

The Story of the Life of Christ – Lesson 6

4 BC

In the last lesson we took a bit of a detour to establish the scriptural and historical basis for the timeline which I have followed and will follow in my account of the Life of Christ in these lessons. In Lesson 5 we have already covered the timeline for the Gospel accounts we will look into in this lesson. In the last lesson we did not go into the verse-by-verse explanation of those scriptures. So, in a sense, we are taking up the verse-by-verse study which we concluded with the end of Lesson 4.

Just to remind you, in lesson 4 we saw the account of the night of Jesus' birth which was accomplished in an open field where Jesus was laid in a manger (a feeding trough) under the wondering gaze of the angels. There were many shepherds who tended the tens of thousands of sheep in the Shepherd's Field where the young sheep were kept for just the ordinary daily Temple sacrifices. Besides that, there were the sheep which were reserved for the massive sacrifice at the upcoming Passover for that year. Those shepherds had heard the proclamation of the angel and had come to the place just outside of Bethlehem where Jesus was laid in a manger (a feeding trough). There they worshipped him. At this point, we take up the verse-by-verse account in Luke.

Luke 2:20 **The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told** *(by the angel of the LORD).*

This helps to set the spiritual atmosphere in and around Jerusalem during the next month and a half. As we noted in the last lesson, these shepherds, who lived in the countryside surrounding Jerusalem, would have numbered at least a hundred, if not several hundred. Although they were despised by the Pharisees and Sadducees as being uneducated and spiritually unclean, their unanimous report must have created quite a stir among the people in and around Bethlehem which was just six miles from Jerusalem. As we shall see in the upcoming verses, almost immediately Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were able to procure a house in which to live (Matthew 2:11). It was probably provided for them by one of the shepherds who had seen the miracles on the night of Jesus' birth. Although the house was in the precincts of Bethlehem, most of the people who lived within the walls of Bethlehem were probably ignorant of who this particular couple were and how they were related to the story that was being told by the shepherds.

Luke 2:21 **On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise him, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he had been conceived.**

As with the circumcision of John the Baptist, the circumcision of Jesus was probably performed at the house where Jesus was living, although it could have been performed at the Bethlehem synagogue.

Luke 2:22-24 **When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”),¹ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”**

There were two things to be accomplished during this trip to Jerusalem.

The first thing to be accomplished was the purification of Mary 33 days after the circumcision of the baby² and 41 days after the birth of Jesus. The fact that the passage indicated that their offering was “a pair of birds” tells us something else. It tells us that Mary and Joseph would have been considered poor. The offering they made was only allowed to the poor. Those who could afford more were supposed to offer a lamb.³ This offering of the impoverished also tells us that Mary’s purification at the Temple happened before the arrival of the Magi and their presentation of the gift of gold. That gift would have changed their status of poverty.

The second thing to be accomplished was the consecration of the first-born son during the second month of his life (Numbers 18:15-16). We studied the significance of the fact that this consecration took place 41 days after Jesus’s birth. It helped us establish the exact day of Jesus’ birth.

As we saw last time, the dedication of Jesus Christ and the purification of His mother was on the Fast of Esther 4 BC – 41 Days after His birth. In the prophetic shadow presented in the ceremony of the Fast of Esther, the role of the destiny of Israel was played out in its fulfillment by Mary. The Fast of Esther was significant in that it was the day on which Israel’s destiny was cast in Esther’s time. It was also the day before the Feast of Purim (also called the Feast of Esther). Esther means “Star” Or “Morning Star.”

Luke 2:25 **Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon,⁴ who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.**

¹ Exodus 13:1

² Leviticus 12:1-4,6,8

³ Leviticus 12:6, 8 “*When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. --- If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons.*”

⁴ The Greek word here is *Συμεών* {soom-eh-one'}. It is the Grecianized version of the Hebrew name *שמעון* {shim-one'} which means “to hearken” or “to hear.” The original Simeon was the second son of Jacob and Leah.

Simeon was obviously a very old man. The “consolation of Israel,” for which Simeon and all other Old Testament believers of history were waiting, was the fulfillment of the LORD’s promise to send the Messiah. The “consolation” of Church Age believers is looking back on the finished work of the Messiah.

