

# BIRTH OF JESUS CHRIST

## INDEX

1. The Synoptic Gospels
2. Genealogy of Jesus
3. Deity of Christ
4. Angels
5. Joseph
6. Mary
7. Virgin Birth
8. Shepherds
9. Magi
10. Star
11. Links for further study

# Chapter 1 - The Synoptic Gospels

## Introduction

Most Christians are aware of the biblical claim of inspiration and inerrancy yet when it comes to explaining how the Bible came to us in sixty-six books they are woefully bankrupt of any knowledge. Therefore, when anyone challenges the origin of the books of the Bible they are unable to give any reasonable or intelligent defense of the scriptures. The Bible comes to us as 66 books, 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. In this lesson we will explore the origin of the first four books of the New Testament called the Gospels.

Jesus Christ left us no writings. In fact, the only recorded writing that Jesus did was to write something on the ground when the accusers of the woman taken in adultery wanted to stone her. We are not told what he wrote, but whatever it was it was most likely immediately erased by a swish of a sandal.

It is only logical that sometime after the death and resurrection of Jesus some people wrote down their recollections of what Jesus said and did. We do not know who or how many or to what extent these freelance writers recorded the story of Jesus. What we do know is that a few of these documents were already highly regarded as early as 50 A.D. by the apostles and churches of the early years.

Four of those writings, carefully copied and preserved by the churches, survive to this day. Those four documents are known as the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The word "gospel" means "good news." The Greek word for gospel is "evangeleon" from which we derive the terms evangelize, evangelism, evangelist, and evangelical. It refers to the good news heralded concerning Jesus Christ. In the Greek culture of the Roman Empire "evangeleon" in singular and plural forms referred to the announcement of the good news of victory. It was used in the Roman cult of emperor worship to mean the glad tidings of the birth of a future emperor or his ascension to the throne.

All of the gospels were written in the first century during the lifetime of the apostles and in plain view of critics, skeptics, and agnostics who could have torn it to shreds had it contained errors historical or otherwise. They did not and could not. In fact one of the antagonists to the gospel message, Celsus, in disputing the faith with Origen, could not deny the genuineness of the four gospels while he vehemently rejected the message. (Faussett-Brown p. 261) On the other hand the gospels, written during the lifetimes of hundreds and thousands of eyewitnesses, were never refuted, questioned, or challenged regarding words, chronologies, names and places, times or dates, or references to concurrent secular history. One wonders why in the midst of intense world persecution Christianity's opponents were not able to assail the reliability of the gospels seeing they too were eyewitnesses of the life and times of Jesus. One must also wonder why 1900 years later non-eyewitness theologians can assault the integrity of the gospel, impugning its veracity, and judging its authenticity as though they had more knowledge, evidence or proofs than did the first century scholars.

By the end of the first century and most certainly before the death of the last apostle (John) all of the books of the N.T. known to us today were already in circulation. (Faussett p112) The renowned scholar Andrew R. Faussett states the argument for validity of the N.T. canon this way.

"The prophets' in the Christian Church, speaking themselves under inspiration, and those having the Spirit's gift, 'the discerning of spirits,' acted as checks on the transmission of error orally before the completion of the written word. Secondly it was under their inspired superintendence that the N.T. Scriptures were put forth as they were successively written.... Thus by the twofold sanction of inspiration, that of the authors and that of the judges, the canonicity of each book is established. By God's gracious providence most of the books of the N.T. were in the church's possession years before the death of leading apostles, all of them before the death of John." (Faussett p112)

### **Higher Criticism**

During the last 150 years theologians have turned to a critical analysis of the Old and New Testament known as higher criticism. Critical study of the Bible is not bad in all its disciplines. It should involve textual criticism (to discover original use and meanings of words), and historical criticism (a study of the historical setting of scripture). The problem comes when men begin to bring in speculative theories as to the sources and forms from which they think the scriptures were derived. Higher criticism seeks to discover what portions of the scriptures were really authentic and what are suspect. The problem is that their approach to the scriptural writings is full of skepticism and agnosticism. Their assumption is that the scriptures are not "God breathed."

From the outset they start with the assumption that the Bible is not historically accurate. Despite these incessant attacks on the Bible there has yet to be discovered any archeological or scientific discovery that proves the Bible wrong. "The attitudes behind these attacks on biblical accuracy and authority were those of complete rejection of God's inspiration of the scriptures." (p70 Grant Jeffrey) Many of these so-called religious scholars outright deny any supernatural event such as miracles or prophecy. For them any reference to miracles or prophetic fulfillment is an indication of unreliability. They begin with doubt and end with adamant unbelief. Their basic premise is that all in the Bible is false unless it can be corroborated by non-biblical evidence. Yet time and time again discoveries of the ancient world have confirmed the biblical narratives. Still they continue in unbelief refusing to listen to their own pre-established proof requirements. Instead they move on to their next pet-peeve against the scriptures. Their faith in agnosticism exceeds their need for scientific empirical data.

As we move into the NT these pseudo-scholars become even more vociferous against the scriptures. They seem hell-bent on disproving the historicity of Jesus at any cost. Their theme is evident - If it is miraculous it didn't happen. They are convinced of a scientific method that all things operate under the natural laws and anything outside that realm is fantasy. Therefore after 150 years of assaulting the Bible they are now emboldened to

assault Jesus Christ himself blatantly denying the birth, death, and resurrection accounts of Christ. Some have gone as far as to claim that Jesus did not even exist but was a hero legend of superstitious people.

### **The Jesus Seminar**

The epitome of this folly is the infamous Jesus Seminar composed of seventy-five liberal scholars who sit in pompous judgement over the authenticity of Jesus' words. Meeting semi-annually they vote on the probability of the Jesus' sayings being genuine. It was reported in 1996 by Time magazine that their verdict over the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John was that they (the Gospels) were "notoriously unreliable." They had thrown out the story of the Nativity, the Resurrection and the Sermon on the Mount. When they examined the Lord's Prayer they rejected every word except the "Our Father." The Jesus Seminar has now produced a revised "Gospel According to Jesus" which eliminated almost all of the sayings of Jesus, and most of the miracles." (Jeffrey p112)

## **THE CANON**

### **How The Gospels Came To Us**

As we have already stated, the four gospels that we have in the New Testament were written and circulated not long after A.D. 50. As we will see, these books were unanimously upheld by the early church as authentic and written by the apostles or prophetic colleagues of the apostles. These New Testament books were not simply voted into the scriptures hundreds of years after Christ, they were considered scriptures at the earliest moment, when they were first written and circulated among the churches that the apostles had founded.

Early after the resurrection of the Lord congregations gathered authentic writings of scripture into archives or libraries, to be read in the churches on the Lord's day.

We call these archives of the books of the Bible "canons" from the Greek word *kanon* which means a reed, or rule of measurement. Reeds were used for measurement like a yardstick. We get the word cane from "kanon." It was a standard of measurement. In Revelation 11:1 John states that he was given a reed like unto a rod to measure the temple of God.

The word is used in Galatians 6:16, 2 Corinthians 10:13-16, and Philippians 3:16. The word "canon" carries the idea of a setting limits on something, that is, to set off the boundaries of something. Thus the canon of scripture sets off the boundaries of what is scripture and what is not. These manuscripts were carefully and laboriously copied and shared with other congregations. The apostles themselves referred to these writings as scripture. (See 2 Peter 3:16, I Cor 14:37, I Cor 12:10, and Galatians 1:8-9)

The churches themselves individually and without any organized oversight judged what was divinely inspired. We therefore have the solid witness of the apostles themselves, the churches individually and independently of each other using the gift of discernment, all coming to the unanimous decision that the gospels in particular, and the writings of the epistles were genuine, having been written either by the apostles, or as in the case of Mark and Luke, by apostolically recognized men.

### **Muratorian Fragment**

An ancient manuscript written by Caius, a presbyter of Rome in the first century, known as the Muratorian Fragment, contains one of the earliest lists of canonical books, and declares Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to be scriptures while rejecting the Shepherd of Hermas as being spurious. (Fausset p 113) In the same era Peshito and Syriac versions of the canon agree with the Muratorian Fragment and include Hebrews and James.

### **Council of Carthage**

It was not until AD 397 at the Council of Carthage that the organized church declared their agreement and ratified the canon of the New Testament as containing the 27 books which we now recognize. The canon agreed upon at Carthage could not make any writing inspired scripture which was not already scripture. "Man could never make that inspired which God has not, nor can the doubts of some divest of inspiration that which God has inspired." (Fausset p113) The church merely sealed by declaration the decision which the churches and apostles had already concluded through careful sifting. The canon was closed therefore at the death of the last apostle, not by any legislation of men, but by the witness of God's spirit to the church over a period of four hundred years.

### **A Test for Scriptures**

The Diocletian persecution of AD 303 was directed against the Christian scriptures. Whoever delivered them was considered a traitor to the state, therefore even by secular standards there had to have been a predetermined canon of what constituted Christian scriptures. Men and women gave their lives for the scriptures even from the earliest days of Christianity. It is hard to believe that someone would die for something they considered to be the general writings of good men.

There were five possible guiding principles used by the early church fathers to determine whether a New Testament book was canonical.

1. Was it authoritative - did it come from the hand of God with the authoritative "Thus saith the Lord"?
2. Was it prophetic - was it written by a man of God who was himself a prophet?
3. Was it authentic - was its authenticity in doubt? The early church fathers had the policy, "If in doubt, throw it out."
4. Was it dynamic - did it come with the life transforming power of the Spirit?
5. Was it accepted - was it accepted unquestioningly by the church at large since the beginning?

(McDowell, A Ready Defense, p 39)

## **Reliability of the Early Dates for New Testament Writings**

We now possess over 5,000 manuscript copies of portions of the NT in the Greek language. Beyond this there exist 15,000 manuscripts of the NT in other languages dating from the first centuries after Christ. No other writing of ancient times has so much original material that has been so carefully scrutinized as the New Testament. No other body of literature has undergone such intense attacks on its integrity.

## **The Synoptic Gospels**

Part of the attack on the New Testament is due in part to what is called the "synoptic problem." Since the 18th century scholars have been comparing the gospels to see what similarities and differences might be there. They do this by placing the gospels side by side in parallel columns.

### **"Synoptic"**

The term "synoptic" means "seeing together." (Syn= together and optic=seeing) In doing this kind of careful study it has been observed that three of the four gospels are very much alike. They are Matthew, Mark and Luke. John's gospel is different in content and in several other ways. Therefore Matthew, Mark, and Luke constitute the "synoptic gospels." It has also been noted that there are significant differences between these three witnesses to the life of Christ. These differences cause some scholars to conclude that there were therefore errors made by the writers.

### **The Q Document**

Further studies reveal that Matthew's gospel contains 91% of Mark's words, and Luke contains about 53% of Mark's gospel. It has therefore been speculated that Matthew and Luke both used Mark's gospel and were familiar with it. Others speculate that there may have been a fourth document, or oral tradition, unknown to us, perhaps lost in the sands of time, known as the "Q" document that was also used by Matthew and Luke. ("Q" stands for the German word "Quelle" meaning source.)

### **Harmony of the Gospels**

The Gospel of John is not a chronological Gospel therefore is not considered as part of the synoptics. But for our use and study of the Scriptures we are going to use it because though not chronological it helps us to grasp the bigger picture of what was happening in Jesus' life and ministry. We will call this the "Parallel" Gospels, or "Harmony of the Gospels." Thompson's Chain Reference Bible gives an excellent side-by-side comparison of the chronology of the Gospels. We have included it here for your use and enjoyment. You will find it very helpful in understanding the story of Jesus' life and ministry. For instance, using this chart you could easily pick out all the sermons Jesus preached and examine them from each writer's viewpoint. You could do the same with all the miracles, or all the healings.

For our present study, the story of the birth of Christ is told in only two of the four Gospels. That becomes very clear when you look at the chart. We have deliberately left out the chronology of Christ's Infancy so you could experience doing a "synoptic" comparison, or a "harmony" of the Gospel on your own. For an extra challenge we ask you to find the passages, Gospel or other book of the Bible that defines his Pre-Existence. (Hint: Only one of these passages comes from the Old Testament.)

### **PRE-EXISTANT CHRIST**

- Eternally the Same
- With No Beginning
- His Activities Eternal
- Word Before Creation - Jn 1:1
- Creator of all things
- In glory before world
- Lamb slain before foundation
- Before Abraham

### **BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD OF JESUS**

- Angel Gabriel to Zacharias
- Mary visits Elizabeth
- Birth of John Baptist
- Angel visits Joseph
- Angel visits Mary
- Birth in Bethlehem
- Visit of Shepherds
- Presentation in Temple
- Words of Simeon and Anna
- Visit of the Wise Men
- Flight to Egypt
- Return to Nazareth
- Visit to Jerusalem at 12 yrs
- Silent years

### **ASSIGNMENT:**

Prepare your own synoptic gospel of the birth and early years (up to 12 years old) of Christ. Do this by labeling each event in the birth and childhood narratives and list those events in chronological order (the order in which they happened.) Be sure not to leave anything out. How many events are there? Ask yourself, "What are the differences and

similarities? Are there any contradictions? Why do you suppose they do not all contain identical material? Share your observations with the class.

### **Inspiration of Scripture**

We must ask ourselves an important question at this juncture: Does it matter who wrote the gospel of Mark? If you are a liberal theologian it probably doesn't matter since in the end liberals don't believe the scriptures to be divinely inspired any more than Shakespeare or Milton were inspired. If you believe in the inspiration of scripture and that the scriptures are inerrant and infallible, then it does matter who wrote the gospels or any of the other New Testament books. If it doesn't matter who wrote the scriptures then we could also say it doesn't matter now if one adds to or takes away from those writings. If there is no divine inspiration and no inerrancy to worry about then anyone could write anything and be on par with the New Testament scriptures. In fact, you would have no reason to limit scripture to the canon of the New Testament at all. Why not canonize every inspired writing? Do you see the folly of the liberal view of scripture? It destroys the foundation of our faith and leaves revelation open to evolve with the times. The Bible itself declares its own inspiration as the inerrant, inspired, and unchanging word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21, 1 Corinthians 2:13, Matthew 5:18)

Now that we have established how the New Testament and the Gospels in particular came to us, let us consider separately each of the Gospel authors:

## The Gospel of Mark

The Gospel of Mark is most likely the first of the gospels to be written. (Though some scholars contest this.) It is the shortest of the four gospels and it appears to have been used by Matthew and Luke as a skeleton upon which to build their narratives. The earliest known manuscript of Mark was found to be in the library of the Essenes in the Dead Sea Scrolls which were sealed in a cave around AD 50. That would mean that within the first 16 years after Jesus' life, death, and resurrection this gospel was written and circulated among the churches.

