

The Story of the Life of Christ – Lesson 2

6 BC

In the last lesson I introduced some of the assumptions and sources I would use in unfolding the story of the life of Christ as related in the four Gospels and told against the known history of the times. In this lesson, I will start with the Genealogy of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew.

According to ancient tradition and internal evidence, the Gospel of Matthew was not only the first Gospel written, but also the first book of the New Testament. According to Papias the Gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew. Bishop Papias of Hierapolis (died circa 120 AD), had spoken with those who had known the Apostles, including Saint Polycarp. He recorded the information he gleaned from them, but only a few fragments have been preserved. This is the quotation from one of Papias' surviving fragments: "Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could."

Eusebius ¹ and other later ancient authors depending on this fragment of Papias contended that the original Gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew (Aramaic). Although there is no surviving ancient manuscript in Hebrew, there are other things that argue for the truth of that statement. First and foremost is that the Gospel of Matthew was self-evidently written as the Gospel addressed to the Jews. They were the ones who were the main target of evangelism in the early years of the Church. Why would Matthew, who spoke the Hebrew language (technically the Aramaic dialect) as his first language, write a Gospel to the Jews in Greek, a language that many of them could not understand?

The Genealogy of Christ in Matthew is important because it was the genealogy which went through the legal line of inheritance. That means it went through Joseph, Jesus' legal father. The legal line went through the father's side and through numerous Levirate births. A Levirate birth occurred where the mother's husband had died and a seed was raised up for the dead husband's line through the living wife, by a kinsman redeemer of the same line as the husband. I will revisit the six Levirate births in the biological line of Christ when we revisit the biological Genealogy of Christ in Luke later in our studies. That genealogy is related in Luke just after the account of the story of the Baptism of Christ by John the Baptist. The Genealogy of Christ in Matthew is important because it connected to all the Old Testament prophecies of the lineage of the Messiah and proved that Jesus Christ fulfilled those prophecies. The first chapter of Matthew, which I have copied below, contains that Genealogy. I have underlined the names of the significant figures in prophecy:

Matthew 1:1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham:

¹ *Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260 AD to 30 May 339 AD) was a Greek historian of Christianity, exegete, and Christian polemicist. In about AD 314 he became the bishop of Caesarea Maritima in the Roman province of Syria Palaestina. Together with Pamphilus, he was a scholar of the biblical canon and is regarded as one of the most learned Christians during late antiquity. Wikipedia*

In this verse the pattern of the genealogy in Luke is given. There, Jesus was listed as “the son of” both David and Abraham. That is in accord with the Hebrew way of speaking. Everybody who is a direct male descendant is considered a “son” of their ancestor. To our culture, the term “son” only refers to a male descendant in the next generation. However, as we continue with the genealogy in Matthew, we note that the rest of the genealogy is ordered differently. Each entry in Matthew is noted as “begetting” their son, instead of being “the son of” which is the pattern of the genealogy in Luke.

Matthew 1:2-16 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judah and his brethren; and Judah begat Perez and Zerah of Tamar; and Perez begat Hezron; and Hezron begat Ram; and Ram begat Amminadab; and Amminadab begat Nahshon; and Nahshon begat Salmon; and Salmon begat Boaz of Rahab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; and Jesse begat David the king. And David begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Uriah; and Solomon begat Rehoboam; and Rehoboam begat Abijah; and Abijah begat Asa; and Asa begat Jehoshaphat; and Jehoshaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Uzziah; and Uzziah begat Jotham; and Jotham begat Ahaz; and Ahaz begat Hezekiah; and Hezekiah begat Manasseh; and Manasseh begat Amon; and Amon begat Josiah; and Josiah begat Jechoniah and his brethren, at the time of the carrying away to Babylon. And after the carrying away to Babylon, Jechoniah begat Shealtiel; and Shealtiel begat Zerubbabel; and Zerubbabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor; and Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud; and Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. ASV

I have replaced the NIV, which translates the Greek γεννάω {ghen-nah'-o} as “was father of” with the ASV which translates the word as “begat.” I believe that is more accurate as in English to be one’s father does not always imply a direct genetic input. Seven of the translations I looked at had “begat, begot, or fathered.”

Matthew 1:17 **Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Christ.**

These verses fulfilled the following prophecy that the Messiah was to be the seed of **Abraham**:

Genesis 18:17-18 “Then the LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? *Abraham* will surely become a great and powerful nation, and *all nations on earth will be blessed through him.*” Also: Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 22:15-18.

The genealogy fulfilled the following prophecy that the Messiah was to be the seed of **Isaac**:

Genesis 26:2-5 “The LORD appeared to *Isaac* and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your seed I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your seed as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and *through your seed all nations on earth will be blessed*, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.’” Also: Genesis 24:60.

The genealogy fulfilled the following prophecy that the Messiah was to be the seed of **Jacob**:

Genesis 28:10-15 “*Jacob* left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: ‘I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your seed the land on which you are lying. Your seed will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. *All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your seed*. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’” Also: Jeremiah 33:25-26

The genealogy fulfilled the following prophecy that the Messiah was to be the seed of **Judah**:

Genesis 49:8-12 “Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness--who dares to rouse him? *The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his*. He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.” Also: Zechariah 10:3-4

The genealogy fulfilled the following prophecy that the Messiah was to be the seed of **Jesse**:

Isaiah 11:1-2 “A shoot will come up from the *stump of Jesse*; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.”