Luke 2:26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ.

The Greek word in Luke which is translated “Christ” is χριστος {khrē-sto's}. The word could also be translated “anointed.” It is the equivalent of the Hebrew מָשִׁיחַ {mā·shē'·akh} which is translated “Messiah.”

Luke 2:27 Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required,

On that day, the Holy Spirit came upon Simeon. In the last lesson we showed, from Josephus’ history, that on that very same day, God had ordained that the golden eagle image of the Roman God Jupiter Capitolinus would be torn down from the Temple Gate before Jesus and His parents arrived in the Temple through that same gate. Also, as we saw in the last lesson, on that same day, a righteous High Priest officiated over the rites in the Temple. The scene that Simeon would have come upon as described by Luke was that righteous High Priest (for one day), finishing the rites for dedicating the baby Jesus as the first-born Son of God.

Luke 2:28-29 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace.

The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon, as the angel had revealed to the shepherds, that this was the Messiah.

Luke 2:30-32 For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

The Holy Spirit, speaking through Simeon also spoke the great truth at which, during Jesus’ ministry, the Jews were later offended. As the Messiah, Jesus had come for everybody, both the Jews and the Gentiles.⁵ He was also the fulfillment of the great eternal destiny and glory of Israel.

Luke 2:33 The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him.

Joseph and Mary shouldn’t have been surprised at the content of Simeon’s prophecy. After all, they had heard it from Gabriel, Zechariah, Elizabeth, and the angel of the Lord who had also

⁵ *As prophesied in Isaiah 11:10, Isaiah 42:6, Isaiah 49:6, 22, Isaiah 55:4-5, Psalm 67:1-7, Psalm 87:1-7 among others.*

spoken to the shepherds. I think they “marveled” because for the last 41 days they and the baby had been hidden securely from view. Suddenly, in the midst of a crowded Temple, what they already knew was pronounced boldly before a crowd of thousands.

Luke 2:34-35a Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed.

Encompassed within this prophecy was the future destruction of Judah, Jerusalem, and the Temple.⁶ This was “the falling.” “The rising” probably refers to the salvation of all who believed in Jesus. However, it is possible that it refers to the rising of many dead Jewish saints between Jesus’ resurrection and His ascension. They rose to testify to the Jews in Jerusalem as recorded by Matthew:

Matthew 27:51-53 “At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus’ resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.”

Luke 2:35b And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

This verse helps establish the fact that the cross is sometimes identified figuratively in scripture as “a sword.” Other examples are found in Zechariah and Isaiah:

Zechariah 13:7 ““Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!”⁷ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against hand against the little ones.’”

Isaiah 27:1 “In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan (*Satan*) the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea.”

Luke 2:36a There was also a prophetess, Anna,⁸ the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.

The tribe of Asher was one of the so-called “lost tribes.” Many, but not all, from those tribes had been taken off by the Assyrians seven hundred years before. Anna was called a

⁶ *This would commence forty years to the day after Jesus was crucified as had been prophesied in Ezekiel 4:6.*

⁷ *Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27 confirm that this prophecy was about Christ.*

⁸ *The Greek word here is Ἄννα {an'-nah}. It is the Grecianized form of the Hebrew name חַנָּה {khan-naw'}. The anglicized form is “Hannah.” It means “grace.” The only other Hannah in the Bible was the mother of Samuel (1 Samuel 1:2).*

“prophetess,” which means that she used to preach the Word of the LORD to anyone who would listen.

Luke 2:36b-37 She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

She not only preached, she worshipped fasting and praying. Although she was not a Priest or a Levite, she never left the precincts of the Temple. She must have slept in what was called “Solomon’s porch.” It was a great columned hall which ran for a mile along the outer edge of the Temple mount. She must have had someone to bring her food. She could have done her praying and fasting at home, but there she couldn’t have found so many people to whom to preach.

Luke 2:38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of in⁹ Jerusalem.

Evidently, by some agency of the Holy Spirit, she knew at once that what Simeon had just proclaimed was true. If she had been awake in the Temple courts late in the night that Jesus was born, she may have seen part of the display over the nearby Shepherd’s Field outside of Bethlehem. Inquiring, she may have discovered the report of the shepherds. Somehow, she realized that the baby she saw was the great fulfillment of the promises of God. She went through the Temple speaking to everyone who she knew had trusted in God’s promise of the Messiah to come. Remember, as we saw last time, it was a fast day (the Fast of Esther), so the Temple was packed with people.