Critical scholars question the authenticity of Mark's gospel, rejecting historical tradition and recent archeological evidence that confirms its early existence. They also discredit Mark as being the John Mark of the New Testament based on their failure to find corroborating evidence in secular material of the time. They claim the book must have been written later than AD 70 and most probably by an unknown western Roman Christian who just happened to be named Mark, along with thousands of other Marks who lived at that time.

Did Mark Write the Gospel that Bears His Name? There is no internal evidence of the authorship of Mark's gospel, yet it is the unanimous witness of the early church Mark is the author. The earliest record of Markian authorship was by Papias, a disciple of the apostle John, in AD 140. Papias wrote a detailed account of Mark's authorship of the gospel. In quoting an even earlier source Papias testified that

1. Mark, who was the author, was the same John Mark of the New Testament mentioned in Acts.
2. John Mark was a close companion of the apostle Peter and was his interpreter.
3. Mark wrote the account at Peter's request and it was based on Peter's preaching of the gospel.
4. Mark accurately recorded the events and sayings of Jesus which writing was approved by Peter to be distributed and read among the churches. (NIV Study Bible p1490 and Jeffrey p254)

For many years higher criticism dated the Gospel of Mark near the end of Peter's life in Rome, at about AD 70 shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. More recent research, based on the findings in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947), have proved that fragments of Mark's gospel were in the library of scrolls the Essenes preserved before AD 50. Therefore Mark's gospel had to have been written within a dozen years of Christ's life. Why is this so important? This discovery by professor Jose O'Callaghan concluded that the gospel was in circulation while hundreds of eyewitnesses, including the disciples, were still alive to correct, refute, or challenge any inaccuracies had there been any. (Jeffrey p251)

## The Gospel of Matthew

The gospel of Matthew, as with the other gospels, does not tell us who wrote it, yet the church fathers of the earliest centuries unanimously hail the apostle Matthew as its unquestioned author. Modern critical scholars have questioned its authorship as they have all the other gospel authors. Their reasoning is that if it was written by an eyewitness why would the author depend so heavily on Mark's gospel as a resource? The answer could be as simple as Mark's gospel being familiar to the whole church. Therefore it would be an excellent starting outline on which to build Matthew's own view of the events and teachings of Christ.

Jerome, one of the early church fathers, recounts the history of Matthew's authorship as passed down to him:

"Papias, a disciple of the apostle John, who lived around AD 100, says, 'Matthew wrote his oracles in Hebrew and each interpreted it into Greek as he could.' " (McBirnie p175)

His use of the past tense indicated that even by his time the Hebrew manuscript was a thing of the past, so that by the turn of the century the authoritative Greek translation was firmly in place and in extensive use by the churches. Nothing of the Hebrew manuscript has survived to our day. It has been speculated that the explanation for this may be the wide use of Greek, and that the Hebrew Christian judaizers clung tenaciously to the Hebrew, which over time became so corrupted by heretical influences it was rejected by the church.

It is surmised by most scholars and historians that the Greek speaking Jews, known as Hellenists, would have needed the Greek version of Matthew's gospel which in all likelihood Matthew himself provided, as some historical evidence indicates. This would explain the disappearance of the Hebrew manuscript, being unnecessary. The Greek version, accepted and used in all the churches before the time of the apostle John's death, would certainly have been protested by John had it not also carried Matthew's apostolic authority.

Matthew's gospel was probably written in Palestine originally written in Hebrew or possibly Aramaic, then translated into Greek. No one knows for sure since none of the original Hebrew or Aramaic documents survive to our day. It appears that Matthew had a good knowledge of Mark's gospel and quotes from it extensively. (91% of Mark appears verbatim in Matthew.) It would be reasonable to assume that Matthew was the second Gospel since Matthew did not quote from Luke or John. (Some have tried to prove that Mark borrowed from Matthew but the internal and external evidence weighs heavily in favor of Mark's gospel preceding Matthew's. The Gospel of Matthew was probably written sometime around or after AD 50, certainly before AD 60.

Matthew obviously wrote for Jewish people whether Hebrew or the Hellenistic Jews still in exile scattered in other parts of the world. His main purpose is to show from the Old

Testament scripture, from which he quotes or translates directly, that Jesus is the Messiah in fulfillment of the prophecies. He emphasized the lineage of David, the Kingdom of Heaven, and Jesus as the Son of David. Despite his appeal to the Hebrew mind he beautifully wove into the narrative such universal aspects of the Gospel as "the field is the world," the coming of the Magi, and the full text of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20. (NIV p1439)

## **The Gospel of Luke**

Similar to the other gospels, Luke's gospel also contains no author's name, yet it has been unquestionably ascribed to the hand of Dr. Luke from the first century. This gospel is unique in that it is a dual volume containing both the gospel and the book of Acts, both written by the same author, each perhaps separated by a few years. It contains a prologue that carefully outlines the purpose and intent of the work:

" Many have taken 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 were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. 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." (Luke 1:1-3)

From this prologue we learn several things about the author:

1. The author is an educated man writing to a highly esteemed dignitary named Theophilus. We do not know who Theophilus was but some conjecture he was a high ranking Roman official acquainted with the author and who has made inquiries concerning the story of Jesus Christ. The author begins very professionally using language of classical Greek which was a common practice in historical works of the time. Therefore we conclude the author to be an educated man, well versed in the classical Greek writing style, and well known by men of influence.
2. The author refers to things "fulfilled among us" thus including himself with the band of those about whom he is writing. The author uses the first person singular "I" and later in the second volume the first person plural "we" thus showing that he was part of the story that is being recounted. He also reveals that he was not an eyewitness of Jesus Christ but received this information from others who were eyewitnesses.
3. The author presents himself as a careful investigator, the implication being that he is not presumptuous to do so but well qualified among his peers to accomplish this task.
4. The author reveals his sources: Eyewitnesses and servants of the word, as well as written accounts others have made of these events. It becomes obvious to the attentive reader that Luke is writing later than Matthew and Mark. Matthew qualifies as one of the eyewitnesses who took upon himself to write an account, and Mark is well known in Luke's Acts of the Apostles as "a minister of the word." This does not limit the

author to two sources but implies that he relied on at least two written accounts and most likely other accounts as well. ("Many have taken in hand to write.") It is possible that the author traveled extensively to research this report. His sources would include personal recollections from the apostles, including Paul with whom Luke had very close associations. He would have interviewed women who accompanied Jesus as well as those who were healed by him. He may well have had a compiled library of written sources not available to Matthew and Mark, nor to us.

5. The author's intent is to put the events into an orderly account for the reader. That is, the author is attempting to organize the material in a chronological fashion as closely as possible to recollections of the witnesses. Luke then is the first to attempt a harmony of the gospels. We should remember also the testimony of John who later fills in the blanks for Matthew, Mark, and Luke who said of his own gospel account: "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples which are not recorded in this book." (John 20:30) And "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were to be written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25) There are events in Matthew that Luke does not include (i.e. The Wise Men) The same can be said for Luke's exclusion of some of Mark's material. All of the gospel authors use editorial license to choose those events that best suit their task and their audience.

### **Is Luke the Author?**

Though the author does not mention his own name the internal evidence points to Luke.

1. Luke is the only New testament character that can fit the "I" and "we" passages of Acts. (See Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-15, 21:1-18, 27:1-28:16) Luke had extensive knowledge and access to Paul and all the apostles.
2. Luke was a gentile, well educated in Greek culture and language, a Greek speaker, probably born in Antioch, and he was a physician who accompanied Paul on several of his journeys and ministered to Paul while in prison. Luke's gospel uses the best Greek of the four and is written for the gentile mind.
3. Internal evidence that points to Luke is the volume of medical terminology used in his record. The author Hobart, in *The Medical Language of Luke*, documents over four hundred medical terms used by Luke alone among the gospel writers, which terms are also found in other Greek medical writers.
4. Finally the enormous voice of the church from the earliest days assign the gospel to Luke. In fact, there was no difference of opinion as to the authorship of this gospel. Such early church fathers as Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian, as well as the Muratorian Fragment all agree that Dr. Luke is the author of both Luke and Acts.

## The Gospel of John

The Gospel of John is the fourth witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. John's gospel stands out among the others in that he does not seem to rely on any of the previously written sources. Then why should he? He was the beloved disciple, one of Jesus' inner circle, and an eyewitness to all that Jesus did. His name is not mentioned in this gospel which is strange seeing his prominent place among the twelve. Perhaps his conspicuous absence itself indicates he is the author. No one else would ignore such a prominent figure. John however, does reference himself as "the disciple whom he loved" (John 19:26) He reveals himself only briefly at the end of the gospel when Jesus commands Peter to "feed my sheep" then says of the disciple whom Jesus loved, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" The apostle then removes the veil identifying himself by saying, "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. (John 21:24)

John's gospel is distinctly different from the other gospels in several ways. That is why it is NOT called a Synoptic Gospel. It is not seen as mirroring the others. It does however contribute to the chronology of the life of Jesus in significant ways. John tells the stories the others may not have known or neglected to tell. Jerome relates his understanding of the motives that led John to write this gospel record.

- 1) John, the evangelist, wrote a gospel at the request of the bishops of Asia, against Cerinthus, and other heretics and especially against the then growing dogmas of the Ebonites, who asserted that Christ did not exist before Mary. On this account he was compelled to maintain His divine nativity."
- 2) Yet another reason for this work was that when he had read Matthew, Mark, and Luke he approved indeed the substance of the history and declared that the things they said were true, but that that they had given the history of only one year, the one that is, which follows the imprisonment of John... he relates the events of Jesus ministry in the earlier Judean ministry before John was shut up in prison." (McBirnle p117)

John's gospel then is another eyewitness account of the life of Christ from the perspective of the inner circle. John presents the gospel as it would appeal to the Greek thinkers, as a philosophy and theology behind the historical events.

John states his purpose for himself, "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31) Truly it is the evangelistic gospel. Myriads of truth seekers have come to Christ simply by reading this gospel. One can easily see throughout the book his intense interest in answering or rather leading the reader to answer the question, "Who is Jesus?" You cannot read the gospel of John and walk away thinking that Jesus was just a great man, or a prophet. C.S. Lewis put it this way:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. he would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."

Josh McDowell put it succinctly as a trilemma (as opposed to a dilemma) - Jesus Christ must be either a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord." (McDowell, Evidence. p103)

Recommended Reading:

- Grant R. Jeffrey, The Signature of God, Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 1996
- William Steuart McBirnie, The Search for the Twelve Apostles, Living Books/Tyndale, 1973
- Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979
- Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense, Compiled by Bill Wilson, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993

## Chapter 2 - The Deity of Jesus

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him not anything was made that was made... He was in the world, and the world was made by him...No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, has declared him." John 1:1-3

### Introduction

Of all the doctrines of the Bible none is so wonderfully powerful, so profoundly mysterious, and so totally awesome as the doctrine of the person of Christ. No other doctrine causes so many to stumble and to err from the truth, than this incontrovertible doctrine of the deity of Christ. Every Christian needs an unwavering understanding and deep conviction about who Jesus is. Based on the word of God as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments Jesus Christ, the Messiah, was and is very God of very God.

Unfortunately, the average Christian in the church pew today is not sure what to think about the deity of Christ. When challenged by cultists they either cringe or run terrified not knowing what to answer or where to turn for the answers. Every cult that ever sprouted throughout church history has and will assault the character and person of Jesus Christ. Jews stumbled at it, disciples balked at it, Christians have been confused by it, theologians complicated it, but it remains indelibly and irrefutably etched in eternity - the Word was God.

It is not possible to be a Christian, a follower of Christ, and call him a liar. It is not possible to believe the scriptures and deny their unassailable witness that Jesus was God incarnate. It is not possible to call Jesus Lord (Kurios) while questioning whether he is, as Thomas confessed, "My Lord, and my God."

In this lesson we will examine the overwhelming evidence of scripture as to the true identity of the baby born in a manger. We will attempt to lead you down the biblical pathway, guided by God's signposts, led by "the light that lightens every man who comes into the world," and anchored to the eternal Rock of Ages so that when finished you, along with the apostles, can say with a full heart of assurance, "Jesus Christ is Emmanuel, God with us." We will guide you through the scriptures and bring you to that great trilema to decide for yourself whether Jesus Christ is "a liar, a lunatic, or the Lord." You have not known Jesus until you know him in his fullness of divine revelation as the eternal, changeless, Mighty God.

The great preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon, in a sermon on Malachi 3:6 titled "The Contemplation of God," profoundly states the case for deep contemplation of the nature of Jesus Christ.

"Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity. The most excellent study for expanding the soul is the science of Christ and him crucified and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. The proper study of the Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the doings, and the existence of the Great God which he calls his Father... It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can comprehend and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and have our way with the thought, 'Behold I am wise.' But when we come to this master science, finding that our plummet cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought, 'I am but of yesterday and know nothing.'" (Pink, p82)

### **Theology of the Gospel of John**

Though the Gospel of John was written last in the gospel chronology, we begin our study with his gospel witness to who Jesus is. If you will remember, John wrote the gospel late in life at the request of bishops in Asia, and after he and Andrew (who also was at Ephesus) had sought the Lord diligently in fasting and prayer. The purpose was to fill in the gaps concerning Jesus which the other gospel writers had omitted but also to combat the dangerous doctrines of his day that denied the deity of Jesus Christ, such as the Ebonites, Gnostics and later the Marcionites.

John does not deal with the birth of Christ for that had been clearly and precisely communicated by the other three gospels. He instead begins his gospel with the pre-incarnate Christ. John was tenacious about the identity of Christ. He minces no words, beats around no bushes, pulls no punches, but goes straight for the juggler on this one. It is extremely difficult to argue against the deity of Jesus Christ in the face of what John has to say about him. Despite such profoundly clear declarations concerning Jesus there are those who would still fight against God and wrestle with truth. Heresies will always wrestle with scripture to try to distort them by saying, "It doesn't mean that." Such was the case in John's day, and such is the case in ours.

### **Ebonites**

John was disputing with the heretic Cerinthus and the Ebonites who asserted that Jesus Christ did not exist before he came to us in Mary's womb. They maintained that Jesus was just a man, a mere prophet, a spokesman for God. They taught that Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary and that it was at his baptism that God descended on him to declare the Father, but that the Father withdrew before his suffering and death because God himself could not suffer and die. The Ebonites contradicted Paul declaring him an apostate, and as you could have guessed, they used only the Hebrew version of the gospel of Matthew.

