands. The text comes from the period of the judges (1350–1050 BC), when various peoples were contending for power in Canaan.

Bethlehem lay approximately five miles southwest of Jerusalem in the Judean hill country, along the major north-south highway that connected Shechem in the central region of Israel with Bethel, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron to the south. Scholars sometimes refer to the Shechem-Hebron road as the Way of the Patriarchs because Abraham and Jacob traveled it. Abraham journeyed south from Shechem to Hebron on his way even farther south to Beersheba (Gen. 12:6-8; 13:3–4,18). Jacob passed through the region of Bethlehem as he journeyed north from Beersheba toward Bethel, fleeing his brother Esau (28:10-19). Twenty years later, Jacob returned to the region, where he faced tragedy; his wife Rachel died in childbirth and was buried near Bethlehem (35:16-20).

Bethlehem’s location in the hill country, in the territory allotted to the tribe of Judah, meant it was not along the International Coastal Highway, which extended from the border of Egypt in the south to Damascus in the north. Travelers from Egypt to Syria, Asia Minor, or Mesopotamia normally would remain along the coast, following the easier route.

Bethlehem’s Resources
The region around Bethlehem had fertile soil, where farmers grew grapes, olives, wheat, and barley. These

Left: Overlooking Bethlehem from the southeast.
Below: Exterior of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.
gave her a son, Obed (4:9-17). Obed fathered Jesse, who became the father of David, Israel’s great king (v. 22). God’s blessing on Ruth’s life in Bethlehem reminds us how God can use seemingly ordinary lives for His amazing purposes.

Bethlehem figures largely in the account of David’s life. The prophet Samuel came to Bethlehem where David lived with his brothers and their father Jesse; there he anointed David as God’s designate to succeed Saul as Israel’s king (1 Sam. 16:1-13). During Saul’s battle with the Philistines in the Elah Valley, David went back and forth between Bethlehem and the valley to check on his brothers, who were fighting in Saul’s army (17:12,15,20). While in the valley, David heard the taunts of Goliath, a Philistine giant, and defeated and killed him, bringing victory for Israel.

After King Solomon’s death in 930 BC, Israel divided into two kingdoms (1 Kings 12:1-19). The Northern Kingdom maintained the name Israel, while the Southern Kingdom took the name Judah after its major tribe. Rehoboam, who was Solomon’s son and Judah’s first king, fortified Bethlehem and other cities of Judah to protect against enemy invasion.

Shepherds also grazed their sheep and goats in the region surrounding Bethlehem. During the season after the harvest, farmers invited shepherds to bring their animals into the fields to consume the stubble that remained. Both shepherds and farmers benefited from this arrangement; the shepherds secured food for their animals, and the farmers obtained stubble-free fields fertilized with sheep and goat manure.

**BETHLEHEM’S OLD TESTAMENT OCCURRENCES**

The Old Testament mentions Bethlehem approximately forty times. After the Genesis references mentioned above, it appears again in the time of the judges (Judg. 17:7-9; 19:1-2,18). Most significantly during this period, Bethlehem forms the backdrop for the events in the Book of Ruth. The book records how Ruth, a Moabite woman, married into an Israelite family and chose to become part of Israel. She moved to Israel from Moab with her mother-in-law Naomi after their husbands died (Ruth 1:19,22) and settled into the community there. Boaz, a man of influence and godly character, ultimately married Ruth and gave her a son, Obed (4:9-17). Obed fathered Jesse, who became the father of David, Israel’s great king (v. 22). God’s blessing on Ruth’s life in Bethlehem reminds us how God can use seemingly ordinary lives for His amazing purposes.

Modern chapel built at Midgal Eder, which is in walking distance from the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. Below the chapel are caves, the entrance to which are shown. The sacrificial lambs that were offered in the Jerusalem Temple were birthed and raised at Midgal Eder.

3. Shepherds also grazed their sheep and goats in the region surrounding Bethlehem. During the season after the harvest, farmers invited shepherds to bring their animals into the fields to consume the stubble that remained. Both shepherds and farmers benefited from this arrangement; the shepherds secured food for their animals, and the farmers obtained stubble-free fields fertilized with sheep and goat manure.

4. Crops provided food for Bethlehem’s citizens and those who lived nearby. Olives also yielded oil, which provided fuel for lamps as well as oil for cooking; people processed grapes into wine. Travelers on the Way of the Patriarchs likely could purchase these items from local merchants. Even today, such crops cover the landscape of that area.