Luke 2:39 When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth.

The Gospel of Luke skipped the whole story of the coming of the Magi to Jerusalem two days later. It also skipped the flight to Egypt and jumped forward to when the family returned from Egypt. That may have been as long as six years later.

Chronologically, the next event was the coming of the Magi to Jerusalem. That account is in the Gospel of Matthew. As we saw in the last lesson, that was two days after Joseph and Mary had returned to Bethlehem from the Temple in Jerusalem. As we saw, the Magi arrived in Bethlehem the night of the eclipse of the moon, which was the second day of the Feast of Purim. It was then that they again were able to see the star in the clear sky¹⁰ which was over

⁹ *This is the KJV translation which I prefer. Although the redemption “of” Jerusalem will occur, here the ones who would be glad to hear the news were those “in” Jerusalem. They were the ones here who were looking for the “redemption” of their souls.*

Bethlehem and Jerusalem. This was forty-two days “after Jesus was born.”

Matthew 2:1a **After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod,**

It should also be noted that the rule of the Idumean Herod (the Idumeans were descendants of the Edomites). Herod fulfilled the prophecy of Deuteronomy that an alien among the Jews would rule over them. Herod the Great became immensely rich as the prophecy had also indicated:

Deuteronomy 28:43-44 “The alien (*singular*) who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, but you will be the tail.”

Matthew 2:1b **Magi from the east came to Jerusalem**

These Magi would have come from the region of Babylon and Persia, across the Euphrates. The Magi were a class of people who had been created for many centuries by the ruling powers in those regions. They would take the talented youth of conquered peoples and educate them and train them to be the advisors and bureaucrats for the Babylonian and Persian rulers. Being foreigners, they were independent from the local factions and wholly dependent on the monarchs they served. Because of that they could be counted on to support the monarch. Part of their function of being advisors was to be able to read the stars, so they became experts in astronomy and astrology. The number of these Magi that travelled to Bethlehem is not given in Matthew, but the tradition of three Magi is probably accurate, being based on the number of gifts which they brought (gold, incense and myrrh).

Matthew 2:2 **and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”¹¹**

The Greek word translated “star” here is ἀστήρ {ä-stā'r}. It comes from the same ancient Persian word from which the Hebrew name Esther (אֶסְתֵּר {es-tār'}) was derived. It is a word which must be understood here in the time it was written, not in terms of our modern understanding of astronomical bodies. In the ancient world, “a star” was any light in the heavens. In the Bible stars were also used as metaphors for Angels (Revelation 12:4, Job 25:5). Angels also were often described as of a brilliant brightness (Matthew 28:2-3). This “star” was a “light in the heavens” that rose over Israel. Remember, no ordinary stars remain stationary

¹⁰ As we saw in the last lesson, we know that night was clear because of the sighting of the lunar eclipse over Jerusalem the night that Herod burned the young men who tore down the golden eagle over the gate of the Temple.

¹¹ Some have claimed it took the Magi two years to travel from Babylon or Persia. This is ridiculous! In Ezra 8, Ezra led an expedition of over 2,000 men and their wives and children from Persia to Jerusalem. This would have meant there were at least 8,000 to 10,000 people. It took exactly 4 months!

over the horizon except stars which are directly over the poles, like the North Star. Instead, they pass from the eastern horizon to the western horizon during the night as the earth turns beneath them. This “star” was seen from Babylon to the east of Israel. If it was a star in the terms of a 21st century definition, it could not have “risen out of Jacob (Israel). Instead, from the perspective of Babylon, it would have risen over the Himalayas. Today, of course, there appear to be several non-polar “stars” that remain still, but they aren’t stars at all, but man-made satellites in geo-synchronous orbit. The Bible is not a scientific textbook. It explained celestial phenomena in terms of what they looked like to the man on the ground in that day. This light in the sky looked just like most other planets or stars, except that it was stationary. Thus, to the Magi it was a “star.” In the same way, the LORD in Isaiah described a darkening of the sun: Isaiah 50:3 “I clothe the sky with darkness and make sackcloth its covering.” Obviously, the LORD didn’t literally cover the sky with “sackcloth,” He just made it look like it had been.