### **Gnosticism**

The other heresy that John had to contend with was that of gnosticism which came along in the second century but was most certainly evident in John's day. Gnosticism, from gno="to know," was highly syncretistic combining elements of Greek philosophies and beliefs of other religions into Christianity. One of the names historically associated with gnosticism was Simon Magus, the magician of Acts, who sought to buy the power of the Holy Spirit. Gnosticism attacked the very core of Christianity - Jesus Christ. Among its varied doctrines was the belief that God the Father created other beings called "aeons" which together constitute the "Fullness" or true reality. From this spirit world our present world was born when one of the prideful "aeons" wished to do what the Father had done and created something on her own. They conclude then that this world of matter is evil. Salvation involves freeing oneself from the corruption of matter and its associated evils. This involved revelation of secret knowledge, or gnosis, by which one escaped the corruption of the flesh. Christ therefore could not have been composed of flesh, since flesh is matter and matter is evil. Jesus only appeared to be a man but was really pure spirit. They so badly distorted Jesus as to make him wholly other than the historical Jesus of the gospels.

### **Marcionism**

A third doctrine that appeared shortly after John's death was just as deadly as Ebonitism and Gnosticism. It is called Marcionism. Marcion was a rich roman citizen who arrived in Rome about AD 138, joined the church and made a generous gift to it. He became a teacher and began to disseminate his distorted views of Christianity until he was declared a heretic and cut off from the church in AD 144. He took with him a number of members and started his own church. (Does that sound familiar?) Marcion's doctrines were influenced by gnosticism but took on a whole new character. He saw the world as evil containing suffering and cruelty which he concluded could not have been the work of a good God. He concluded that the God of the old Testament was an evil God commanding blood sacrifices, doing violence, destroying his enemies, etc. There was a second God who was unknown until Christ. This was the God of love and mercy. This God had mercy on the plight of evil men and decided to rescue them from the hand of the evil God called Demiurge. Christ was not part of the human race but was a phantom who appeared as a man. It was this phantom that was crucified to redeem men from the hand of the evil God of the Old Testament. All that this good God asks of men in order to escape the Demiurge is to believe and love him thus they will escape the commandments and legalistic requirements of the evil God of Judaism.

It is in this context that John's gospel is written. Understanding this will help you to grasp the urgency of John's gospel being added to the gospel record.(John's being a theological gospel.) It is a proof of who Jesus really is, not a phantom, not a created aeon, not an angel, not a second benevolent God, but God incarnate- as theologians put it - "Very God of very God." You cannot read the gospel of John and believe otherwise. Jesus Christ was God himself manifest in the flesh as is proved by his character, his works, his own claims, and by the names given to him. If John's gospel were the only recorded evidence of the

deity of Jesus we would have no cause to question this fact. Yet John's gospel is only a part of the record of Christ's deity. In this lesson we will see from the Old Testament, from other gospels, and from the epistles that Jesus is God incarnate! With this volume of evidence of who Jesus is, it is incredible that men continue to strive with God and distort the scriptures over this issue. Cults today, as in John's day, continue to contradict the scriptural record and distort the historical Jesus.

Beginning with John's gospel we have overwhelming evidence of the deity of Jesus - not the least among these, is most specifically, evidence of his pre-existence. The first paragraph of John's gospel sets the stage for all that follows. John minces no words but gets right to the point as bluntly as possible in verses 1 to 18 proclaiming Jesus is God. We will follow John's immutable outline. It is not possible in this short lesson to be exhaustive on every reference to the deity of Jesus. Ours is but to give the evidence that proves beyond any reasonable doubt the deity of Jesus.

John was the beloved disciple of Jesus and perhaps the best loved of all the disciples. In his gospel, as in his epistles, he constantly affirms his eyewitness testimony of Jesus Christ, (I John 1:3) and the affirmation of the truthfulness of his testimony. We would do well to listen.

Beginning with the gospel through the Revelation John gives ample witness to the deity of Jesus - his name, his pre-existence, his works, his glory, and his self declaration prove his deity beyond any shadow of doubt.

### **"Logos" - The Word**

John 1:1-18 stands out as the great "proof text" of Jesus' true identity and deity. In this short passage John uses six specific references to the deity of Christ.

John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word." Without going into depth on the meaning of the Greek word "logos," translated "the Word," it is sufficient to say that one need not be a Greek scholar to decipher who this Word is. It was not John's intent to cloak his identity but to reveal him through one of his hundreds of appellations - in this case, The Word.

Let there be no doubt, the identity of the Word is revealed in Revelation 19:11-13:

"And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse... Faithful and True... 12) Name which no man knew... vesture dipped in blood... his name is called THE WORD OF GOD."

In this same gospel prologue John fingers the identity of this one he calls "Logos" as (v14) "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us..." There is no room for any speculation about the identity of the Logos - It is Jesus!

Listen now to the description of the Logos, Jesus:

"He was in the beginning...he was with God... he was God... all things were made by him... he has life in himself... he lightens, or gives life, to every man who enters the world... he was in the world, which was made by him... he was made flesh and dwelt among us... he had the glory of the Father as the only begotten of the Father... he is the revelation and visual representation of the Father."

Every one of these descriptions can be backed by other New Testament witnesses as well. It is necessary to note here that the foremost antagonists to calling Jesus God have gone through extreme gyrations and verbal gymnastics to twist this text into not saying that Jesus Christ is God with us. The Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ. To do so they must distort the scriptures or eliminate them altogether. Their means of dealing with John 1:1, which is so clear as to be offensive to their ears, they insert an article "a" to make the passage say, "and the Word was a god ." Every Greek scholar, bar none, whether Christian or non-Christian, has examined the passage independently and concluded there is no "a" in the passage nor would it be possible in the Greek. The founder of the Jehovah's Witness, in a court of law, also under oath, admitted knowing no Greek at all. (Martin, p38-39, 75-76)

"Was the Word," now that is a strange statement. It is kind of like a Star Trek episode in which a new entity is discovered that needs a name. We have used Forengi, Klingons, Shapeshifters, and etc. What do we call the next one? So a word is invented or adopted to define this new entity.

Story of Heraclitus and Plato But this was no unfamiliar term to the Jews. In their writings long before a Greek philosopher named Heraclitus used the term Logos around 600 B.C. to designate the divine reason or plan which coordinates a changing universe. This word was well suited to John's purpose in John 1. Heraclitus taught that life was moving onward, like time, always changing. If you put a foot into a stream the stream would pass over it so the next step would not actually be in the same water at all. Life was flowing like that. Always changing, rushing on. (ie) Like the cartoon character B.C. who made water balls - it cannot be done, water flows chaotically, until contained inside something.) But the philosopher asked the question then, "Why then is not life perpetual chaos? What keeps it from flowing away and disappearing?" Heraclitus' answer was that life is not chaos but purposefully changed because of Divine Reason, which he called "the Logos."

Other philosophers built on this concept of "the Logos." The Logos made life make sense. It held all things together. Plato said to a group of philosophers that surrounded him, "It may be that some day there will come forth from God a Word, a Logos, who will reveal all mysteries and make everything plain." It is to this "Unknown God" that the philosophers and religionists of Athens built a statue, which Paul used to preach that Christ is that "Unknown God," the Logos. \*

## **Equal With God**

John 5:18-23 is a classic passage (attested to by each of the other gospel writers as well in which the Jews witnessed the comments of Jesus and concluded that he was making himself equal with God. (Matthew 9:6, Mark 2:16, Luke 5:27, Luke 7:48) Because of this, on several occasions they picked up stones to kill him for blasphemy. There was obviously no doubt on the part of the Jews concerning Jesus' intended meaning. There are four important characteristics that Jesus attributed to himself:

1. Jesus declared himself to be the only begotten Son of God - thus being equal with God.
2. Jesus declared to do the works of the Father with the same self power (i.e. to raise the dead at will) that is affirmed with verse 26, that as the Father has life in himself so does the Son.
3. Jesus declared that he is to be given honor as the Father, that is, to not honor him is to not honor the Father.
4. Jesus declared that all judgement was given to the Son and now the Father judges no man.

Now if you were standing in a crowd hearing Jesus say these things what would you think? He is either a liar, a lunatic, or he is the Lord. We would probably have done as the Jews did. No man ever spoke this way. He either has to be crazy, delusional, or maybe, just maybe - (is it possible?) he is the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us.

## **Light**

John 8:52-59 is another stoning passage proving that the Jews heard and understood him correctly. Jesus has just proclaimed himself the Light of the World, the Judge, the Truth, and the Liberator and Forgiver of men's sins. The Jews challenge him on these statements saying they are not slaves to sin but children of Abraham and that he claimed that those who believe in him will not die. They argued that Abraham and the prophets all died so who does he think he is? Is he greater than Abraham?

Jesus' response is a short and powerful declaration of his true identity. Verse 58 says, "Before Abraham was I AM." The Jews immediately got the message and picked up stones to kill him. Why? Jesus did not say, "I was before Abraham," which would have been bad enough, and true enough. He did not say, "Before Abraham was, I was." No, he said it deliberately giving himself a title, a name above all names, the name of God. When God introduced himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14) He responded with the name by which all Israel would know Him - I AM. Jesus powerfully revealed that he was the great I AM who spoke to Abraham in the burning bush. Who is Jesus? He would have to be a pathological liar, a raving maniac, or (could he be?) might he be, by some slim miraculous chance, God incarnate? (See Theophanies)

## **One With the Father**

John 10:30-33 In this passage the Jews beg Jesus to declare plainly whether he was the Christ. (It is interesting to explore the Old Testament identity of who Christ would be. [Isaiah 9:6] Had they been listening to the witness of the Old Theological prophets they would not have missed him.) So Jesus obliges them and declares, "I and my Father are one." (i.e. One and the same.)

Some have attempted to explain this away as meaning only that the Father and Son are one in purpose, yet the context belies that understanding. Certainly the prophets, many priests, even godly Jews could benignly say they were one in purpose with the Father with impunity. But the Jews immediately take up stones to kill him and declare why they are doing it (verse 33), "Because you, being a man, make yourself God." So the Jews understood perfectly well what he meant by, "I and my Father are one."

## **"Kurios" - Lord**

John 14:-11 This time we find Jesus with his disciples in the upper room celebrating the Passover, the last supper. Thomas and Phillip had heard Jesus declare before that he was God. But this time in a more succinct form, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6) He follows that declaration with the comment, "If you have known me you should have known the Father also; and from hereon you will know him, and have seen him." The disciples still don't get it and Phillip retorts, "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied." Jesus sighs deeply and laments, "Don't you even know me? Even after I have been with you so long? (Pause for effect and let that sink in.) "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. So how can you say, 'Show us the Father.'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say unto you they are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." (John 14:9-11)

I am not sure the disciples believed in him, in fact, the scripture says they didn't. Who could? That declaration is a real stretch for the heart and the imagination - God in flesh and blood? It wouldn't be until after the resurrection that the disciples fully realized the truth of this revelation.

## **Lord and God**

John 20:28 expresses Thomas' own astonishment when the truth of this Passover dedication dawns on him. He has doubted. He swears on his own disbelief and draws up a bogus scenario of what it would take to convince him otherwise. (John 20:24-25) Then suddenly the resurrected, glorified Jesus in whom all the fullness of the Father dwells appears behind closed doors (only God or a ghost can do that) and challenges Thomas' doubting heart. He is no ghost as Jesus plainly demonstrates with his very real nail-pierced

hands, and pierced side. So what is your verdict Thomas? Here it is... "My Lord, and my God." This was not a hastily devised idiomatic expression or hyperbole. It was a declaration of recognition of who Jesus is, Lord (Kurios) and God (Theos). Had he been in error Jesus would have corrected him. He did not, but rather blesses him and all those who though not seeing still believe that he is, indeed, Lord and God.

## **His Glory**

John 17:1-18

Finally, our Lord's high priestly prayer for his disciples reaffirms his eternal existence with the Father when he cries, (verse 5) "And now Father glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." As the prayer continues he reveals the same knowledge of himself that at great personal risk he revealed to the Jews at large, and to his disciples in particular. Here are his assertions to the Father:

v 10 "All I have is yours, and all you have is mine."

v 21 "That they all may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I in you."

v 24 "Father I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

What a profound and emotional appeal. The Son and the Father are One! Though often this concept is un-understandable to our finite minds, it is nonetheless declared to be the way it is.

Only in heaven will the full import of Jesus' divine declaration be fully known when before the throne we know fully even as we are known, and we will fall down before him in awe for who he is.

## **Book of Revelation**

John's revelation of Jesus goes beyond the gospel record and into his epistles and on into the book of Revelation. Let us take a look at the revelation of Jesus' divinity in the book of Revelation. This book is the record of John's vision of Jesus Christ and things to come which he received while a prisoner on the island of Patmos. It is a picture book of divine glimpses into heaven. Catch the vision of Jesus!

Revelation 1:8,11-18 Jesus speaks. His first words, our first glimpse of the glorified Lord, and his summation statements declare his divinity.

v 8 "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending...the Almighty."

v 11 "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last."

v 17 "Fear not, I am the first and the last."

v 18 "I am he that lives and was dead, and have the keys of hell and death."

Isaiah 41:4 declares who has the title, "I am the Lord, the first and last; I am he."

Revelation 22:13 repeats it as "I am the Alpha and Omega." Out of Jesus' own mouth as resurrected, ascended, glorified, and enthroned, "King of Kings, and Lord of Lords" he declares his own identity as that of the Old Testament Jehovah, First and Last.

Revelation 4:11 follows immediately on the heels of Jesus' message to the seven churches. The door of heaven is open and we see a throne and "one sat on the throne." And we read his description:

(v 3-5) "Before the throne is a sea of glass like crystal and around the throne are four creatures full of eyes... and they rest not day and night saying,

(v 8) 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, is, and is to come...' and they gave glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who lives forever and ever. (v 9) And twenty-four elders who also

(v 10) Worship him who lives forever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne saying,"

(v 11) 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honor and power; For you have created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.'"

In chapter 5 a book was in his right hand which no man could open but the Lamb who is identified as "in the midst of the throne," not next to the throne but in the middle of it. The twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb and worshiped him, (v8) and the angels with an innumerable host. (v12-13)

## **Theophanies (or Christophanies)**

It is upon this declaration the theologians have gone back to the Old Testament to search for appearances of the pre-incarnate Jesus. They are scattered throughout the Old Testament. Jesus said, "No man has seen God at anytime, but the son declares or reveals Him. (John 1:15)

This agrees with Jewish theology that no man has seen God and lived. It also agrees with many other New Testament passages. (Hebrews 1:3, I Timothy 3:16) These pre-incarnate appearances of Jesus before his birth are known as "Theophanies" or "Christophanies." They are not angelic appearances but special manifestations of God in human form - a God appearance, a Theophany.