The genealogy fulfilled the following prophecy that the Messiah was to be the seed of **David**:

1 Samuel 7:8-16 “Now then, tell my servant *David*, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have

been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. “The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, *I will raise up your seed to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son.* When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” Also see Psalm 132:11, Jeremiah 23:5-6, Jeremiah 33:25-26

The genealogy fulfilled the following prophecy that the Messiah was to be the seed of **Zerubbabel**:

Haggai 2:21-23 “Tell Zerubbabel governor of Judah that I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother. ‘On that day,’ declares the LORD Almighty, *‘I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,’* declares the LORD Almighty.”

It should be noted that in the above verses from the NIV translation, where you see the singular word “seed” I have used that literal translation “seed” instead of the NIV’s mistranslation of the Hebrew word זָרַע {zeh'·rah}. The word זָרַע {zeh'·rah} in the above passages is always in the singular and should be translated “seed.” In Galatians Paul made clear that there was an important distinction between “seed” and “seeds.”² The NIV chose to interpret this word in these verses incorrectly as “descendants” or “offspring” which is in the plural.

Starting on the next page I have compiled a Table of the different Genealogies in the Bible which list either the line of Christ the Messiah, or portions thereof. Make sure to read the endnotes on Hezron, Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, and Jeconiah. They will help clear up what some have called inconsistencies:

² Galatians 3:16 “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.

	<u>Matthew 1:1-17</u> Legal Line of Kings “Begot” the next	<u>Genesis 5,</u> <u>11,21,</u> <u>25,35, 38</u>	<u>I Chronicles 1-3</u>	<u>Luke 3:23-38</u> Biological Line Jesus was “the son of”	<u>Ezra 3:2</u>	<u>Wife, Mother of Next in Line</u>
		Adam	Adam	Adam		Eve
		Seth	Seth	Seth		
		Enos	Enosh	Enosh		
		Kenan	Kenan	Kenan		
		Mahalaleel	Mahalelel	Mahalelel		
		Jared	Jared	Jared		
		Enoch	Enoch	Enoch		
		Methuselah	Methuselah	Methuselah		
		Lamech	Lamech	Lamech		
		Noah	Noah	Noah		
		Shem	Shem	Shem		
		Arphaxad	Arphaxad	Arphaxad		
		Cainan (LXX Septuagint)		Cainan		
		Shelah	Shelah	Shelah		
		Eber	Eber	Eber		
		Peleg	Peleg	Peleg		
		Reu	Reu	Reu		
		Serug	Serug	Serug		
		Nahor	Nahor	Nahor		
		Terah	Terah	Terah		
1	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham	Abraham		
2	Isaac	Isaac	Isaac	Isaac		
3	Jacob (Israel)	Jacob (Israel)	Jacob (Israel)	Jacob (Israel)		
4	Judah	Judah	Judah	Judah		Tamar
5	Perez	Perez	Perez	Perez		
6	Hezron ^a	Hezron ^a	Hezron ^a	Hezron ^a		
7	Ram		Ram	Ram		
8	Amminadab		Amminadab	Amminadab		
9	Nahshon		Nahshon	Nahshon		
10	Salmon		Salmon	Salmon		Rahab
11	Boaz		Boaz	Boaz		Ruth
12	Obed		Obed	Obed		
13	Jesse		Jesse	Jesse		
14	David –reigned 40 yr.		David	David		Bathsheba
1	Solomon–reigned 40 yr.		Solomon	Nathan		Naamah, an Ammonite, prob. 1 st wife of Solomon
2	Rehoboam–reigned 17 yr		Rehoboam	Mattatha		Maacah, daughter of Absalom, an idolator, wife