First the Magi must have come to understand that this “star” was the sign spoken about by Balaam, one of the first Magi almost 1500 years before. This prophecy, spoken by Balaam under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit is recorded in the Old Testament:

Numbers 24:17 “A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel.”

In the last lesson we studied all the reasons to suppose that, from the first sighting of the star in Babylon, until the arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem was forty-two days. This brings up the question: Why didn’t the Jews in Israel notice the star? The answer is that the winter along the Mediterranean coast of Israel is the rainy season. At that time the sky is usually obscured with clouds. However, in the East where the Magi first saw the star, it is usually dry and cloudless that time of year (late January) so they could see the star. However, as we shall see, as the Magi had travelled south through the highlands of Samaria and Judah, they had lost sight of the star in the clouds those mountains created that time of year.

Matthew 2:3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

As we saw in the last lesson, there is every reason to believe that they arrived two days after the Fast of Esther when the golden eagle was torn down. As we saw from Luke, on the day of the eagle’s destruction, Simeon and Anna had proclaimed in the Temple that they had seen the Messiah in the Temple being dedicated as the firstborn. That would have been 41 days after the reports of the shepherds who saw the angels over the Shepherd’s Field near Bethlehem. Those shepherd’s reports, although dismissed by the priests, must have still been in their consciousness. Thus, Herod had every reason to take this report seriously and to connect it to the act of insurrection in the destruction of the eagle image over the Temple gate. That had happened just two days before. Remember, he knew he that he was close to death. His bowels were being eaten by maggots. He had imprisoned the leading men from every village and clan in the hippodrome in Jerusalem. He had given orders to his Royal Guard that every one of them were to be slaughtered on news of his death. He did this so that the Jews, who he knew hated him, wouldn’t have cause to celebrate the day of his death. Instead, they would all mourn the

death of their leading men. He was evidently also determined that they wouldn't be able to celebrate the birth of this unknown child.

Matthew 2:4 **When he had called together all the people's high priests (*the serving High Priest and living former High Priests*)¹² and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.**

Herod took this report of the Magi seriously enough that, in the middle of his failing health and the disturbance about the golden eagle, he took the trouble to assemble a council of the highest religious authorities in Jerusalem. In the light of all of the reports about Simeon's and Anna's proclamation in the Temple from two days before, they must have been aware of the reason for Herod's question.

Matthew 2:5-6 **"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.""**¹³

Considering the circumstances in Jerusalem, they must have suspected Herod's dire intentions toward this child. Despite that, they offered up the correct answer to enable Herod to carry out his extinction of the child. This tells you that the state of the Jewish religious establishment was already dire in 4 BC.

Matthew 2:7 **Then Herod called the Magi secretly¹⁴ and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.**

As we saw in the last lesson, we do know that Jesus had been born about a month and a half before. That was probably when the "star" had appeared. Remember, to the people of that day, any bright light in the sky was a "star." That star had marked itself as remarkable because it had

¹² *These would have included the currently serving High Priest Matthias who had just been appointed, and probably the previous High Priest Simeon who was Herod's brother-in-law by one of his wives. He had been the priest who had arranged to be absent on the day the golden eagle was torn down and had appointed another man to take his place for one day.*

¹³ *This only paraphrases Micah 5:2. Although this was what they said to Herod, it is not a literal rendition of either the original Hebrew version or the accurate Greek translation of it available in the Septuagint. The correct translation of Micah 5:2 is "But you, little Bethlehem Ephrathah, just one among the thousands of Judah, out of you shall come to me the one who is to be the ruler in Israel, whose origins are from the days of eternity." Two verses later the true ruler is compared to a shepherd: Micah 5:4 "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God." This was clearly speaking of Jesus Christ.*

¹⁴ *Herod would have called them secretly for fear that word of his interest would leak out and that the child's parents would have been warned. In those days, no one wanted to be noticed by Herod for any reason. It was very dangerous.*

remained stationary over the land of Israel. Note that all Herod found out was when the star had been noticed, not when the child had been born. This led to the imprecision of his instructions to his soldiers about which children to kill.