Micah 5:2 "But you Bethlehem Ephrata, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose going forth have been from old, from everlasting."

## **THEOPHANIES (appearances of Christ in O.T.)**

1. In Eden Gen 3:15/ 3:22-24/ Ex 6:3,5/ Jude 14,15/ 2Thes1:7-8

2. To Hagar Gen 16:7-14

3. To Moses Exodus :2,6,14/ 23:20-21 Acts 7:38

4. To Abraham Gen 18:1/ 22:11-13/ 26:2,5,2,,25

5. To Jacob Gen 28:/ 32:24-32/ 48:15-16/ Hos 12:4-5

6. To Joshua Jos 5:13-15 Captain of the host of the Lord

7. To Manoah Jud 14:15-23 Is 9:6

8. To Isaiah Is 6:1-13/ John 12:39-41/ Ez 1:1-28/ Is 63:8-10

9. To Zechariah Zec 1:8-13/ 2:8-11

10. To Shadrach, Meshach, Abedigo Dan 3:24-25

Can you think of any others? Please look up each of these passages. (From Thompson's Chain Reference Bible.)

OK, take a deep breath. Go get a cup of coffee, take a nap, or go for a walk before continuing.

# Chart of Deity Passages

John was not alone in his declarations that Jesus Christ was God incarnate. Both the Old and New Testaments contain so many witnesses to the deity of Christ that it makes it virtually impossible to read the scriptures and miss this important truth. The following is a chart that organizes and tracks the biblical references to the deity of Christ. It is certainly not exhaustive but is ample enough to back any arguments for the deity of Christ. Since many of these passages are repeated in the topical headings we will also include at the end a list of all the relevant passages dealing with the deity of Christ.

## Creator

John 1:3 All things were made by him, without him not anything was made ...  
I Corinthians 8:6 Lord Jesus Christ by whom are all things.  
Ephesians 3:9 God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.  
Colossians 1:16 By him were all things created...by him all things consist.  
Hebrews 1:2 By whom also He made the worlds.  
Hebrews 1:10 You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth.

## God Incarnate

Matthew 1:23 Call his name Immanuel, which means, God with us.  
Acts 20:28 Feed the church of God which he has purchased with his own blood.  
Romans 9:5 Who is over all, God blessed forever.  
Philippians 2:6-8 Being in the form of God.  
Colossians 1:15 Who is the image of God.  
Colossians 2:9 In him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily.  
I Timothy 3:16 God was manifest in the flesh.  
I Timothy 6:15 Blessed and only Potentate, King of kings, and Lord of lords.  
Titus 2:13 Looking for...glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.  
Hebrews 1:8 Unto the Son he says, Your throne O God is forever and ever.  
I John 5:20 This is his Son Jesus Christ, the true God, and eternal life.  
Jude 25 To the only wise God our Savior.

## Eternal

Colossians 1:17 Who is before all things.  
II Timothy 1:9 Our calling...given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.  
I Peter 1:20 Who was foreordained before the foundation of the world.  
I John 1:1 That which was from the beginning.  
I John 2:13 You have known him that is from the beginning.

## Exalted Position

Philippians 2:9-11 Highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name.

### **Preexistence**

Ephesians 1:4 Chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.

Philippians 2:5-8 Made himself of no reputation...Being found in fashion as a man.

Colossians 1:17 He is before all things.

2 Timothy 1:9 Called us...before the world began.

Hebrews 1:2 By whom also He made the worlds.

### **Power to Forgive**

Matthew 9:2-8 Jesus heals sickness and forgives sins.

Mark 2:10 Son has power on earth to forgive sins.

Luke 5:24 Son has power on earth to forgive sins.

Luke 7:49 They asked, Who is this that forgives sins also?

### **Worshipped**

Matthew 2:11 The Magi worshipped him.

Matthew 14:33 The disciples worshipped him after he stilled the sea.

Matthew 28:9, 17 The disciples worshipped him after the resurrection

Luke 24:52 The disciples worshipped him after the resurrection.

John 20:28 Thomas calls him "My Lord and my God."

Hebrews 1:6 "All the angels of God worship him."

Philippians 2:9-11 "Every knee shall bow."

### **Power over nature**

Matthew 28:18 All power is given unto me in heaven and earth

Colossians 1:17 By him all things consist

Ephesians 3:20-21 Exceeding greatness of his power

## **Names of Christ**

1. Alpha and Omega - Rev. 1:8
2. Almighty - Rev. 1:8
3. Blessed and Only Potentate - 1 Tim. 6:15
4. Brightness of His Glory - Hebrews 1:3
5. Emmanuel - Matthew 1:23, Is 9:6
6. Everlasting Father - Is 9:6
7. First and Last - Rev 1:7, Is 41:4
8. God manifest in flesh - 1 Tim. 3:16
9. God our Savior - 1 Tim. 2:3
10. God with us - Matthew 1:23
11. I Am - John 8:58
12. Image of His Person - Hebrews 1:3
13. King of kings - 1 Tim. 6:15, Rev 17:14
14. Lord of lords - Rev. 17:14, 19:16
15. Lord God Almighty - Rev. 15:3, Is 9:6
16. Lord of the Sabbath - Mark 2:28
17. Mighty God - Is. 9:6
18. Only Wise God - Jude 25
19. Only Potentate - 1 Tim 6:15
20. Word of God - John 1:1, Rev 19:13

# CULT TEACHINGS

## FALSE TEACHINGS ON THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF CHRIST

In our day there are no less dangerous doctrines afloat in the stream of so-called Christian cults. Two of those need special mention since they have so affected millions by distorting the scriptures and the truth of the deity of Jesus Christ.

### **Jehovah's Witnesses:**

The Jehovah's Witnesses appear as harmless, perhaps over-zealous, do-gooders to many evangelical Christians. Yet most Christians are unaware of the realities of JW teachings concerning Jesus Christ. Here are just a few as they apply to the deity of Christ:

"Our Lord Jesus Christ is a god..." Studies in the Scriptures. Vol. V. p.55

Teaching: Jesus was a god, not 'the Almighty God, who is Jehovah'.

"Our Redeemer existed as a spirit being before he was made flesh, and dwelt amongst men. At that time as well as subsequently, he was properly known as 'a god' - a mighty one." Ibid. Vol. V, p 84

Teaching: At the beginning Jesus was created by God without the instrumentality of any mother. He was not an incarnation in flesh but was flesh, a human Son of God, a perfect man, no longer a spirit, although having a spiritual heavenly past and background.

"...the Logos [Christ] himself was 'the beginning of the creation of God.'" Ibid. Vol. V, p.86 Teaching: This One is not Jehovah God, but was existing in the form of God... he was a spirit person... he was a mighty one although not Almighty God. He was a god, not Almighty God.

"As chief of the angels and next to the Father, he [Christ] was known as the Archangel (highest angel or messenger), whose name, Michael, signifies, 'Who as God' or 'God's Representative.'" Ibid. Vol V. p. 84

Teaching: Jesus was a prince among other creatures. He bore another name in heaven, that of Michael the archangel. Other names were given to him in the course of time. (see Martin p. 51)

## **Mormons:**

(We need no commentary here!)

"God himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man."

"The Father has a body of flesh and bone as tangible as man's."

"When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body and brought Eve, one of his celestial wives, with him...He is our father and our God and the only God with whom we have to do."

"As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become."

"Remember that God our Heavenly Father was perhaps once a child and mortal like we are, and rose step by step in the scale of progress, in the school of advancement...until He has arrived at the point where He now is." (Martin, p.178)

## **What Should You Know?**

Remember the purpose of this course is to build your knowledge for ministry, not just to get a good grade. Most people are minimalists, learning only what is necessary for a test, but that is not good stewardship of our minds or our resources. We should seek to show ourselves approved UNTO GOD as workmen that never will be ashamed of our ability to rightly divide the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

That being the case, we should seek to thoroughly understand and be able to effectively defend the deity of Jesus as we would in a court of law. So then, what we need to know is how to earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3) once delivered to the saints. Be able to biblically defend the deity of Jesus Christ. If we were using essay questions I would give one of the many deity passages and ask you to argue the deity of Christ based on that passage. Another way to test your knowledge would be to pose a challenge to the deity of Christ based on a Jehovah's Witness argument and ask you to defend the faith. Another test would be to defend the deity of Christ from the Old Testament, or the gospels only, or from the Pauline epistles.

The real test of whether you have profited by this lesson is to ask yourself whether you could answer any of the previous challenges.

**Sources and Recommended Reading:** (It is not necessary to buy these books.)

Authur W. Pink, Gleanings In The Godhead, Moody Press, Chicago, 1975

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# Chapter 3 - The Genealogy of Jesus

## Importance of Genealogies

Two of the most boring parts of the Bible are the table of nations and genealogies. Sometimes we modern readers of the Bible wonder why God even bothered to clutter the Scriptures with genealogical list that are of limited value for us today. As always, there is a reason.

The Messiah was promised through prophecy centuries before the birth of Christ . It was promised that he would be of the lineage of David. The first and immediate test of anyone claiming to be Israel's Messiah was to check the public genealogical tables. It was not possible for someone to claim to be Messiah without the pedigree to prove it. Both Matthew (Mt 1:1-18 ) and Luke (Lk 3:23-38) include the genealogy of Jesus to prove beyond any doubt that he had the genetic background required of the Messiah, that is, he would come from the royal line of David. It was for this reason that Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem for the Roman census. They were both of the house and lineage of David.

Had Jesus not met this first criteria for Messiahship his enemies would have readily been able to publicly condemn him as a pretender, but they could not. The genealogies were kept meticulously by the priest for the purpose of proving who was qualified (or not) for the priesthood, and to check the pedigree of their intended wives. Those genealogies were public material. Josephus states that he could trace his own ancestry to the first of 24 courses of priests, and adds that he "found it in the public tables." In Jesus day the list of priests for 2000 years back could be traced!

These genealogies were important to every family. Children grew up memorizing their genealogy. Jews were very proud of their heritage. Some genealogical records were lost during the Babylonian captivity. In 70 AD when Jerusalem was destroyed the genealogical records were almost entirely destroyed.

The genealogy of Jesus, being a concurrent document of his day, could have been refuted by his enemies but was not because it was public record. The Holy Spirit inspired both Matthew and Luke to record the genealogy of Jesus for all ages to know the authenticity of Jesus the Messiah.

## Genealogy of Joseph and Mary

Mary and Joseph were of the same lineage - the line of David, though through different lines. Matthew's genealogy is of Joseph's legal line as a descendant of David (Mt.1:17) Matthew similarly tells the story from Joseph's viewpoint while Luke tells the same story from Mary's view. Luke gives the genealogy of Mary. ( Luke 3:23-28) It would appear that Matthew gained his information from Joseph, probably through James, the Lord's brother, while Luke drew his information from Mary. (Douglas, p. 660)

## **Two Different Genealogies**

Matthew and Luke approach the genealogy from different viewpoints. Matthew was set on proving the kingly right of Jesus, so his genealogy followed the male line of Joseph, through the father.

Luke chose to record Mary's genealogy. This was to prove that the blood which flowed from Mary to Jesus was royal. Mary had to be of the same royal line as Joseph according to the law in Numbers 36:8.

## **Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus**

Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph the supposed father of Jesus. Matthew used a common genealogical custom of omitting some ancestors since the purpose of this genealogy was not chronology or dating, but establishing the direct line of ancestors back to David. He also uses a common memory tool of dividing the genealogy into three sets of 14 generations - Abraham to David (14), David to Babylonian Captivity (14), the Captivity to Christ (14). This is interesting because it provides us with a history of Israel divided into three segments. He counts 42 generations altogether to David.

## **Four Women**

Another interesting anomaly of Matthew's genealogical list is that he mentions four women. Normally women are not mentioned in a genealogy. Each of these is a Gentile (a non-Jew). Three of the four had a sinful past. They are: Tamar, Rahab the Harlot, Ruth, Bathsheba. What wondrous grace that God should so emphatically prove his undying love and forgiveness. Those transgressions were forgiven and their sins pardoned - just as though they never happened. Thus these women could share in Messiah's lineage as Gentiles and as sinners testifying to the fact that Jesus did indeed come to seek and save that which was lost. And, as his name signified, "He shall be called Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." (Mt 1:21)

Let us pause here to underline this truth. Many people don't get "the begats," so they ignore them altogether, but God never intended them to be overlooked. There is a message between the lines. God's forgiveness is total and his love covers a multitude of sins. It is important for us to pass along this truth to weary sojourners in faith who, like these women, have failed. God's grace is sufficient for all our sins. There is no sin he cannot forgive. His forgiveness is total and irrevocable.

## LESSONS IN FORGIVENESS

Here are two important lessons to pass on to others in your teaching.

### **1. What God Has Done With Our Sins**

Most Christians struggle with the guilt of sins past. They are confessed and forgiven but often there is a guilt or an accusing finger that leaves them restless and uncomfortable. One of the best things we can do for any believer, new or old is share with them from the Scriptures what God has done with our sins. It helps us visualize what God says is true. Here is what God says about your sins.

1. They were paid in full – Romans 5:11 / Isaiah 53:6
2. They were forgiven/pardoned – 1 John 1:9
3. They were laid on him – Isaiah 53:6
4. They were washed whiter than snow – Isaiah 1:18
5. They were covered – Psalm 32:1
6. They were cleansed by blood of Jesus – Hebrews 9:22/ 10:4
7. They were blotted out – Isaiah 44:22
8. They were removed as far as east from west – Psalm 103:12
9. They were cast in depths of sea – Micah 7:19
10. They were forever forgotten – Jeremiah 31:34

I keep this little tool in the back page of my Bible to help people at the altar or with whom I am counseling find freedom from sins that are past.

The hymn "It Is Well With My Soul" expresses so well what the women in Jesus genealogy must have felt when God told them they would be in Messiah's line.

*My sin, Oh, the bliss of this glorious thought,  
My sin not in part but the whole,  
Has been nailed to the cross,  
And I bear it not more.  
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, Oh my soul!*

### **2. Justified Freely By His Grace**

Most of us hear and parrot the word "justified" but few really understand it. Here is a way to remember and illustrate God's justifying work in our hearts and lives. God does not excuse our wrongs. He doesn't just wink at it, or pass it over. He makes up for it. He does something about sin and sinfulness. He must. It is His law that must be satisfied.

### **Let Me Illustrate:**

Notice the sentences on page. Each of them are of differing totals in letters and spaces. That is because there are no perfect sentences so perfectly balanced that they all come to the exact same place at the end of the line. Some leave one space, others five or six spaces, but they don't naturally come out perfect.