						of Rehoboam
3	Abijah—reigned 3 yr.		Abijah	Menna		
4	Asa—reigned 41 yr.		Asa	Melea		Azubah, wife of Asa
5	Jehoshaphat—reigned 25 yr		Jehoshaphat	Eliakim		
6	Jehoram —reigned 8 yr		Jehoram	Jonam		Athaliah, Ahab's daughter, Jehoram's wife. Murdered her grandchildren
	(See Endnote ^b)		Ahaziah— reign 1 yr	Joseph		Zibiah, wife of Ahaziah
	(See Endnote ^b)		Joash – reign 39 yrs,	Judah		Jehoaddin from Jerusalem, wife of Joash
	(See Endnote ^b)		Amaziah—reigned 29 yrs.	Simeon		Jecoliah from Jerusalem, wife of Amaziah
7	Azariah/Uzziah—reigned 52 yrs		Azariah/Uzziah	Levi		Jerusha, Uzziah's wife
8	Jotham—reigned 16 yrs.		Jotham	Matthaat		
9	Ahaz—reigned 16 yrs.		Ahaz	Jorim		Abijah, Ahaz's wife
10	Hezekiah—reigned 29 yrs.		Hezekiah	Eliezer		Hepzibah, wife of Hezekiah
11	Manasseh- —reigned 55 yrs.		Manasseh	Joshua		Meshulemeth, wife of Manasseh, from Jotbah
12	Amon – reign 2 yrs		Amon	Er		
13	Josiah – reign 31 yrs.		Josiah	Elmadam		
14	Jeconiah ^c – reign 11 yrs		Jehoiakim	Cosam		
15	Jeconiah ^c – reign 3 mo.		Jehoiachin	Addi		
2	Shealtiel		Shealtiel	Melki	Shealtiel	
3	Zerubbabel			Neri	Zerubbabel	
4	Abiud			Shealtiel		
5	Eliakim			Zerubbabel		
6	Azor			Rhesa		
7	Zadok			Joanan		
8	Akim			Joda		
9	Eliud			Josech		
10	Eleazar			Semein		
11	Mathan			Mattathias		
12	Jacob			Maath		
13	Joseph			Naggai		Mary, wife of Joseph
14	Christ			Esli		
				Nahum		
				Amos		
				Mattathias		
				Joseph		
				Jannai		
				Melki		
				Levi		
				Matthat		
				Heli		
				Joseph/Mary		

End Notes

^a *Hezron begot Caleb (Not the faithful spy who was an Ephraimite), who begot Hur by Ephrath. Hur was the brother-in-law of Moses who stood with Aaron to help hold up Moses' Staff during the battle with the Amalekites. Hur also begot Uri who begot Bezalel (who was given wisdom by God to build the Tabernacle). Nason, Salmon's legal father died when the Israelites refused to obey the LORD and advanced on the land so he was unlikely to have been alive to be Salmon's blood father. I believe that Hur was the Levirate grandfather of Salmon. Therefore, the two men standing on either side of Moses helping him hold up the staff were in the blood line of Christ. Hezron also begot Segub who begot Jair the Judge.*

^b *Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah are omitted in Matthew's Genealogy. Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah were King Ahab's grandson, great grandson, and great-great grandson respectively. It seems likely this omission was due to the curse on Ahab's house in 1 Kings 21:20-22 and 2 Kings 9:8. This curse was carried to "the third even the fourth generation" as was the curse on the Exodus generation (Exodus 20:5). It is worth noting that Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah all died unnatural deaths. They were all murdered or executed by their own people. They were the only Kings of Judah out of David's line who died unnatural deaths outside of Amon, the son of Manasseh, and the last one, Zedekiah.*

This view is also supported by others. According to the commentary of Jameison, Fausset, Brown on Matthew 1, "Three kings are here omitted--Ahaziah, Joash, and Amaziah (1 Chronicles 3:11,12). Some omissions behooved to be made, to compress the whole into three fourteens (Matthew 1:17). The reason why these, rather than other names, are omitted, must be sought in religious considerations--as in the connection of those kings with the house of Ahab as LIGHTFOOT, EBRARD, and ALFORD (and Thompson - me) view it."

^c *The Jeconiah here should be understood as referring to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim was the one who had "brothers," Jehoahaz and Zedekiah, both of whom were Kings of Judah. On the other hand the next Jeconiah in the next verse should be understood as referring to Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son. This agrees with the other genealogies and brings the total names in Matthew 1 to 42 as is stated Matthew 1:17.*

To understand why Jeconiah appears here instead of Jehoiakim, you must remember that Matthew was originally written in Hebrew. There are two kings listed in verses 11 and 12 whose names are very similar, Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin. In some of the Greek translations of the Old Testament of the time both Hebrew names were Grecianized into the same spelling. In the Apocryphal Book 1 Esdras, (written in Greek) both Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin, are called by the same Greek name "Joacim" (1 Esdras 1:37, 43). Evidently, when this verse was being translated into Greek at some early date, it was evidently either inattentively misread from the original Aramaic of Matthew as the same name, or following the pattern in some texts, Grecianized using the same name (in this case Jeconiah). We know that Jeconiah is one Greek form of Jehoiachin (See Greek Addition to Esther 11:2-4a below) and thus that name was used in verse 11. We need to understand that this is referring to Jehoiakim. He was the one in the Old Testament Histories and genealogies that had two brothers both of whom were Kings of Judah.

Greek Addition to Esther 11:2-4a “In the second year of the reign of Artaxerxes the great, in the first day of the month Nisan, Mardocheus the son of Jairus, the son of Semei, the son of Cisai, of the tribe of Benjamin, had a dream; Who was a Jew, and dwelt in the city of Susa, a great man, being a servitor in the king’s court. He was also one of the captives, which Nabuchodonosor the king of Babylon carried from Jerusalem with ***Jechonias*** king of Judea.”