Matthew 2:8 **He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”**

Using the information he had gotten from the priests, Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem. The Greek word translated “child” here is παιδίον {pī-dē'-on}. It can refer to any child from a newborn anywhere up to at least the age of five. It is the same word applied to Jesus when he was circumcised on the 8th day (Luke 2:21). Jesus was a baby at this point, not a two-year-old child as some have argued. You should note that at this time neither the Magi nor Herod knew for sure that the child in question was a newborn. Despite what Herod said to the Magi, Herod had no intention of worshipping the child, as events would prove.

Matthew 2:9 **And they, having heard the king, departed, and lo, the star, that they did see in the east, did go before them, till, having come, it stood over where the child was. Young’s Literal Translation**

When the Magi came outside, for the first time since they had left the Syrian Desert and come under the winter clouds of the Anti-Lebanon Mountains, they saw the same stationary star that they had seen in Babylon (the east). As we saw in the last lesson, we know sky was clear that night as history records that all the people of Jerusalem were able to see the full eclipse of the moon as the young Jewish iconoclasts were burned alive. The Scripture only says that the Star was directly over where the young child was. That could just mean it was directly over Bethlehem, confirming the prophecy. If that was so, then they might have found the house by asking around the small village of Bethlehem. Surely some in that village knew of the events that had occurred just outside of their village forty days before and could have directed them to the house. It is also possible that the bright light that had been high in the sky somehow pointed the way to the house.

Matthew 2:10-11a **When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.**

Whatever was the way that they were led to the house, they had no doubts when they saw the baby and immediately worshipped Him. Renaissance artists have depicted the baby with a halo. I like to think the sign was more like the radiant face of Moses when he came down from the presence of the LORD on Mt. Sinai.¹⁵

¹⁵ *Exodus 34:29* “When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD.”

Matthew 2:11b Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense ¹⁶ and of myrrh.

The gifts had symbolic meanings. The gold, incense, and myrrh spoke of the divine birth (gold), righteous life (incense), and upcoming death (myrrh) of Jesus. The gifts also had practical uses. The gold was probably used to support them for the time they were in Egypt. The myrrh was probably kept by Mary and brought to the Garden tomb 33 years later. I expect the frankincense was kept as a fragrance for the home in which Jesus lived His righteous life.

Matthew 2:12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Instead of going back through Jerusalem they probably went south around the Dead Sea and then back north along the caravan route that ran north to Damascus and back across the Syrian Desert to the Euphrates. This route would have gotten them out of Herod's territories as quickly as possible. We are not told how long they stayed in Bethlehem. It could have been just a few hours, but I suspect they talked with Mary and Joseph long enough to hear the whole story of Jesus' conception and birth.

Matthew 2:13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

We are not told how many days after the Magi had left that Herod discovered their deception. I suspect that it was long enough that both the Magi and Jesus' parents had passed out of Herod's territory and the possibility of pursuit. That would have been at least two or three days.

Matthew 2:14-15 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁷ where he stayed until the death of Herod.

Josephus and Acts records that about this time a man named Judas of Galilee claimed to be the Messiah sent by God. No doubt his claims received some credence because of the Messianic

¹⁶ The word here is *λίβανος* {lib'-an-os} which means frankincense. This is the same Greek word used by ancient Hebrew scholars in the Septuagint to translate the word "frankincense" (an ingredient of the Holy incense used in the Temple) which appears in Exodus 30:34. The concept of Jesus' life being symbolized by the fragrant incense is presented in Ephesians 5:1-2.

¹⁷ According to my chronology, Mary and Joseph fled for Egypt just after the Feast of Esther (or Purim) which is just one month before Passover. If they traveled slowly, it is conceivable that they arrived in Egypt at Passover, which was the same date that Jacob (Israel) and his family had arrived in Egypt (Exodus 12:41). It was also the same date that the Israelites later left Egypt.

signs that had just manifested themselves for Jesus (the star and the prophecies of Anna and Simeon at the temple - Luke 2) and the rumors that were circulating about the slaughter of the children in Bethlehem. This Judas of Galilee raised up a rebellion against Rome in Galilee, centered in Sepphoris, about 2 miles from Nazareth. While Jesus was in Egypt, the people of Nazareth were subject to the worst horrors of civil war, including the forced enslavement and deportation of most of the Jewish population, possibly including the families of Mary and Joseph.