This illustrates our sins. We don't all sin alike, but we know there are none perfect, no, not even one. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." It is this "coming short" that stumped publishers when the printing press first came out. Paragraphs always looked sloppy and unbalanced because they ended abruptly. The right side of the page was always jagged. So they invented "JUSTIFICATION OF THE LINES."

Look at your Bible, or just about any published book, and you will see that the right side of the page is perfect. All the letters and words of every sentence come to the exact same measure to the end of the line. That is justification. The printers used to manually put spacers between the words to make the sentence come out just right. That is what God does with us. He justifies us. He makes up that which is lacking. He doesn't just overlook our sins and shortcomings but he makes up what is lacking. Jesus did that for us. He satisfied the justice of God by living the perfect sinless life. Now God adds what he did for us to what we are lacking. That is the meaning of justification.

## **Luke's Genealogy of Jesus**

Luke's genealogy of Jesus is different than Matthews in several ways. Luke's genealogy is much longer. He seems to be recording every father and son while Matthew skipped a few which was customary.

1. First he follows Mary's lineage, not Joseph's. Perhaps he was aware of Matthew's gospel when he wrote it. But we also know that Luke researched his gospel carefully and had intimate information about the family of Mary. Perhaps he did a personal interview with Mary herself. We don't know.

2. Second he traces the line not just to David or even Abraham, but all the way back to Adam.

3. Third he traces Mary's ancestry back to David through Nathan's line, since Solomon's line failed to produce offspring in Jehoiachin, while Matthew traces Joseph's through Neri.

4. Finally the two genealogies are backward to each other. Luke begins at the character being traced and goes backward in time, while Matthew begins with Abraham and moves forward. One says "who was the father of...", and the other "who was the son of..." That is not a problem except that it makes it more difficult for us to match the lists. (see list

below) The names between verses 23 and 27 are not in the Old Testament because they lived between the close of the Old Testament and Jesus' birth.

The two genealogies merge. The lines of Solomon and Nathan (his brother) unite in Zerubbabel by the marriage of Shealtiel (Salathiel) to the daughter of Neri of Nathan's line. Thus Jacob and Heli were brothers. Jacob's daughter was Mary and Heli's son was Joseph. They were first cousins.

## **The Genealogical Problems**

### **Problems With The Genealogies**

Very tough questions arise in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke. They deserve a hearing and a reasoned defense by thoughtful Christians. See if you can give a reason of the hope that is in you.

1. Discrepancies: There are too many discrepancies between the genealogy of Matthew and Luke to overlook. The genealogies contradict and do not match. Matthew lists 26 people from Abraham to Jesus, Luke lists 41. Only eighteen names correspond out of the fifty-five generations

2. Why Joseph's Line? If Jesus was not conceived by Joseph why track his ancestry through David? His ancestry is only trackable through God the Father.

3. Who is Joseph's Father? How can Joseph be the "son of Jacob" and the "son of Heli?"

4. The Curse of Jeconiah: How can Jesus be the Messiah when both genealogies track through the cursed King Jeconiah (Jeremiah, chapter 22:30)?

5. Not Solomon's Line: Luke tracks the genealogy of Jesus through David's son Nathan instead of Solomon, when the Scriptures prophecy that the Messiah would be of Solomon's line. (Ezekiel 34:23, 37:21-28; Isaiah 11:1-9; Jeremiah 23:5, 30:7-10, 33:14-16; and Hosea 3:4-5).

## **Answers To The Problems**

### **1. Discrepancies Between the Lists:**

There are several answers to the differences between the two lists. (see the addendum)

First, they are of two different genealogical lists. Luke is following Mary's line, and Matthew follows Joseph's. Luke follows physical descent, while Matthew follows legal lineage of heirship. So we should not be surprised that the lists are not alike. They are not meant to be. Remember Luke is writing at least 10 years after Matthew. Luke is using Matthew's account as one of his sources for his list. Luke also has Mary as an eyewitness and is recording directly from her own commentary.

Second, the number of generations are different. Luke lists 41 progenitors in Mary's line from David to Jesus, Matthew lists only 26. Only 18 names out of 55 match. So why shouldn't they be different? Two sides of a family tree are not identical nor symmetrical. Generations and ancestors do not live and die at the same speed. Some live longer than others.

Third, it was customary, especially in Jewish genealogies, to omit or skip generations of unimportant names. Matthew does this, as do genealogies in the Old Testament. (for examples compare (compare Ezra 7:3 with 1 Chronicles 6:7-10 and 1 Chronicles 22:1, 11 to 24:27; and 2 Kings 23:34 to 24:6) It is not an error. It is a way of simplifying and using memory aids. Remember too, Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience. Luke is writing to Gentiles. The styles and traditions are different.

### **2. Why Joseph's Line?**

The question arises then of why Matthew follows Joseph's line at all since Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus. Joseph has no blood or genetic tie to Jesus Christ since he is not the father. So why trace his lineage? The first reason is that in Matthew's Hebrew world genealogies were traced through the father's side only. That was customary. A second answer would be that Joseph was the representative of Jesus, as an adoptive father. He is legally the heir to Joseph's line and Mary secures his right of inheritance.

According to Numbers 36:6-12, an only daughter had to marry within her own family so as to secure the right of inheritance. (\*Advent/ Encyclopedia/Genealogy of Christ)

### **3. Who Was Joseph's Father?**

Between the two lists one must note right off that as the list begins (or ends) the fathers listed for Joseph are not the same. Luke says that Heli was Joseph's father, while Matthew stated he was the son of Jacob. Who is right? This gets a little complicated so hang on.

View 1: The first view holds that Heli was indeed the father of Mary, not Joseph. The exclusion of Joseph by the phrase '(as it was supposed, of Joseph) "makes Christ, by means of the Blessed Virgin, directly a son of Heli. This view is supported by a tradition which names the father of the Blessed Virgin "Joachim", a variant form of Eliacim or its

abbreviation Eli, a variant of Heli, which latter is the form found in the Third Evangelist's genealogy." (\* NewAdvent Encyclopedia/Genealogy of Christ)

This view was the view of the early church fathers as well as a chief opponent of the Gospel, Celsus the Greek Philosopher. It is difficult to argue against when the opponents of Christianity confirm that Mary was of the house and lineage of David. (\* In The Word Ministries)

View 2: Another view, however, insists that both lists are legal genealogies of Joseph (not Mary) but through lineage that converges through levirate marriages thus giving the line through both Solomon and Nathan. This view purports that both Jacob and Heli were legitimate heirs in the lineage stated by each of the evangelists. This view alleges that Heli died childless. According to Jewish law his half-brother, Jacob, married Heli's widow and by her had Joseph. This is known as a "levirate marriage." This meant that physically Jacob (Joseph's father) was son of David through Solomon's line, but Heli was descended from David through Nathan's line. Therefore Joseph was both.

"Jacob and Heli were, therefore, uterine brothers. Heli married, but died without offspring; his widow, therefore, became the levirate wife of Jacob, and gave birth to Joseph, who was the carnal son of Jacob, but the legal son of Heli, thus combining in his person two lineages of David's descendents." (\* NewAdvent Encyclopedia)

We may never know for certain and the argument continues even among evangelicals. What is certain is that there is no contradiction in the genealogies.

"The Jerusalem Talmud shows that Joseph was the son-in-law of Heli. Joseph's father was Jacob. It was customary to refer to a son-in-law as a son in the first century. So Luke's statement was culturally correct." (\* Life of Christ)

#### **4. The Curse of Jeconiah:**

One of the characters in direct lineage of David that appears in Matthew's genealogy is cursed by God. It appears in Jeremiah 36:1-32. Jeconiah who was also known as Coniah, was the son of Jehoiakim, a king of Judah. Coniah was the last king of Judah in the direct line of King David. He angered God by cutting and burning the scroll that Jeremiah the prophet wrote. (See List of Kings)

God cursed Jehoiakim promising that none of his children would sit on the throne of David (Jeremiah 22:24-30 & Jeremiah 36:29-31). And although Jehoiakim had children, scripture shows that none of them ever reigned as King David had. His son ruled just 100 days before being removed. His descendant, Zerubbabel, who led the first captives back to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple, did not rule as king.

Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, was one of Jehoiakim's descendants (through Jeconiah). Neither Joseph, nor his offspring could claim David's throne because of that curse. Many questions are raised in the issue of Jeconiah's curse, one being how can anyone come from

the direct line of David and Solomon if that line is roadblocked by this curse? The answer apparently is that NO ONE can become the king of Israel through Jeconiah's line, thus no direct descendant of Solomon can sit on the throne. In fact,

Solomon sinned before Jeconiah by pursuing foreign wives. Had Joseph been the physical father of Jesus he would have been disqualified and thus Jesus disqualified to sit on David's throne. Yet God legitimized Jesus' claim to the throne through Mary's lineage, and through her marriage to Joseph whereby she is granted legal rights of inheritance (not the throne).

Note: It must be noted that on this point many opponents to the Gospel have been led astray blaspheming Jesus Christ as a usurper to the throne. Among these are Muslims and those of the Bahai Faith. And so the prophecy of John in Revelation finds its fulfillment:

Revelation 12:13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

### **5. The Nathan Problem:**

Next we come to the problem of Mary's claim to the throne of David through Nathan, not Solomon. The aforementioned problem of the Jeconiah curse should itself pave the way for an understanding of why God chose to circumvent Solomon's line.

"Since Matthew and Luke clearly record much common material, it is certain that neither one could unknowingly incorporate such a flagrant apparent mistake as the wrong genealogy in his record. As it is, however, the two genealogies show that both parents were descendants of David--Joseph through Solomon (Matthew 1:7-15), thus inheriting the legal right to the throne of David, and Mary through Nathan (Luke 3:23-31), her line thus carrying the seed of David, since Solomon's line had been refused the throne because of Jeconiah's sin" [Dr. Henry M. Morris, *The Defender's Study Bible*, note for Luke 3:23 (Iowa Falls, Iowa: World Publishing, Inc., 1995).].

And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, 10 And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. 11 Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. (I Kings 11:9)

# Chapter 4 - Angelic Ministries

## How to Study Angels

The story of Jesus' life begins with the appearance of angels. Whenever I am doing a study or a sermon I make it my business to investigate the matters thoroughly. If I come across a passage that refers to heaven, then I want to know everything the Word of God says about heaven. If I happen across verses about the devil, I want to study everything the Bible has to say about the devil. So when I encounter references to angels in the birth narratives of Jesus, I want to know everything the Bible teaches about angels.

### 1. Examine the Evidence

The first thing I do is to look carefully at the passage or passages so I don't miss something. In the case of Jesus' birth I find that there is not just one reference to angels but many. One way to carefully rake over the Scriptures to turn up evidence is to use a Concordance. A concordance is a huge book that contains all the words of the Bible organized in to lists of where they occurred. There are really only two really good concordances to use: Strong's Concordance or Young's Analytical Concordance.

#### Strong's Concordance

Strong devised a clever way to study the Bible words for those who don't know the original languages of the Bible, Greek and Hebrew. He gave every single word a corresponding number. Every Hebrew word has a number, and every Greek word has a number. Then he organized his lists, not according to the English translation, but according to the original Hebrew or Greek word used. It is a wonderful system that is used even today in computerized versions of Bible search programs.

#### Young's Concordance

Young took a different approach than Strong. Instead of a numbering system. He used an analytical approach. So in his concordance you will find words already organized in a helpful analytical way. I have always enjoy manual searches using Young's Concordance rather than Strong's.

#### The Online Bible and Other Hebrew/Greek Electronic Apps

Today there are many electronic Bible word search programs on the market. Some of them are quite expensive costing hundreds of dollars. One of the best and least expensive is the Online Bible. It was a program written by many godly men who dedicated themselves to distributing this tool of Scripture freely. The code is open and the program itself may be copied and shared freely. I have used it for many years now. Over the years it

has grown to be a huge program that will not easily fit onto floppy disks any more so it is distributed on CD. It contains not only the Bible in many translations but also a huge array of Classic literature that is in public domain. To buy it on CD costs about \$35.00.

You use the Online Bible just as you would a concordance but it is much faster and can do things a concordance cannot. To search for the word "angel" you simply type that word into the window and press enter. Voila! It immediately finds the hundreds of passages that use that word and display it on your screen. In this case I did a search of "angels" and "angel" and limited that search to the New Testament. Here is the result that pertains to our study. If you want to see the results of the whole bible search click this link.

### **Birth Passages About Angels**

1. Matthew 1:20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.
2. Matthew 1:24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife:
3. Matthew 2:13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.
4. Matthew 2:19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,
5. Matthew 28:2 And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.
6. Matthew 28:5 And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.
7. Luke 1:11 And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.
8. Luke 1:13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.
9. Luke 1:18 And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

10. Luke 1:19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.
11. Luke 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,
12. Luke 1:28 And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.
13. Luke 1:30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.
14. Luke 1:34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?
15. Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.
16. Luke 1:38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.
17. Luke 2:9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
18. Luke 2:10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
19. Luke 2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
20. Luke 2:21 And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

## **2. Organize the Information:**

Having examined the Biblical evidence and studied the passages, we then turn to organizing that information. Some of the references are just repeat statements, like "*the angel said.*" In this case I find six distinct angelic visitations.

1. To Joseph - Matthew 1:20, 24
2. To Joseph in Bethlehem - Matthew 2:13
3. To Joseph in Egypt - Matthew 2:19-20
4. To Zacharias - Luke 1:11
5. To Mary - Luke 1:26-38
6. To Shepherds - Luke 2:9-15

## **2. Ask Key Questions:**

Having done that I then turn to organizing that information. To learn as much a possible about angels I widened my search to the whole New Testament, then the whole Old Testament. Having done that I print it out and begin asking questions.

I ask myself questions. Every good reporter knows the six basic investigative questions to ask:

Who, What, Where, When, How, and Why?

The following lesson is the result of this kind of investigative study of a Biblical topic. I hope you enjoy and learn much from it.

### **Here is an interesting exercise:**

Search the Bible to find out if angels ever sing. Share your discoveries in the class discussion.

# Angels in The Bible

Angels have been around a long time. The first are mentioned in Genesis and the last in Revelation. The Bible does not attempt to defend or explain the existence of these heavenly messengers. It just pronounces their existence and shows us the other side of God's creation – the side we do not see now.