5. BETHLEHEM’S OLD TESTAMENT OCCURRENCES

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Messiah would be born. The Jewish leaders responded, “In Bethlehem of Judea,” citing Micah’s prophecy (Matt. 2:5-6). Sadly, although all in Jerusalem were troubled by the wise men’s visit, no one else apparently made the five-mile trip with them to Bethlehem to see if maybe God’s Son had indeed come.

BETHLEHEM’S LEGACY

The Bethlehem of Bible times was significantly smaller than the more expanded city of today. Nevertheless, its mention in the Old Testament reveals its importance during that period; and the New Testament Gospels of Matthew and Luke herald it as a focal point of God’s redemptive plan. Bethlehem was a small town in Judea, but it boasts a great legacy—the birthplace of King David, and the birthplace of God’s Son, who is the eternal King of kings.

(2 Chron. 11:6). Nonetheless, Shishak, king of Egypt, invaded Judah during Rehoboam’s reign, and Judah paid a heavy price (1 Kings 14:25-27).

Bethlehem remained a Judean town until Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah in 586 BC and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple (2 Kings 25:1-21). When Persia’s King Cyrus conquered Babylon and later issued a decree that Jews could return to Judah to rebuild their homeland, almost 50,000 people returned to the region (Ezra 2:64-65). The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah specifically mention citizens of Bethlehem as among that number (Ezra 2:21; Neh. 7:26). That number may have included descendants of the original exiles.

Bethlehem was the focus of an important proclamation from the prophet Micah, who prophesied these words around 750-700 BC: “Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times” (Mic. 5:2, CSB). Micah’s announcement must have encouraged God’s people, who would have known that King David hailed from there. They believed God one day would send them another king—King Messiah, the Anointed One, who would establish God’s kingdom (vv. 4-5). The New Testament affirms the messianic fulfillment of Micah’s words. After Jesus’ birth, when wise men came from the east seeking to worship Him, King Herod consulted with the chief priests and scribes, asking them where the Messiah would be born. The Jewish leaders responded, “In Bethlehem of Judea,” citing Micah’s prophecy (Matt. 2:5-6). Sadly, although all in Jerusalem were troubled by the wise men’s visit, no one else apparently made the five-mile trip with them to Bethlehem to see if maybe God’s Son had indeed come.

Bryan E. Beyer is dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Columbia International University, Columbia, South Carolina.
At Age Twelve: Significance in Jewish Life

ETB: LUKE 2:41-52

Significance in Jewish Life
that children would eventually ask about “the meaning of the decrees, statutes, and ordinances that...God has commanded.”

Exodus 12:26-27 and 13:14-16 instructed fathers to recount God’s power when their children asked about the observance of the Passover. Fathers were expected to explain the commands and encourage obedience from their children. Psalm 78 recalls how the commandments were “passed down” to them from their fathers (Ps. 78:3). Each generation was to do this, “so that a future generation...might know” God’s commands (v. 6).

OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS
Moses called the Israelites to remember and obey the commandments of God (Deut. 4). The command, “Teach them to your children and your grandchildren” (4:9), was taken seriously. The best way for future generations to know what God had commanded was for an adult to pass it on to a child. Commandments were to “be in your heart,” and parents were to “repeat them to your children” (6:6-7). Parents were to have God’s Word hidden in their hearts; they were then to make sure that their children followed suit. The connotation from Hebrew is that the commandments would be “engraved” or “etched” into their hearts. Engraving stone is a laborious endeavor—filled with painstaking hours of tedious effort, but the impact to the face of the stone would last for generations. Parents were tasked with training their children in such a way that the commandments would be chiseled into their hearts through repetition. This would change young hearts, and its impact would last for a lifetime. This repetitive training meant discussions of the commandments infused most every aspect of Jewish life (vv. 7-8).

Several other passages build on this foundation. Deuteronomy 6:20-25 indicates that children would eventually ask about “the meaning of the decrees, statutes, and ordinances that...God has commanded.”

The Gospels record only one story about the years between Jesus’ birth and the beginning of His ministry. At age twelve, Jesus was left behind in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-52). After searching for three days, Mary and Joseph found Him “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (v. 46). Jesus showed knowledge and wisdom beyond His years—amazing the teachers of the law.

BY CHRISTOPHER JOHN BASS

Above left: Bar Mitzvah celebration of a 13-year-old boy at Jerusalem’s Western Wall. Having gone through this rite, a boy is considered morally and ethically responsible for his decisions and actions.

Above: Copy of the Midrash Tehillim, which are the oral traditions related to the Psalms. This part of the Midrash includes interpretations of the Psalms as well as stories and parables related to the texts.