Matthew 2:15b And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”¹⁸

This quoted a prophecy in the Book of Hosea:

Hosea 11:1 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”

The Book of Daniel makes it clear that “Israel” is one of the names of God:

Daniel 9:19 “O Lord, listen! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your Name.”

Also, in the prophecy of the virgin-born Messiah in Isaiah 49, the Messiah was called by the name “Israel.”

Isaiah 49:1-3 “Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from *the belly of my mother*¹⁹ he has made mention of my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,²⁰ in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow²¹ and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor.’”

This passage in Matthew 21:15 demonstrated that the Apostles understood that Jesus was the substitute and fulfillment of the true “Israel.” The name “Israel” means the “Prince of God.” It had been prophesied that the “Prince of God” would come out of the people of Israel. He would pass every test that national Israel had failed and thus earn for them the blessings of God just as He earned salvation for Adam’s seed as the “Last Adam”²² (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45). “Israel”

¹⁸ Also note *Psalms 80:8-17*

¹⁹ “*From the belly of my mother*” is what the Hebrew says here. What is this speaking about? The most ancient prophecy of *Genesis 3:15* “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*”

²⁰ See *Revelation 1:16, 2:16, 19:15,21.*

²¹ See the Messianic passage *Psalm 127:4-5.*

²² *1 Corinthians 15:22* “*For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.*”

was the name conferred on Jacob after the great prayer-struggle at Peniel because, just like Jesus, “as a prince he had power with God and prevailed.”²³

Matthew 2:16 **When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders ²⁴ to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.**

It was within a day or two of this that Herod the Great had his own son and heir Herod Antipater executed. Herod was within a few weeks of his own death. According to Josephus he had rounded up prominent men from every family, town, and village in Judea and imprisoned them in the hippodrome in Jerusalem. He had given their guards standing orders that upon his death they were all to be killed. In this way he was going to ensure that his death was an occasion of mourning not rejoicing. After Herod died however, Herod’s family countermanded the orders before they could be carried out.

As we saw in the last lesson, the suggestion that this verse means Jesus was two years old is not valid. As we noted above, Herod didn’t know how old the child was, he only knew when the star had appeared. Instead, the evidence suggests that Herod decided that two years was a good enough margin to ensure that all possible candidates were included. Even if he had known that Jesus was a brand-new infant, he wouldn’t have been willing to take a chance on the capability of his soldiers to recognize the correct age of a young child. That brings up the question: How many people were there in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus and how many babies would have been slaughtered? W. F. Albright, who was considered a primary archaeologist of his era, did some extensive research on populations at the time of Jesus. His estimate was that there were around 300 people in a village with the archaeological infrastructure of Bethlehem. Such a village would have held six or seven children under one year of age.

This raises the question: How was this slaughter of the infants carried out? Did Herod’s men just ride into town and break into every house looking for infants? Some movies I have seen suggested that was what happened. I think it was more probable that they used the same ruse that Herod tried to use on the Magi. I think that it is more likely that they came into town declaring that they wanted to reward any infant under two with gifts of gold. Then when the babies were all presented for the reward, they were slaughtered.

1 Corinthians 15:45 “15:45 “So it is written: ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.”

²³ *Genesis 32:28 “And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.” KJV*

²⁴ *These orders were undoubtedly given to Herod’s elite personal guards. Josephus recorded that these guards were all Gentiles from Galatia in Asia Minor. They had previously been the personal guards of Cleopatra, but had been given to Herod by Augustus after her suicide.*

Matthew 2:17-18 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah ²⁵ was fulfilled: “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel ²⁶ weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