Modern liberal theology, which has gradually invaded our churches and pulpits, has long rejected angels along with anything not seen with the eyes and held in the hand. That is not new. The Sadducees of Jesus' day were the liberal theologians of that era. They too rejected the existence of angels claiming that they were simply symbolical illustrations of God's actions and work in the world. On the other extreme the rabbinical teachings about angels became mystical and even silly at times, a mere speculative theology. And so history repeats itself. There are those today who have become enamored with the study of angelic beings (good and evil) so as to taint their view of reality so that they live in a fanciful world filled with fictitious and superstitious imaginations of what cannot be seen. God has not called us to give undue attention to his mysterious beings but to understand that they are his servants "sent forth to minister to them that are heirs of salvation." (Hebrews 1:14)

Much can be said about angels as we learn bits and pieces about them from the scriptures but it is not our intent to dedicate this chapter to the study of angels. Yet it is important for us to highlight here the existence and ministry of angels since so many in our day are agnostic when it comes to the miraculous, yet invisible work of God in and around us every day. The Bible makes it abundantly clear that there are angels. Angels are not relegated to Bible times. Angels are and continue to be God's special agents on behalf of the heirs of salvation.

## Angels in the Old Testament

Angels do not just happen onto the scene in the story of the birth of Christ. They are part of the whole of scripture from Genesis to Revelation. From the Old Testament we mention a few of the angelic appearances:

- Present at creation (Job 38:7)
- Present at the Fall of Adam (Gen. 3:24)
- Angels appear to Abraham to announce promise of a son (Gen. 18:2)
- Angels frequently appear in the story of Jacob (Gen. 28-32)
- An angel stood in Balaam's donkey's way (Numbers 22:20-35)
- An angel met Joshua at Jericho (Josh. 5:13-15)
- An angel met Gideon (Judges 6:12)
- An angel announced Samson's birth to Manoah and his wife (Judg, 13:3-5)
- Angels were associated with Elijah's ministry (I Kings 9:5-7)
- Angels guarded Shadrach, Meshach, and Abedigo (Dan. 3:25-28)
- Angels guarded Daniel in the lion's den (Dan. 8:16)

## **Angels in the New Testament**

The New Testament hardly gets started without angels showing up on the scene. In the story of Jesus' birth we have numerous angelic appearances.

- The angel Gabriel announces John the Baptist's birth to Zechariah (Luke 1:11)
- The angel Gabriel announces Jesus' birth to Mary (Luke 1:26)
- The angel appeared to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:20-23)
- Angels appeared to the shepherds announcing Jesus' birth (Luke 2:8)
- An angel appeared to Joseph to warn him to flee Herod's plan (Mt 2:13)
- An angel appeared to Joseph in Egypt telling of Herod's death (Mt 2:19)

It is not surprising to us that angels should accompany he who left heaven's glories to be born in a stable. It is the greatest event in human history. Angels seem to accompany all great earthly events and this is certainly no exception. But how often we read the Scriptures. Most of us grew up believing that the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest." But in reality the Bible says they SAID "Glory to God in the highest." (Luke 2:13-14)

## **Continuing Ministry of Angels**

Angels accompanied the life of Jesus as we see in the gospels. They ministered to him when he finished his forty day fast in the wilderness. They were spoken of by him during his ministry. In the garden of Gethsemane they strengthened him. In his resurrection they rolled away the stone and announced the event to the grieving women. Angels appeared to the apostles as they stared up to heaven after Christ's ascension.

Angels continued to minister to the church during the lives of the apostles right up to and through the book of Revelation.

- Peter and John were released from prison by an angel (Acts 5:19)
- Philip was told to go to Gaza to meet the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26)
- Cornelius was visited by an angel while he prayed (Acts 10:3)
- Peter was let out of prison by an angel (Acts 12:7)
- Paul was visited at night by an angel (Acts 27:23)

There is no reason to believe that angelic visitation ceased with the closing of the New Testament. The purpose of angelic visits was not usually to give words to write in scripture (John being the exception. Revelation 1:1) but to minister to the lives of the men and women of God. There also is no evidence that believers are to expect regular house calls by angels either. Hebrews 13:2 indicates that many of us may entertain angels without even knowing it. Do we believe the scriptures or not?

## **What Do Angels Do?**

We will not delve into what angels do in heaven since that is not the scope of this study. What they do on earth is important to this lesson. Jesus spoke of the ministry of angels and the apostles refer to their ministries experientially. Let us look at the ministry of angels as revealed in the Scriptures.

### **1. Angels worship God (Hebrews 1:6, Revelation 19:10)**

Hebrews 1:6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

### **2. Angels witness events on earth (Hebrews 12:22, I Cor. 4:9, I Tim. 5:21)**

Hebrews 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

1 Corinthians 4:9 For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

1 Timothy 5:21 I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

### **3. Angels are assigned churches (I Cor. 11:10, Rev. 2-3)**

1 Corinthians 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

Revelation 2:1 Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

#### **4. Angels bring messages from God (Acts 10:3&7, Acts 27:23-24)**

Acts 27:23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

Acts 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

#### **5. Angels direct evangelists to sinners ready to receive Christ (Acts 8:26, 10:3)**

Acts 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

Acts 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

#### **6. Angels appear in dreams and visions (Matthew 1:20-24, Acts 27:23)**

Matthew 1:20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

Acts 27:23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

#### **7. Angels reveal God's will (Acts 5:19-20)**

Acts 5:19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,

#### **8. Angels bring answers to prayer (Dan. 10:12-13, Acts 10:3)**

Daniel 10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. 13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Acts 10:3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

### **9. Angels carry us to heaven (Luke 16:22)**

Luke 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

### **10. Angels are assigned to children (Matthew 18:10)**

Matthew 18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

### **11. Angels rejoice over each sinner who repents (Luke 15:10)**

Luke 15:10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

### **12. Angels appear as men, disguised, unawares (Judges 6:12, Josh. 5:13-15, Hebrews 13:2)**

Judges 6:12 And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.

Joshua 5:13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? 14 And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of the LORD am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? 15 And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

Hebrews 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

### **13. Angels strike men down in judgement (2 Samuel 24:16, 1 Chronicles 21:12, Isaiah 37:36, Acts 12:23)**

2 Samuel 24:16 And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite.

1 Chronicles 21:12 Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. 15 And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld, and he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. 16 And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. 18 Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. 30 But David could not go before it to enquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.

Isaiah 37:36 Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.

Acts 12:23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

#### **14. Angels minister to all believers (Hebrews 1:14)**

Hebrews 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

#### **15. Angels encourage/strengthen those in trouble (Matthew 4:11, Luke 22:43)**

Matthew 4:11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

Luke 22:43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

#### **16. Angels rescue/help us in times of trouble (Acts 12:11)**

Daniel 3:28 Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

Daniel 6:22 My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.

Acts 12:11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

### **17. Angels protect saints (Psalm 34:7, 91:11)**

Psalms 34:7 The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

Psalms 91:11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

### **18. Angels guide and prosper saints (Genesis 24:7, Genesis 24:40)**

Genesis 24:7 The LORD God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence. Genesis 24:40 And he said unto me, The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house:

### **19. Angels defend us from Satans accusations (Zechariah 3:5, Jude 1:6)**

Zechariah 3:5 And I said, Let them set a fair mitre upon his head. So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD stood by.

### **20. Angels harvest souls in the end (Matthew 13:39, Revelation 14:15)**

Matthew 13:39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.

Revelation 14:15 And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.

### **21. Angels fight battles in heavenly realms (Daniel Dan. 10:12-13, Revelation 12:7-9)**

Daniel 10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. 13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Revelation 12:7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8 And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

**22. Angels execute end time judgements** (Matthew 13:41-42, Acts 12:23)

Matthew 13:41 The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity;

Acts 12:23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

**23. Angels will escort Christ back to earth** (Matthew 25:31, Luke 9:26)

Matthew 25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory:

Luke 9:26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.

## What Are Angels Like?

1. Angels are strong (Psalm 103:20, 2 Peter 2:11, Revelation 5:2)
2. Angels are holy (Luke 9:26, Rev 14:10)
3. Angels are beautiful (Zech 5:9)
4. Angels appearance are awesome (Judges 13:6)
5. Angels can fly (Zech 5:9, Revelation 8:13)
6. Angels commute between heaven and earth constantly (Genesis 28:12)
7. Angels are sent to lead sinners to Gospel (Acts 10:1-4)
8. Angels have ranks and authorities (1 Peter 3:22)
9. Angels blow trumpets (Rev. 8:2ff)
10. Angels have responsibilities/assignments (Rev 2&3)
11. Angels change forms [human, female, male] (Gen. 18:2)
12. Angels appear as men (Judges 6:12, Josh. 5:13-15)
13. .Angels are shiny like fire (Psalm 104:4)
14. .Angels stand before God (Zechariah 6:5, Revelation 7:11)
15. Angels are limited in knowledge (I Peter 1:12, Mat. 24:36)
16. Angels are not male and female (Matthew 22:30 )
17. Angels don't die (Luke 20:36)
18. Angels are created beings (Job 4:4-7, Romans 8:38-39, Colossians 1:16, Revelation 4:11)

## **Angels Names and Titles**

### **Michael: (Daniel 10:13/ Jude 1:9/ Revelation 12:7)**

Daniel 10:13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Jude 1:9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. Revelation 12:7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

### **Gabriel: (Daniel 9:21, Luke 1:19, Luke 1:26)**

Daniel 9:21 Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation.

Luke 1:19 And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. Luke 1:26 And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

### **Angel of the Lord: (Judges 6:22)**

Judges 6:22 And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face.

Judges 13:18 And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?

Judges 13:22 And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God.

### **Angel of His Presence: (Isaiah 63:9)**

Isaiah 63:9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.

### **Captain of the Lord's Host: (Joshua 5:15)**

Joshua 5:15 And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so.

**Principalities and Powers: (Romans 8:38, Eph. 3:10, Eph 6:10, Col 1:16, Col 2:15)**

Romans 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Ephesians 3:10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

Ephesians 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Colossians 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:

Colossians 2:15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

**Lucifer: (Isaiah 14:12)**

Isaiah 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

**Apollyon: (Revelation 9:11)**

Revelation 9:11 And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

## Questions About Angels

### Is Jesus An Angel? (Hebrews 1:4-6, 2:16)

No. He is not nor ever was an angel. He is "so much better than angels," meaning so far beyond their realm as to be of no comparison.

Hebrews 1:4 *Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 5 For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? 6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*

Hebrews 2:16 *For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.*

### Do We Have Guardian Angels? (Matthew 18:10)

Yes. We all have guardian angels. Notice that is plural. Psalm 34:7 says that the angel of the Lord encamps around about them that fear Him and delivers them. Matthew 18:10 *Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

### Do Angels Know Everything? (Mat. 24:36, I Peter 1:12)

No. They are created beings and have limited knowledge. They know only what God has revealed to them.

Matthew 24:36 *But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*

1 Peter 1:12 *Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*

### Do Angels Have Wings? (Zech 5:9)

Not necessarily. Yet there are many passages that indicate that angels do fly. Only Zechariah 5:9, which was a vision, actually indicated any wings. For certain cherubims have wings.

Zechariah 5:9 *Then lifted I up mine eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came out two women, and the wind was in their wings; for they had wings like the wings of a stork: and*

they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heaven. [Cherubims have wings Ezekiel 1:6-25] Ezekiel 1:6 And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings.

**How Many Angels Are There? (Psalms 68:17, Matthew 26:53, Hebrews 12:22, Rev. 5:11)**

### **More than can be counted**

Psalms 68:17 The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

Matthew 26:53 Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

Hebrews 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

Revelation 5:11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

### **Warnings About Evil Angels**

It is not the scope of our study to investigate evil, or fallen angels here. But it is important to clarify their existence and give a few warnings.

**There Are Bad Angels (Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:14-15, Mat. 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4, 2 Peter 2:11, Jude 1:6, Rev. 9:14, Rev. 12:4)**

Isaiah 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! 13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. 15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Ezekiel 28:14 Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. 15 Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.

Jude 6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

### **Don't Worship Angels (Colosians 2:18, Rev. 2:18, 19:10, 22:9)**

Colossians 2:18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

### **Bad Angels Disguise as Angels of Light (2 Corinthians 11:14)**

2 Corinthians 11:14 And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

### **Don't Believe Every Angel (1 John 4:1)**

1 John 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

### **Don't Believe If They Contradict the Gospel (Galatians 1:8)**

Galatians 1:8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

## **Mysteries Surrounding Angelic Beings**

### **Cherubim:**

Genesis 3:24 So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Psalms 80:1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

Ezekiel 10:1-9 Then I looked, and, behold, in the firmament that was above the head of the cherubims there appeared over them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne. 2 And he spake unto the man clothed with linen, and said, Go in between the wheels, even under the cherub, and fill thine hand with coals of fire from between the cherubims, and scatter them over the city. And he went in in my sight. 3 Now the cherubims stood on the right side of the house, when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court. 5 And the sound of the cherubims' wings was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of the Almighty God when he speaketh. 6 And it came to pass, that when he had commanded the man clothed with linen, saying, Take fire from between the wheels, from between the cherubims; then he went in, and stood beside

the wheels. 7 And one cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubims unto the fire that was between the cherubims, and took thereof, and put it into the hands of him that was clothed with linen: who took it, and went out. 8 And there appeared in the cherubims the form of a man's hand under their wings. 9 And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub: and the appearance of the wheels was as the colour of a beryl stone.

Ezekiel 10:15-19 And the cherubims were lifted up. This is the living creature that I saw by the river of Chebar. 16 And when the cherubims went, the wheels went by them: and when the cherubims lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the same wheels also turned not from beside them. 18 Then the glory of the LORD departed from off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims. 19 And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight: when they went out, the wheels also were beside them, and every one stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD'S house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above.

Isaiah 37:16 O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth.

### **Seraphims:**

Isaiah 6:2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

Isaiah 6:6 Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:

### **The Beasts Before the Throne:**

Revelation 4:6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

Revelation 4:8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

Revelation 4:9 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

Revelation 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Revelation 5:8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

Revelation 5:11 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands;

Revelation 5:14 And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

Revelation 6:1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

Revelation 6:6 And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

Revelation 6:8 And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Revelation 7:11 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God,

Revelation 14:3 And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

Revelation 15:7 And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

Revelation 18:13 And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.

Revelation 19:4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

## **We Shall Judge Angels:**

1 Corinthians 6:3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?

## **Tongues of Angels:**

1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

## **The Facts of Scriptures**

A good student of the word will take each and every reference to angels and list them as we have done here and then from those encounters deduce the ministry of angels forming them into categories. The biblical scholar will find great satisfaction in not depending on the study of others to guide him but will "rightly divide the word of truth" for himself.