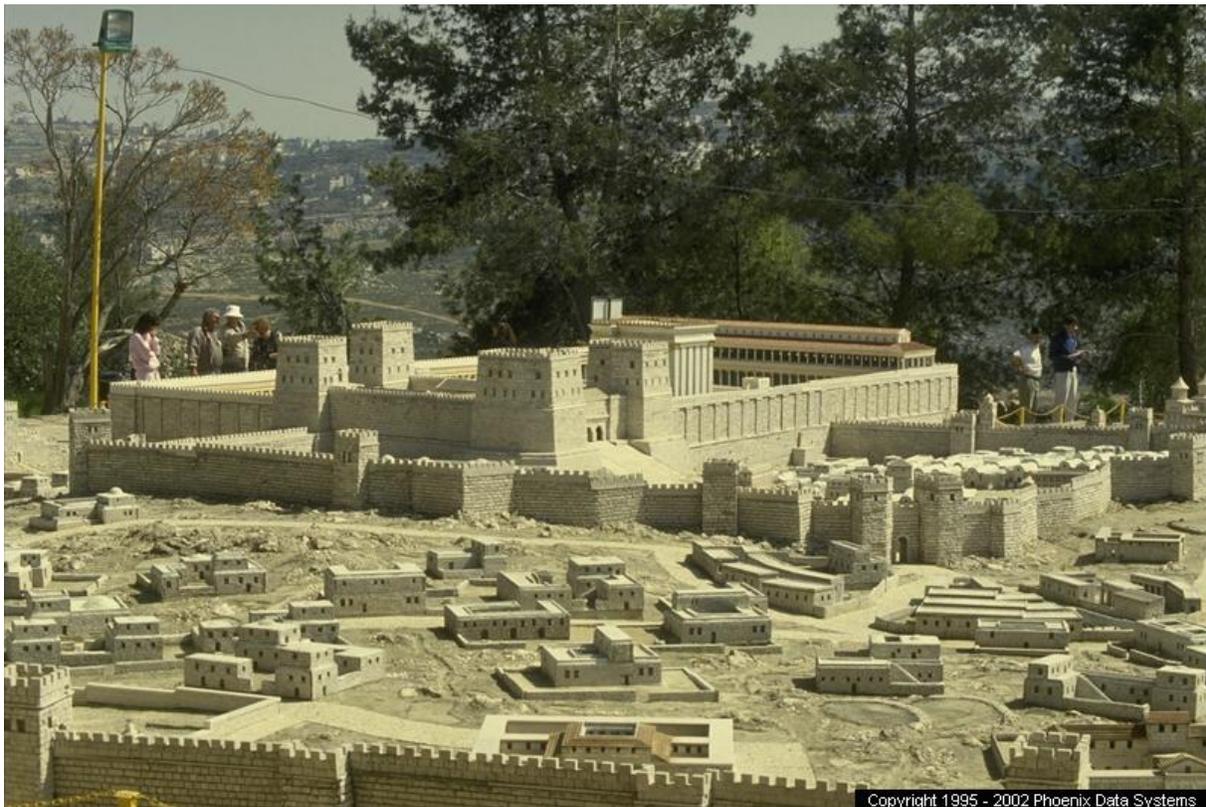
It is worth noting that the average length of the generations after David in the Genealogy in Matthew was 37 years. That compared to the miraculous average length in the seven generations before David of over a hundred years. The average length of generations after Zerubbabel in the Genealogy in Matthew was a long 49 years. That compares to the relatively normal 27 years in the Genealogy in Luke, which we will study later.

The Historical Context of Christ’s Birth

Jesus was born in 4 BC, just before the death of Herod the Great. We know from Josephus that Herod died between the lunar eclipse during the Feast of Esther (Purim) on March 12, 4 BC (Gregorian calendar) and Passover thirty days later on April 12, 4 BC (Gregorian calendar). At the time of Jesus’ birth Herod was at the end of a long reign as King. Herod was the son of Antipater, an Idumean who had been the prime minister of John Hyrcanus, the last of the Hasmonean Kings of Judea. Antipater and all the Idumeans living in Judea had converted to Judaism but were descended from the Idumeans (Edomites). About the 4th Century BC, Edom had been conquered by the Nabateans (an Arab tribe from the south) and the Edomites (Idumeans) had been driven out of their own land just east of the Dead Sea and had emigrated to the land to the west in southern Judea. When the Jews again became masters of that land at the defeat of the Seleucid Syrians two centuries later (about 100 BC), they had been forced to convert. Antipater, was the power behind the throne during the reign of John Hyrcanus. The Romans were invited in to arbitrate a power struggle between John Hyrcanus and his brother Antigonus. They wound up appointing Antipater as Procurator of Judea in 47 BC and he appointed his young son Herod (then 26 years old) as governor of Galilee. After his father Antipater was poisoned, and his brother was betrayed and died in prison, Herod was eventually made king by the Roman Senate in 39 BC. Herod was a master of survival and he had to be to have survived in that atmosphere of political intrigue, bribery, and betrayal. He emerged in 31 BC on the other side of the multiple Roman Civil wars as the closest friend of the two most important men of the Roman world, Augustus Caesar and Agrippa. These wars included the wars of Pompey vs. Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar and Mark Antony vs. Cassius, Brutus and the assassins of Julius Caesar, and Augustus Caesar vs. Mark Antony and Cleopatra. During that time the losing side was always in the east and Herod always started on that side. He always stayed loyal to the losing side on which he started until they lost, and then switched allegiances. He did this without losing credit with the eventual winner because they valued him as an ally who was loyal. He was also a skillful general, and courageous and dangerous in personal combat. He carried many scars on his body from wounds received in battle. Just to have survived as many close combats as he did was remarkable. To have survived as many political battles as he did was even more remarkable. He was aided immensely by the fact that