This passage is one of the most useful keys in the Bible to help the earnest reader to understand how figures and symbols in the Old Testament speak of things that were fulfilled in the New Testament. Matthew tells us that this verse is about the killing of the infants in Bethlehem, yet Bethlehem is not specifically mentioned in the prophecy of Jeremiah. However, when it mentions Rachel, the wife of Jacob (who died a thousand years before Jeremiah’s time), we should understand that it is talking about Bethlehem. That was where the tomb of Rachel was (Genesis 35:19, 48:7). So, this connects Bethlehem with the destruction of young children. However, what does that have to do with Ramah? Ramah was a town in the hill country of Judea which was on the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem. That was the same road which Mary and Joseph must have travelled to the place of Jesus’ birth. I believe it was the very town mentioned in Luke 1:39 where Zechariah and Elizabeth lived. When they heard the news out of nearby Bethlehem, they were among the very few who understood the disaster it seemed to announce about the newly born son of Mary. It is interesting to reflect that Rachel also had a son, Joseph who was reported to be dead, but was actually alive in Egypt waiting to deliver the people of Israel of his day.

Matthew 2:19-20 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

Both the English and the Greek here are in the plural “those.” This seems to indicate that more people than just Herod were involved in seeking Jesus’ death. It says that it was safe to return only “after” Herod had died, not “when” Herod died. That seems to inform us that whoever made up the “those,” they seem to have been aware that they had missed the child they had sought in Bethlehem. Perhaps later interrogation of some of the shepherds from Bethlehem informed them that they had missed the miraculous child whose birth had been celebrated by the angels.

Matthew 2:21 So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel.

It doesn’t tell us how long Joseph and Mary were in Egypt, but it was some time after Herod’s death and after Archelaus returned from Rome as Tetrarch of the Province of Judea.

Matthew 2:22a But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there.²⁷

²⁵ *Jeremiah 31:15*

²⁶ *Rachel, being the grandmother of Ephraim, possibly associates this prophecy with the prophecies that Ephraim was connected with the coming Messiah.*

Josephus tells us that Archelaus left for Rome immediately after the death of Herod and went to plead with the Emperor Augustus to confirm him as successor of his father in the Kingdom. Most of Herod's family went to plead against him. There was an interval of at least six months or more before he came back confirmed as Tetrarch in Judea by Augustus. The rest of Herod the Great's mainly Jewish territories were split into two Tetrarchies between two of Herod's other sons, Phillip and Antipas.²⁸ Archelaus reigned in Judea and Samaria until 6 AD when he was deposed by Rome because of his "barbarous and tyrannical usage" of the Jews and Samaritans.²⁹ We know that Jesus and his parents came back sometime during this nine-year interval after Jesus' birth. Herod Antipas reigned in Galilee until 36 AD.

Matthew 2:22b Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee,³⁰

Of course, we know that it had been foretold by the Prophet Isaiah that the Messiah would grow up in "Galilee of the Gentiles."³¹ Also, under Herod Antipas, Galilee was far more peaceful and prosperous than Judea.

Matthew 2:23 and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene."

The meaning of this phrase has never been satisfactorily established. It is certain that this is not a quotation of any passage in Scripture, and the quotation marks around this passage do not exist in the original text. In the Old Testament, Nazareth did not even exist as a town. The prophets, do however, associate the Messiah with the area close to Nazareth. In Joshua 19:10-16 there was a second Old Testament Bethlehem (house of bread) located in the area that enclosed New Testament Nazareth. The ancient town of Shunem is associated with prophecies of the Messiah at least three times. It too, was located somewhere close to Nazareth although it had disappeared by the time of Jesus' life. Because the area around Nazareth had been largely re-populated with Gentiles after the earlier rebellion, that area was viewed with scorn by the people in Judea, and some scholars have suggested that this phrase has to do with the prophecy that the Messiah would be despised (Isaiah 53:3).

However, the name "Nazareth" may be connected to the word נָזַר {nä·zä'} which means "to sprinkle" in the Messianic passage of Isaiah 52:13-15. The word is connected to ritual purification.

²⁷ Besides, which, it had always been God's plan for Jesus to grow up in anonymity in "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 9:1, Matthew 4:15-16).

²⁸ The mainly Gentile Decapolis (east of the Sea of Galilee) reverted to the overall control of the Roman Governor of the East who ruled out of Antioch.

²⁹ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 17, Chapter 13, Paragraph 2.

³⁰ This is the first time in the Gospel of Matthew that Galilee is mentioned.

³¹ Isaiah 9:1-2.

Isaiah 52:13-15 “See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him -- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness-- **so will he sprinkle** many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.