It should be abundantly clear through this short survey of angelic ministries in the scriptures that angels were, are and ever shall be God's servants who are sent by him on special assignments to believers. God has revealed to us the ministry of angels to encourage us that we are not alone in this world. Not only do we have the Holy Spirit, but we have those ministering spirits who are sent as special agents of God to us in our times of need.

"The angel of the Lord encamps around about those that fear him and delivers them."  
(Psalm 34:7)

## **Conclusion: So What?**

As the finishing touch to any sermon I prepare I ask the same question and make the same challenge: So what?

So what are we to do with all this information? How does that help me? How will this affect my Christian life? What should I do about it? Is there anything in me that needs to change because I know this information? I ask you the same question: So what? What does it matter? Does it make any difference to you? Is it important to know this? And in knowing it what will change?

In my personal experience with the Lord I have found that God reveals truths to us, not just for knowledge, but for practice. This knowledge needs to be put into practice. We need to believe it, to put the word into practice as James says, "Not a forgetful hearer of the word but a DOER of the word."

## **My Personal Conclusions:**

**1. I am not alone, and I am not helpless.** There are unseen helpers around me. Their numbers are 10,000 times 10,000. "Greater is He that is in my than he that is in the world." - I John 4:4 My help comes from the Lord. Psalm 124:1 "If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, now may Israel say; 2 If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: 3 Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: 4 Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul: 5 Then the proud waters had gone over our soul. 6 Blessed be the LORD, who hath not given us as a prey to their teeth. 7 Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. 8 Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

**2. I am provided for by my Heavenly Father.** He supplies my every need "through His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:13. Angels are part of his fathomless resources. He sees the sparrow fall. He knows the very number of hairs on my head. He sends his messengers to minister to me.

**3. I am protected.** There are angels encamped around about me. He sends me help in my time of need. "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." Psalm 34:7 - I will live by the truth of Psalm 46 and 91. I will believe it, declare it, reckon it to be so.

Psalms 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. 4 There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. 5 God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early."

Psalm 91:1 "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. 3 Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. 4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

**4. God cares what is happening to me.** One day He will send his angels to escort me home. This is the heritage of all his saints. Not even angels, nor dark angels can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord. The gates of hell cannot prevail against me while God is on my side. (Psalm 124:) Romans 8:35 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**5. Angels are watching all my activities**, both good and bad. My world is a stage and angels are observing me. May I never be put to shame. Hebrews 12:1 "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

### **Some Links to Further Information on Angels:**

What Angels Do: <http://applecity.com/Angels/Articles/study.html>

Study of Angels - 10 Lessons: <http://www.scripturessay.com/garrison.html>

Study of Angels - a paper Bethel Edu: <http://www.bethel.edu/~rakrob/files/Newdim.htm>

Book by Dr. Edward P. Myers:

<http://www.howardpublishing.com/Books/studyofangels.asp>

Book Chapter: <http://www.howardpublishing.com/Books/Chapters/studyangelsch.htm>

A Study of Angels - a sermon: <http://www.biblecenter.com/sermons/astudyonangels.htm>

What About Angels - clarifyingChristianity:

<http://www.clarifyingchristianity.com/angel.shtml>

Genesis 6:1-8: Can Angels and Humans Cohabitate?

<http://www.biblestudyplus.com/cohabitationangelswithman.htm>

ANGELS - God's Ministering Spirits -

<http://members.tripod.com/polsong2000/page11180.html>

**Sources and Recommended Reading:** (It is not necessary to buy these books.)

Hurbert Lockyer, All the Doctrines of the Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1964

L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, 1939

Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979

Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense, Compiled by Bill Wilson, Thomas Nelson Pub, 1993

Keathley, J. Hampton III, Angels, God's Ministering Spirits Internet Article on Angels,

<http://www.bible.org/docs/theology/angel/angels.htm>

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Why would anyone even consider himself a Christian if he does not believe in miracles?
2. Why do you think liberal scholars consider themselves Christians?

**Recommended Outside Readings**

- Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, 1939
- Grant R. Jeffrey, The Signature of God, Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 1996
- Edersheim, Alfred, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Hendrickson Pub., 1993.
- Edersheim, Alfred, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Pub., 1994.
- The New Bible Dictionary, Douglas, J.D. editor, Eerdmans Pub. Grand Rapids, 1962
- Eusebius, The History of the Church, Penguin Books, 1989
- Fausset, Andrew. R. , Bible Encyclopedia and Dictionary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids,
- NIV Study Bible,
- Hurbert Lockyer, All the Doctrines of the Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1964
- Hurst, John, F. D.D., The History of the Christian Church, Eaton & Mains, New York, 1897
- Keathley, J. Hampton III, Angels, God's Ministering Spirits Internet Article on Angels,
- LaTourett, Kenneth Scott, A History of Christianity, Vol. 1, Harper and Row, New York, 1953
- McBirnie, William Steuart, The Search for the Twelve Apostles, Living Books/Tyndale, 1973
- McDowell, Josh, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979
- McDowell, Josh , A Ready Defense, Compiled by Bill Wilson, Thomas Nelson Josh Publishers, 1993
- Martin, Walter, Kingdom of the Cults,

- Merrill C. Tenney, editor, The Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vols. 1-4 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1975
- Nave, Orville J., Nave's Topical Bible, Southwestern Co. Nashville, 1962
- NIV Study Bible, Notes on Herod and Hasmoneans.
- Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 1, 3, 4 Merrill C. Tenney, editor, Zondervan, 1975
- The Works of Josephus, translated by Wm Whiston, ch. XIV, XV, 1980
- Pink, Arthur W., Gleanings In The Godhead, Moody Press, Chicago, 1975

### **Questions Regarding Angels**

1. Do angels minister to all believers?
2. What musical instrument do some angels play?
3. What is the name of the angel of the bottomless pit?
4. What percentage of angels fell with Satan?
5. Will we some day we will be angels?
6. How many angels are there?
7. What was the name of Satan before his fall?
8. Was Jesus is God's best angel?
9. What is the name of the angel that visited Mary and Zacharias?
10. The Sadducees of Jesus' day were the liberal theologians who rejected?
11. What is the name of the angel who fights battles?
12. What verse defines angels as "Angels are ministering spirits"?
13. Do angels bring answers to prayer?
14. Do angels still minister to us today?
15. Are all angels always good angels?
16. Are angels are all equal in status?
17. Are there are male and female angels?
18. Do angels have wings?
19. Do all children have an angel?
20. How many angels appeared in the Christmas story?
21. Should we and can we pray to angels? Why, or why not?

# Chapter 5 - Joseph, the Carpenter

## Joseph's Age

The Roman Catholic Church adopts the story of the apocryphal books in seemingly the fourth century History of Joseph the Carpenter which said Mary was twelve years old when she was betrothed and Joseph was a widower of ninety years with a full grown family. How ridiculous to think this 90 year old would still be a working carpenter, traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem (90 miles on foot), then fleeing on foot to Egypt and back again to Nazareth, re-establishing his carpentry shop, and traveling year by year to the Passover in Jerusalem until at least Jesus' 12th year. That would have made him 112 years old on that last journey!

No, Joseph was probably not an old man. And why would a 12 year old consent to marry him anyway? He was certainly older than Mary, perhaps in his late twenties or even late thirties, but not ninety. The passages in question give no hint of Mary continuing to be a virgin, else it would have been extremely important for the authors to clarify that these "brothers and sisters" were not really siblings.

The Roman Catholic Church alleges that these were either Joseph's step-children from a previous marriage, or cousins. The step-children theory would be plausible enough, but why would not the gospel writers clarify the point if indeed Mary's perpetual virginity might be maligned? As to being his cousins, the theory is that Cleopas was Joseph's brother who took charge of the family upon Joseph's death.

This theory is also full of difficulties. Jesus also had other cousins who were not called "brothers". Why? If Cleopas is another name for Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15) then Jesus' cousins and disciples were James and Thaddeus. ( Matthew 27:26) Are these the same James and Joseph of Jesus' family mentioned in Mark 6:3? Then why is that not clarified? This view was first expressed by Jerome in an attempt to argue for the perpetual virginity of Mary, but he did not staunchly nor consistently defend it. (Zondervan Vol. 3, p.394)

## A Carpenter by Trade

Matthew 13:55 Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

Mark 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

Two New Testament references to the occupation of Joseph and Jesus lead us to believe that during the 18 silent years of Jesus' boyhood and early manhood he was employed as a carpenter. There would have been little to engage a carpenter in the tiny village of

Nazareth, but the city of Sepphoris was only a 4 mile walk and was the center of renovations and architecture sponsored by Herod the Great's son, Antipas. After the destruction of Sepphoris in 4 BC it was rebuilt during the early life of Jesus, about the time he would have been a carpenter. Though Nazareth was small, probably not more than 25 families living there during Jesus' time, Sepphoris was large, prosperous and offering plenty of work for carpenters. It is only speculation to assume that Jesus would have at least occasionally worked and visited in Sepphoris.

### **Was Jesus a Carpenter?**

The term used for carpenter was "tekton," which means a skilled craftsman and could involve metal, stone, or wood. Jesus himself is only called a carpenter once, in Mark 6:3. Matthew 13:55 describes him as the son of a carpenter. A carpenter was a worth occupation and much in demand especially in the bustling city of Sepphoris, the second largest city in Israel. There would have been plenty of work for good carpenters. We must assume that Jesus was not lazy but industrious. He is the example for us all. He then would have naturally followed in his father's footsteps taking on the trade of carpenter until he entered his full time ministry. Should we think of him as a effeminate man, loafing about while others worked for a living? I doubt it.

Recent attempts to rediscover Jesus and turn him into a well-to-do, successful builder have not basis in fact. Jesus' family remained a humble one. Thus it was with derogatory intent that the Jews of Nazareth derided him as the "son of a carpenter." We know for a fact that his parents were not well off. At his dedication they offered the poor man's sacrifice - a pair of doves and two young pigeons - (Luke 2.22-24 & Leviticus 12.2,6,8). Some may argue that with the gifts of the Wise Men perhaps Joseph and thus Jesus were able to improve their economic plight. Perhaps, but still we see Jesus even in his ministry as humble in origins, and lacking in worldly goods.

### **Origen Denies It**

Indeed, the early 3rd century church writer Origen(23)writes against Celsus' assertion that Jesus was a mere carpenter, that "in none of the Gospels current in the churches is Jesus Himself ever described as being a carpenter".(24) This is still a widely debated topic(25), however Geza Vermes(26) highlights an Aramaic use of the term carpenter/craftsman (naggār) to metaphorically describe a 'scholar' or 'learned man'. Nevertheless, the majority of wandering rabbis had a trade to support their learning and teaching and there is no reason to doubt that carpentry may have been that of Jesus.

### **Justin Confirms It**

Although Origen dismisses Jesus' role as carpenter, the earlier church writer Justin(27) cites it. He says that "He was considered to be the son of Joseph the carpenter; and He appeared without comeliness, as the Scriptures declared; and He was deemed a carpenter (for He was in the habit of working as a carpenter when among men, making ploughs and

yokes; by which He taught the symbols of righteousness and an active life)".  
(<http://www.leaderu.com/theology/jesusjew.html>)

### **Status of a Carpenter**

An artisan was a noble occupation. Many of the ancient Jewish scholars were hard working artisans as well. Hillel was a woodcutter, and Shammai was a carpenter, both were renowned leaders of the Jewish religious community. It was considered right and proper for a father to train his son to follow his own profession. In fact, one rabbi stated, "Whoever does not teach his son a trade it is as if he brought him up to be a robber." The Mishna taught that one must "teach son a trade." Without question Jesus was taught by Joseph, his step father, to be a respected carpenter. It was a worthy profession. Edersheim, Sketches, chapter 11 "Trades"

### **A Carpenter's Tools**

Bow saws, hand saws, claw hammers, planes, adzes, wood mallets, chisels, and the lathe and the bow drill were well known tools in Roman times. (See the research paper done for this class last semester.)

### **The Carpenter's Craft**

Joinery was well developed by the time of Christ (mortise, tennon, and dovetail). Objects could be turned on a lathe to make beautiful design work. Carpentry was useful in a wide variety of needs: roofs, doors, frames, tables, beds, cookware utensils, bowls, and cups. Farm implements such as the yoke and plow would have been made by carpenters.

### Required Assigned Reading:

- Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, chapter 11 "Trades"
- Edersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book 2, Chapter 10, "Life in Nazareth"

### References/Sources:

- <http://members.tripod.com/timana/Monographs/jesuscarpenter.html>
- [http://dioceseoftagbilaran.homestead.com/jjdietzen\\_003.html](http://dioceseoftagbilaran.homestead.com/jjdietzen_003.html)
- <http://www.leaderu.com/theology/jesusjew.html>

## Flight to Egypt

There are many unsolved mysteries about the "silent childhood years" of Jesus. Though we have no authoritative sources from which to glean information about the life and times of Jesus during those years we do have "apocryphal books" which add to our storehouse of knowledge and speculation. (Particularly the Gospel of Thomas, read it and make comments.) The apocryphal books are not Divinely inspired, nor are they to be relied on as accurate. Many are so foolish as to render them fables or fantasies of medieval minds. Yet there are elements of truth that predate the documents themselves. Such is the case with the time the holy family spent in Egypt.

The Coptic Church, that is the church in Egypt, maintains legends of the Christ family's arrival, travel, and adventures in Egypt. Again it is not authoritative but at best it sheds some historical light on the fact that Jesus' family did spend at least 2 years in Egypt. The Bible declares it. It is even in fulfillment of prophetic word - "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." (Matthew 2:15)( Hosea 11 : 1) "Behold, the Lord rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt will totter at His Presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in the midst of it." (Isaiah 19:1)

This same message concerning the Messiah's sojourn in Egypt was also delivered through Isaiah "Blessed be Egypt, My people " (Isaiah 19:25). It was an anticipation of the coming of St. Mark to the country, where the Gospel took firm root in the first decades of Christianity. For Isaiah goes on to prophecy, "In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt; and a Pillar to the Lord, at its border. And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt." (Isaiah 19:19-20)

Isaiah 19:18-25 18 In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction. 19 In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. 20 And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a saviour, and a great

one, and he shall deliver them. 21 And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it. 22 And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them. 23 In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. 24 In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: 25 Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

We know for certain that "The Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and said: "Arise, and take the young Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead which sought the young Child's life." (Matthew 2:20) A curious researcher will ask, 'I wonder where that took place in Egypt?' The Coptic Church claims to have the answer on historical evidence that it was "at the very spot where Al-Muharraq Monastery stands." Which the Coptic church calls the "Second Bethlehem."

It would do well for the student of the word and history to at least be familiar with these legends, whose oral traditions date back to the first century.