he was able to use the enormous financial resources and wealth that accumulated in Jerusalem by the Jews from their worldwide trading and banking network and the fact that they had been allowed by the Romans to transfer their wealth from all over the world to the Temple in Jerusalem without impediment or taxes. He regarded himself as favored by God. That was one of the reasons that 16 years before the birth of Christ he started the massive rebuilding of the Temple. In spite of his outward piety toward Judaism, as an Idumean, Herod could never be accepted by the Jews as a valid King.

However, Herod's piety was only devoted to outward things. Inwardly, he was prey to every weakness that a man who depends on his own strength can be. He became so paranoid that he saw conspiracies behind every tree. During the course of his life, he had his favorite wife and youngest brother executed in a rage, and later executed three of his own sons, and countless numbers of former palace favorites. Nearly every member of his family had lived in fear of execution at one time or another. The favorite means of escape was to deflect suspicion on oneself to others. This was done by starting rumors of conspiracies by other palace favorites or other members of Herod's family. By the time of Christ's birth, everyone, high or low, lived in terror of Herod's power and paranoia.

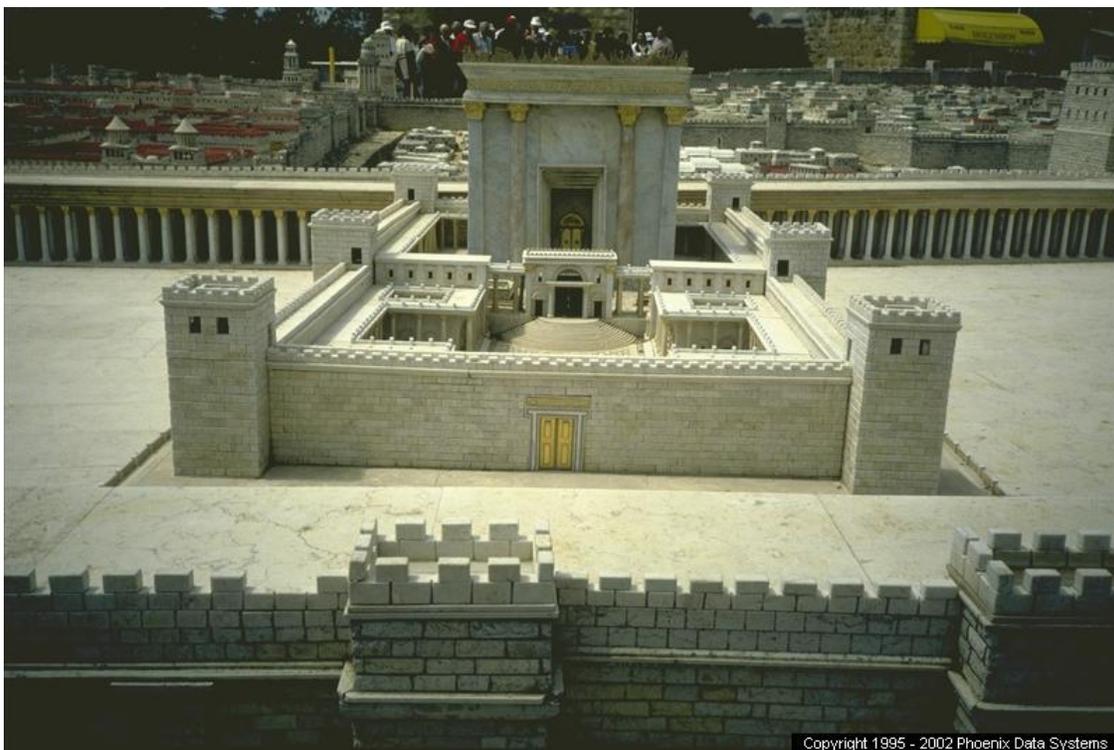


A Model of the Temple Complex from the North
-Antonia Fortress is on the Northern Side

In 20 BC Herod decided to rebuild the temple on such a massive and magnificent scale that it became the most magnificent edifice in the Roman Empire. Up to that time, the Temple had been built on the top of a hill in Northeast Jerusalem called Mt. Moriah. At the top of the hill was a flat space that contained a relatively small square on which the Temple was built. Herod

took the entire base of the hill and compassed it about with a wall in the shape of a trapezoid. The wall started at the base of the hill and went straight up about a hundred feet. At that level they built a much larger square at the level of the old Temple on Mt. Moriah. The floor of the much-expanded area of the square was the roof of vaulted chambers built below. Many of these were used as depositories for wealth and treasure. The stones for the base of the walls were made from stones the size of modern railroad boxcars. They made the walls impregnable to being battered down or undermined. The new Temple building itself was built over and around the old Temple so that Temple services never had to be interrupted. When the new Temple was completed, it covered the old Temple, and specially trained and sanctified priests could tear it down from the inside without revealing the sacred places to the light. The new construction resulted in a building that was nearly eight times the original size of Solomon's Temple, and a square around the Temple that was nearly a mile in circumference and the size of 34 football fields.