By Christopher John Bass

Winter 2020-21
JEWISH EDUCATION

For Jews, education always began in the home. Mothers would begin to teach their children the basics. Fathers had a special educational responsibility to make sure that the religious foundations were laid early. The aim of all education was religious—knowledge and practice of the Torah, the Law of God, revealed in the first five books of the Old Testament. The principle that Jewish boys would be trained in the commandments was established in Deuteronomy. The pattern of that training, though, was laid out by the rabbis in the Talmud.

In the first century BC, Rabbi Judah b. Tema, summarized the educational stages in Pirkei Avot 5:21. Study began with the Torah at age five; study of the Mishnah (the oral traditions) at age ten; at age thirteen a boy would be subject to the commandments and celebrate his bar mitzvah; at fifteen he would study the Talmud (Jewish explanations of the Law) and would continue to study and grow in knowledge and practice so that by age fifty, he could give counsel.²

Education was done primarily though memorization. Even the youngest pupils studied every day. According to Jerome, 'There doesn’t exist any Jewish child who doesn’t know by heart the history from Adam to Zerubbabel [i.e., from the beginning to the end of the Bible].’³ Thus, large portions of Scripture would have been committed to memory, fulfilling the requirements of Deuteronomy. That Jewish boys were required to have this exceptional memory also sheds light on passages such as Psalm 119:11, ‘I have hidden your word in my heart’ (niv); and 2 Timothy 3:15, “from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures.” Memorization, practical application, and obedience were commonplace.

Since every area of life focused on following the Law of God, children would begin learning to read using Leviticus 1–8. Learning the rest of the Torah and the Prophets would follow. Synagogues would have the equivalent of an elementary (bet Sefer; “house of reading”) and secondary (bet Midrash; “house of learning [oral law]”) school.⁴ Exceptional students were encouraged to continue studying at the secondary school—with adults who desired to advance their understanding of the Torah, in their spare time. Outstanding students of the secondary schools might leave home to study with a famous rabbi (this was rare, as help was usually needed for work at home). Paul was a perfect example of continued education, as he studied under the famous rabbi Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). Formal education typically ended at the age of twelve or thirteen, when most boys would be expected to begin learning a trade.⁵

THE JERUSALEM VISIT

Faithful Jewish men were required to go to Jerusalem to worship three
times a year (Ex. 23:14); one visit was at Passover. Jesus’ family went on this Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem each year (Luke 2:41). Luke tells of events that happened during the year that Jesus was twelve (vv. 41-52). Many people misunderstand this passage to mean that Jesus was going to his bar mitzvah, but that would not happen until age thirteen. Bar mitzvah means “son of the Commandment.” At thirteen, boys took vows to keep the commandments (Mishnah Niddah 5:6). Rabbis suggested that training should take place a year or two early “in order that they become accustomed to the commandments” (Mishnah Yoma 8:4). At age twelve, this would have been a year of training for Jesus.

Jewish legend asserted that several significant biblical events occurred at age twelve, including: Moses leaving Pharaoh’s daughter’s home, Samuel being called to be a prophet, and Solomon showing great wisdom between the women fighting over the infant. Traditionally, at age twelve, a boy was accepted into the religious community as a man who was thereafter responsible for keeping the law.

All of the training that Jesus received up to this point—the Scripture memorization, His studying under the local and regional rabbis, His training at home, the education about the oral law and tradition—was in preparation for His vow, which would occur at age thirteen. This particular trip to Jerusalem would have served as part of His final preparations—putting into practice all He had been learning.

While the Jerusalem visit was expected, what Jesus did was unexpected. Luke records that Jesus was found “in the temple sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Luke 2:46). All who heard [Jesus] were astounded at his understanding and his answers” (v. 47). They recognized that the questions Jesus asked were not the normal questions for someone His age. Not only was Jesus able to ask intelligent, theologically deep questions, He was also able to answer theirs. The adult men at the Temple realized that Jesus could not have learned all He knew from the school in Nazareth. Isaiah had foretold of a Servant whom God Himself would train about His identity and mission (50:4-9). Many believe Isaiah was prophesying of the Messiah. Jesus is both God and man. As God, He is omniscient. As man, He had to go through the same learning process that all humans experience. Yet, the Father gave Jesus special knowledge and training about His ministry and message. Consequently, because of the training by God the Father, Jesus knew exactly who He was—the Son of God—and knew the Scriptures well enough to debate the Temple teachers, even at age twelve.