Jerusalem was a town of about 50,000 people in the time of Herod. During the next seventy years, before Jerusalem was finally destroyed in 70 AD, it grew enough in population so that they had to double the volume of the city by adding two new walls. However, during the weeks of the main feasts (Passover and Tabernacles) the population would swell to well over a million people. The illustrations above are pictures of modern models of what the Temple must have looked like. There is also a diagram on the next page of how the Temple was laid out inside.



Model of The Temple Proper

The Birth of John the Baptist – from Luke

I have copied below the Gospel's account of the earliest events recorded in the New Testament. They occurred in late 6 BC. They are found in the Gospel of Luke.

Luke 1:1-2 Many have undertaken ³ to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.

³ *To the best of my knowledge, Luke was the third of the four acknowledged Gospels. It was probably written about 60 AD. Mark was probably written shortly before. I believe that Matthew was written about 36 to 40 AD. John was written about 95 AD.*

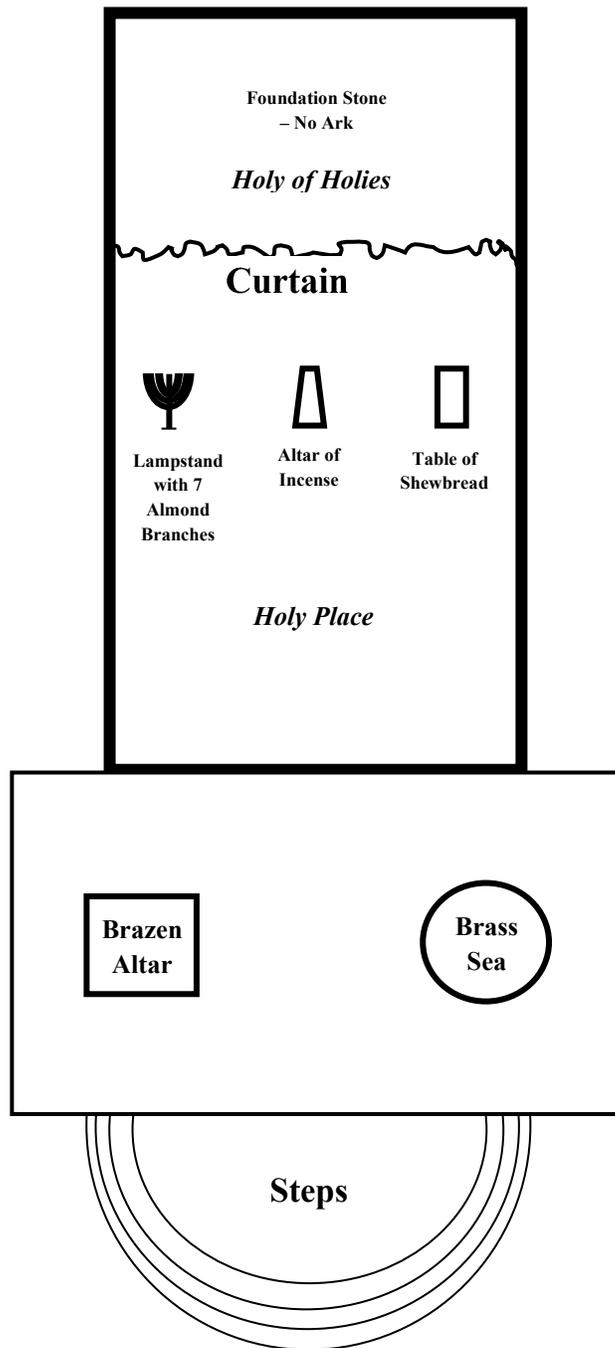


Diagram of the Temple

As noted in the first lesson, Luke would have had the opportunity to speak to Jesus' mother Mary, and his three half-brothers. He also had the opportunity to speak to both Peter and John and many other eyewitnesses of the events. These would have been the eyewitnesses to which Luke referred.

Luke 1:3-4 **Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.**

It will become clear from studying the Gospel of Luke, and Acts that those writings were conscientiously recorded in an “orderly” or chronological fashion. They also are the writings that consistently record historical events that allow us to connect the New Testament events with historical dates.

The one that Luke addresses is called Theophilus which is the Greek Θεόφιλος {the-o'-fē-los}. It means “friend of God.” Theophilus was also the person to whom Luke wrote Acts (Acts 1:3-4). Whether this “Theophilus,” to whom Luke was writing was an actual person or was meant to refer to all “friends of God,” is irrelevant to the understanding of the writings of Luke.

Luke 1:5a In the time of Herod king of Judea

Herod the Great was born in 74 BC and lived until 4 BC. He had reigned as King over Judea, Galilee, and Samaria by the authority of the Romans for about thirty-two years.

Luke 1:5b there was a priest ⁴ named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah;⁵

We know that Zechariah was an unimportant priest in the Jewish hierarchy because he lived in “a town in the hill country of Judea” (Luke 1:39). All the important priests lived in Jerusalem or Jericho.⁶ His name is rendered here in the Greek form Ζαχαρίας {zä-khä-rē'-äs}, but it is taken from the Hebrew name זְכַרְיָהּ {zek·ar·yā'} which means “Jehovah remembers.”

Luke 1:5c his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron.

This is significant because it establishes the fact that Mary, Elizabeth’s niece, and the source of Jesus’ human ancestry, was descended from Aaron on her mother’s side. Mary was descended from David on her father’s side as the Genealogy in Luke will show. Thus, Jesus was descended from both the line of rightful Kings (Judah and David) on His maternal grandfather’s side, and from the line of the rightful Priests (Levi and Aaron) on His maternal grandmother’s side. He will be the King Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek ⁷ who was both King and Priest (Hebrews 7:1-2).⁸

⁴ *Being a priest meant being of the tribe of Levi and descended from Aaron who was Moses brother and the first High Priest.*

⁵ *This was one of twenty-four priestly divisions established by David (1 Chronicles 24:10).*

⁶ *As I will explain in Lesson 6, I believe the site of Zechariah’s home was in Ramah. This is despite a much later Crusader tradition that a village named Ein Karem was the place. Crusader traditions have a habit of being badly flawed. Theodosius (530 AD) does tell us that the distance was five miles from Jerusalem. Both Rama and Ein Karem are five miles from Jerusalem. Both were in the “hill country of Judea.”*

⁷ *Melchizedek is the Hebrew מֶלְכִי־צֶדֶק {mal-kee-tseh'-dek} which means “righteous king.”*

Luke 1:6 Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.⁹

It should be noted that it was the "Lord's commands and regulations" they observed, not those that had been added by the Pharisees and Sadducees over the years.¹⁰ This was probably why he held an "insignificant" post in an "unimportant" village.

Luke 1:7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren; and they were both well along in years.

The great promise of the LORD that had always resonated among the women of faith in Israel was that one of them would have a son or descendant that would be the savior of the world.¹¹ To be childless was to miss the chance of being part of that promise. As we will learn, Zechariah and Elizabeth had been praying for years for a son. They were both evidently well past the usual age for bearing children which probably means they were at least sixty years old.

Luke 1:8-9 Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

This burning of incense was a priestly function first commanded in Exodus:

Exodus 30:7-8 "Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar (*the golden altar of incense*) every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come."

What did this mean? What did the burning incense stand for? The answer is given in Leviticus:

Leviticus 24:7 "Along each row (of the shew bread on the Table of Shewbread in the Temple) put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire."

⁸ *Psalms 110:4 "The LORD has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."*

⁹ *These commands included the commands to acknowledge their sins.*

¹⁰ *Mark 7:6-8 "He (Jesus) replied, 'Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me (the LORD) with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.'"*

¹¹ *See the story of Tamar in Genesis 38.*

The incense burned before the Holy of Holies represented the bread, and the burning of the incense quite clearly spoke of the death of Christ (the bread standing for his body, the fire of the altar for the judgment He underwent for us). The aroma of the incense spoke of His righteous life which was pleasing to God. The following verses from the New Testament also seem to indicate that incense stood for the work of Christ:

Ephesians 5:1-2a “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

2 Corinthians 2:14-16a “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life.”

Luke 1:10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

According to Edersheim, each priest in their division served for a week at a time. There were twenty-four divisions. In David's day each order consisted of a thousand men (1 Chronicles 23 & 24). Only 15 men from each division, each year were chosen, by lot, to go into the Holy Place and burn the incense, and according to Jewish tradition no one could perform this function more than once in his lifetime (Edersheim says this is found in Tamid 5:2). For a simple country priest like Zechariah, this was the one time in his life he would be the center of attention in the Temple worship. Zechariah was an old man. It was probably the only time his duties had even taken him inside the Holy Place. The supreme moment of his life as a priest had come. He would have been nervous enough!

Luke 1:11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

It was very fitting that at the moment Zechariah was performing a ceremony which foreshadowed the offering of the Messiah to come that the LORD sent an angel to tell him that Messiah was coming in his lifetime!

Luke 1:12 When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear.

We learn in verse 19 that this was the angel Gabriel. Gabriel had been the angel that God had sent to Daniel (Daniel 8:16, 9:21). In Daniel 8 we are told that Gabriel looked like a man, but something in his appearance terrified Daniel so much that that he fainted. Perhaps he was of immense size. He was also the one who had delivered the prophecy to Daniel of the seventy weeks which had foretold, almost 500 years before, when the Messiah would come. The name Gabriel (Greek - Γαβριήλ {gä-brē-ā'l}, Hebrew גַּבְרִיֵּאל {gav·rē·āl'}) means “warrior of God” or

“man of God.” We shall see Gabriel later in the story of Christ when he told Mary about her destiny to be the human mother of the Messiah.

Whatever it was about Gabriel, there was something about him that left no doubt in Zechariah’s mind that he wasn’t a man but an angel.

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John.

First, Zechariah was told that, miraculously despite her age, Elizabeth would have a son. He was also told to name the son John. When God specifies a name, it is significant. In the Gospel of Luke the English name “John” is in the Greek form Ἰωάννης {ē-ō-ā'n-nās}. In the Hebrew it is יְהוָה {yō·khā·nān'} which means “Jehovah has been gracious.”

Luke 1:14-15a He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord.

The ministry of John would have a great impact on more than one generation. Over twenty years after the death of Christ, there were many Jews that had only heard of the Baptism of John (Acts 18:25, 19:3).

Luke 1:15b He is never to take wine or other fermented drink,

Although some have proposed that this meant that John the Baptist was dedicated as a Nazirite (Deuteronomy 6:1-21), what is described here does not meet the requirements of the Nazirite vow. That condition required the voluntary pledge of a grown man or woman not to drink wine, cut their hair, mourn their dead, and several other conditions. Here, John the Baptist, who was an infant, and did not make a vow, was only forbidden to drink wine. Beth Moore has suggested (and I believe that she is right) that what this prohibition against drink refers to is Leviticus 10:8-9, where the sons of Aaron (the priests) who went into the Holy Place (the Tent of Meeting) were forbidden to drink fermented drink while in that service of the Lord. Here, John the Baptist (a priest and descendant of Aaron) was to be in special service to the Lord from his birth. Thus he was forbidden, by the same concept, from taking fermented drink.

Luke 1:15c and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from ~~birth~~ his mother’s womb.

This filling of the Holy Spirit was different from the Baptism of the Spirit which could only take place after the death of Christ. It refers to an empowerment by the Holy Spirit from the outside. It was the way the Holy Spirit always worked in the Old Testament. The literal translation is “from his mother’s womb” not “from birth” as the NIV has it. We shall later see the occasion on which this working of the Holy Spirit “from his mother’s womb” happened.

Luke 1:16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God.

For years John would stand along the routes that the tens of thousands of pilgrims took to go up to the three holy festivals. They were the Feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. On their way, usually at the banks of a stream or a river, he would preach to them. Many of them listened and responded back to God.

Luke 1:17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

He would be empowered by the same Spirit as Elijah, and like Elijah, he would foretell and prepare the people for the imminent Advent of the Lord. John foretold the First Advent. During the Great Tribulation Elijah will foretell the Second Advent as one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

Luke 1:18 Zechariah asked the angel, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”

Zechariah could hardly believe his ears. After all, this kind of visitation had never occurred to him before. He knew that as soon as he left the Temple he would be obliged to tell what he had seen and heard. He was looking for a sign that the crowd would believe. The LORD gave him a sign that only Zechariah would understand.

Luke 1:19 The angel answered, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.

Evidently, Gabriel was anciently of equal rank with Satan who in times past had stood in the very visible presence of God.¹²

Luke 1:20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their proper time.”

Put yourselves in Zechariah’s place. Suddenly, the angel Gabriel appeared and gave him astounding news. He had expected to go out to the assembled multitudes and fulfill the ritual of which he was the central figure. Now, he must have realized, time had slipped away and the crowd must have been waiting for him for some time. He must have realized that he would have to disclose what he had seen and been told. The foretold birth of his son John was the least

¹² *Ezekiel 28:14-16 “ You (Satan) were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones.”*

important of what he had to tell. The most important was that his son would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Many false Messiahs had come and gone since Malachi's prophecy (Malachi 4:5-6 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse"). We can understand Zechariah's concern about what he had been told. He was just a small time nobody of a provincial priest who would be seen to be making yet another Messianic claim. Of course, although he needed to strengthen his faith, God had known beforehand what he would do, and that he would strike him dumb. It protected him, and gave him time to think for the next nine months before he could speak again.

Luke 1:21 **Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple.**

Usually, this ceremony would have taken no longer than a couple of minutes. Evidently, his conversation with Gabriel was longer than just what was recorded here. That is an important aspect of the Gospel records you will begin to see. What is recorded was just a thumbnail sketch of what was actually said.

Luke 1:22 **When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.**

Although he couldn't communicate to the crowd more than the fact that he had seen a vision, later he had undoubtedly been able to communicate with his fellow priests in writing exactly what he had seen. Later on he would have communicated the same to his wife. Most of his fellow priests probably dismissed Zechariah's account, even after the birth of John. However, after John began his remarkable public ministry, they must have whispered among themselves about Zechariah's old vision. As I will explain later, I believe John's ministry lasted about ten years, from the time he was twenty until he baptized Jesus.

Luke 1:23 **When his time of service was completed, he returned home.**

After Zechariah's week of service was done he returned to his small town to tell his wife the news.

Luke 1:24-25 **After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."**

Why did Elizabeth stay in seclusion for five months? The Greek actually says she hid herself. Probably, after all the possible ridicule old Zechariah may have undergone at the Temple, both she and Zechariah were not willing to reveal her condition until it was unmistakable, along with baby kicks. No one knew except Zechariah and Elizabeth until Mary arrived.