- Coptic History of Christ in Egypt  
<http://www.copticpope.org/theholysfamily/English/1.htm>
- Map of Jesus in Egypt <http://www.copticpope.org/theholysfamily/English/map.htm>
- Tour of Egypt <http://www.touregypt.net/holysfamily7.htm>
- Holy Family dot Com <http://www.holysfamily.com.eg/>

## **Home in Nazareth**

What was it like to grow up in the small town of Nazareth? What was Jesus like when he was growing up? Did he do any miracles? Was he different than other children?

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.... And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus". (Luke, 1st 26-30)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the province of Judea, that is, southern Palestine. After his family fled to Egypt to avoid the wrath of Herod the Great they returned to Joseph's home town of Nazareth in northern Palestine, about 15 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. (see map - seminar3/map.htm) Today it is called the city of En-Nasira. There is a natural spring there where Mary would have gone to fetch water for the family. The town is on a hill overlooking the ancient battleground of the plain of Esdraelon. Mount Hermon can be seen to the north and to the west the Mediterranean Sea. Nazareth is also 60 miles north of Jerusalem

Insignificant Nazareth: Nazareth is so insignificant that it was not mentioned in the Old Testament. The name means "Separated Branch." We are not sure why Luke calls Jesus the Nazarene, perhaps it was a reference to his being the "branch." It is certain that it did not mean he was a Nazarite.

Nazareth was too small to be noted in the list of settlements of the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:10-16) which mentions twelve towns and six villages. Neither is its name

included in the 45 cities of the Galilee mentioned by Josephus, the historian. Its name is also missing from the 63 towns of Galilee mentioned in the Talmud. It was not expected that a prophet, a king, or priest ever would come out of Nazareth. We suspect that in Biblical times Nazareth was a small agricultural town settled by not more than a few dozen families.

And from this we understand the reason that Pontius Pilate decorates the cross with the sign "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" (John 19:19) - meaning that the "King of the Jews" is from "nowhere." The early name "Nazarenes" given to the Christians might have been a derogatory nickname that the people of Judea gave to the followers of Jesus (Matthew 26:71, Acts 6:38). Jesus was known throughout the Galilee as "Jesus of Nazareth" (Matthew 21:11, Mark 14:67) - but for those not from the Galilee, this name had no meaning for them. In order to explain where Nazareth was located, the Galileans had to explain that the village was near Gat-Hyefer (Jonah's hometown, Kings II 14:25), which could be seen from Nazareth. <sup>1</sup> <http://www.inisrael.com/tour/nazareth/history.htm>

This prompted Nathaniel to ask the question in John 1:46, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nazareth was isolated in ancient times because no trade routes ran through the city. Therefore it had no economical value.

### **Agricultural Nazareth:**

The farm land around Nazareth was of shallow soil which was terraced for agriculture. This would suggest that vines were the primary crop intended for cultivation on such terraces. However, certain terraces were deep enough to raise olive trees and many still survive on these terraced slopes today. Typical crops of the dry farm would have been olives, grapes, figs, almonds, wheat and barley. Observable structures on the site: wine-press, base of watchtower, pools with channels, agricultural terraces and stone quarry; one column drum-type crushing stone.

### **Town of Sepphoris**

Nazareth was overshadowed by the much larger town of Sepphoris located 4 miles northwest. All trade routes were to the north of Nazareth intersecting in the town of Sepphoris, known as Zippori in Hebrew.

Sepphoris was the nearest large metropolitan area to Nazareth. It is an interesting study. It is not mentioned in Scripture, therefore has not historically been associated with the life of Christ. Yet it stood just 5 miles from Jesus' hometown and was on the busy thoroughfare of intersecting trade routes. (The two major ancient roads are, the north/south Via Maris and the east/west Acre-Tiberias road) <sup>2</sup>

It was the capital city of Galilee throughout many periods. For a time, Herod Antipas made it his capital after inheriting the territory at his father's (Herod the Great) death in 4 B.C. \*<sup>3</sup>

The city expanded and its acropolis was rebuilt. Josephus describes this city as the "ornament of all Galilee." <sup>4</sup>

From ancient literary notices we know that Sepphoris had a theater (4,000-seat theater), ten synagogues, several churches, a Council Chamber, an Archive, two market places, temples, a city wall, a mint (Sepphoris minted its own coins), an extensive aqueduct system, and a cemetery, a bathing establishment, and an enormous market building or basilica with beautiful mosaics. <sup>5</sup>

Sepphoris was a center of talmudic study. Many academies were located there. Also its location on or near major trade routes in the lower Galilee made it a prime market for traders of all commodities.

The rabbinical scholars who helped compile the Talmud and Mishna frequently earned their living by working in what seems to be most humble occupations - carpenters, shoemakers, potters and smiths among them.

### **Joseph's Death**

<https://www.biography.com/religious-figure/saint-joseph>

The circumstances of Joseph's death are not known, but it is likely that he died before Jesus's ministry began, and it is implied that he was dead before the Crucifixion (John 19:26-27).

### **Readings:**

(These are required for this lesson)

- Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, chapter 6 "Jewish Homes"
- Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, chapter 7 "Raising Children"
- Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book II, Chapter 6 - Child's Life in Nazareth.

### **Sources:**

- <sup>1</sup> History of Nazareth <http://www.inisrael.com/tour/nazareth/history.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> Century One - Sepphoris <http://www.centuryone.org/sepphoris.html>
- <sup>3</sup> Glass From Sepphoris <http://www.colby.edu/rel/Glass.html>
- <sup>4</sup> Biblical Archeology - Sepphoris <http://www.bib-arch.org/barja00/sepphoris2.html>
- <sup>5</sup> PBS - Sepphoris <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/maps/arch/sepphoris.html>

### **Sources and Recommended Reading:**

(It is not necessary to buy these books.)

- Philip Schaff - History of the Christian Church, Book1, chapter 2
- Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 1, 3, 4 Merrill C. Tenney, editor, Zondervan, 1975
- Fausset, Andrew. R. , Bible Encyclopedia and Dictionary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids,
- NIV Study Bible,
- Edersheim, Alfred, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Hendrickson Pub., 1993.
- Edersheim, Alfred, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Pub., 1994.
- The New Bible Dictionary, Douglas, J.D. editor, Eerdmans Pub. Grand Rapids, 1962

# Chapter 6 – Mary, mother of Jesus

## Birth Events

1. She lived in Nazareth.
2. She was of the lineage of David.
3. She was a cousin to Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist.
4. She was engaged to a carpenter, named Joseph.
5. She was visited by an angel.
6. She was a virgin, at least until after Jesus' birth.
7. She conceived a son by the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.
8. She was a godly woman.
9. She was filled with the Holy Spirit in pronouncing the Magnificat (Lk. 2:46-55)

## Early Life Events

10. She gave birth to her firstborn in a stable in Bethlehem.
11. She dedicated her firstborn male child to God in the Temple.
12. She and Joseph were poor (note sacrifice offered)
13. She fled with Joseph to Egypt.
14. She and Joseph returned to Nazareth.
15. She was a normal married mother.

## Later Life Events

16. She was with Jesus at the marriage at Cana, and somehow knew he was to do something about the lack of wine.
17. She visited Jesus in his ministry but did not follow him during his journeys.
18. She apparently had other children whose names are recorded for us in Scripture.
19. She accompanied his brothers to Capernaum (Mark 3:21, 31-35) to take Jesus home fearing he was "beside himself".
20. She was at the crucifixion and watched her son die. Jesus, from the cross, speaks to John to take Mary to his home.
21. In the book of Acts she is mentioned only as being among the disciples and women who continued with one accord in prayer and supplication for the Holy Spirit.
22. In all the epistles, the life of the early church, and in all 10 post-resurrection appearances she had no special dispensation or visit from her son.

**Can you think of any biblical fact about Mary's life that has been left out?**

## **Did Mary Continue a Virgin?**

In the next chapter of our study will look more carefully at the virgin birth. The Roman Catholic Church asserts that Mary remained a virgin all her life. This is based not on the Scripture but as we have seen, on the apocryphal writings, which are dubious at best. This is not to say that Mary's continued virginity, or subsequent birthing of children, is of any theological import. It is not. Nor is it worth arguing except when men wish to make her a co-redemptrix or co-mediator. Such arguments become mute when we let Scripture dictate our facts and beliefs. (Fausset p.456-457)

## **Did Mary Have Other Children?**

The question would be a moot one except for the fact that the bible in several instances unabashedly describes Jesus as having brothers and sisters.

There are at least three very clear passages which indicate that Mary had other children.

1. Mark 6:3 "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?"
2. Mark 3:21, Matthew 12:46-49, Luke 8:19 "While Jesus was talking to the crowd his mother and brothers stood outside wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, 'Your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to talk to you.' He replied, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brothers? Pointing to his disciples he said, 'Here are my mother and brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.' "
3. John 7:5 "Even his own brothers did not believe in him."

The very concept of Mary's alleged perpetual virginity is ridiculous when one seriously considers scripture the highest source of knowledge of such things. The Bible nowhere even hints of such a doctrine. On the contrary, it advocates the opposite. The first few centuries of the church did not know of this doctrine. "It was in the early century's strict asceticism regarding celibacy as a higher state than marriage, and that sexual relations were part of man's sinful nature that incubated this fiction." (Zondervan Vol. 4 p.111)

The scriptures surrounding Mary's life beg the question. The phrase, "I know not a man" (Luke 1:34), "before they were come together" (Matthew 1:18) and "He had no union with her until she gave birth to a son" (Matthew 1:25 ) all indicate that there was a later normal sexual relationship between Mary and Joseph.

## **Betrothal**

Engagement and marriage were sacred institutions in Jewish customs. Commitments were deep sacred vows made before God and were not to be taken lightly and were unalterable except under extremely extenuating circumstances. Betrothal was as serious as marriage and just as binding. The bible calls the betrothed man the husband and the betrothed woman the wife as though marriage had already taken place. To become engaged a man would make a formal proposal of marriage to his prospective bride and a small gift was given as an earnest on the pledge. From that time the community viewed them as surely married as if they had consummated the marriage ceremony. The betrothal period normally was about a year. A betrothal could only be broken by a bill of divorcement, just as in marriage. Any sexual relationship during the engagement was treated as adultery with all of its legal and social ramifications. (Zondervan, Vol 4, p. 107)

## **BIRTH OBLIGATIONS**

There were religious obligations imposed on every Jewish mother and equally on the firstborn male child of a Jewish family. There were Old Testament commandments of Moses and ceremonial laws to be fulfilled. Of these rituals there were three specifically that needed to be cared for: circumcision, purification and dedication.

### **Circumcision**

The first of the rituals was that of circumcision as proscribed by the law of Moses and initiatory to the blessings and responsibilities of the Abrahamic covenant. If you would like to read some fascinating facts regarding the medical value of circumcision on the eighth day read *None of These Diseases* by S.I. McMillen. (Try <http://www.amazon.com> to find this book) The covenant of Abraham was sealed by circumcision in Genesis 17. Circumcision was practiced by Moses in his own family in Exodus 4:24 and laid down in the Mosaic Law for all Israel in Exodus 12:43-48. The rite was to be done either in the temple, a synagogue, by a priest, and at some times permitted to be done in the home usually by the father-in-law. The Hebrew word for the father-in-law is "circumciser", perhaps indicating that the father-in-law from the earliest days was responsible for this rite.

By the time of Jesus' birth the official naming of the child was done at the same time. In the case of Jesus, his Jewish name was "Yeshua", translated, Joshua or Jesus.

### **Purification**

According to Mosaic law a woman giving birth was ceremonially unclean. Luke uses the term "when the time of their purification according to the law of Moses had been completed". The word "their" has caused some consternation among various commentators. Some assume that "their purification" refers to the Jews' purification. If we view Luke as a careful scholar and historian we must assume that "their" means both Mary

and Joseph. It is obvious that according to the law of Moses in Leviticus 12:2-8 it is the

mother who is unclean for seven days, then after the boy's circumcision she is to wait another 33 days to be purified from her bleeding. The father is not mentioned as being unclean. However, if the father participated in the childbirth he would be considered unclean according to Leviticus 5:1-13. That is, if he touches anything that is unclean, or if he touches any human uncleanness such as the blood of childbirth he would be unclean. If Joseph had been ceremonially unclean he would naturally wait to go with Mary at the end of her purification period.

Mary would have had to wait at least 40 days for the purification ceremony at which time they would have walked the six miles to Jerusalem to care for this matter. Being poor, Mary and Joseph were permitted to substitute a sacrifice of "a pair of young doves or two young pigeons" for that normally required. What is especially interesting is that the need of Mary to be purified precludes that she was as any other woman - not without sin.

### **Dedication**

An often forgotten ceremony required by the law was that of the dedication of the firstborn male to the Lord. (Exodus 13:12,13; Numbers 3:11-13; 8:17,18) The child had to be the firstborn of the mother and should not be of Levitical descent, or the child would be dedicated to the priesthood if free of all physical blemishes. The ceremony was brief in which the parents formally presented the child to the priest. The priest offered two short benedictions, or blessings, then the redemption money was exchanged. (Edersheim p.136)

The whole idea of redemption springs from Numbers 3:11-13 in which God claims every firstborn as his own, but according to Numbers 8:15 God says, "I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons of Israel." Therefore, every non-levite firstborn had to be redeemed, or bought back from God. Even the firstborn of livestock belonged to the Lord and had to be redeemed if they were not given wholly to God's service.

### **Discussion**

1. Without being offensive, how would you show a Roman Catholic friend that Mary is not co-redeemer with Jesus? (Be tactful!)
2. Do you believe that the Virgin Birth is an important doctrine? Why?

# Chapter 7 - The Virgin Birth

## Introduction

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 1:18)

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you." Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." "How shall this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered, "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her. (Luke 1:26-38)

It is not surprising to us who believe that when God became a man it was in such unusual circumstances. So it ought to be. But for the unbeliever the story of Mary, a virgin, being found with child before marriage can mean only one thing. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ, however difficult for some to believe, is a fact of biblical record in both the Old and New Testaments. The doctrine of the virgin birth is not an optional belief. If you reject the virgin birth of Christ you reject the testimony of God, the sinlessness of Christ and therefore the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Am I saying then that you cannot be saved without believing in the virgin birth? Yes, I am. For if you reject the virgin birth of Christ you reject Christ. Your Jesus would then not be the Christ of the Bible and he could not be called the Son of God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) You see the problem of those who question or oppose the virgin birth is not lack of biblical evidence, but a lack of faith in the supernatural. (Berkoff p333) Liberal theologians who reject this doctrine reject the Christ of the Bible in favor of their own human prophet/savior. If one cannot believe in the miraculous then one cannot believe "to the saving of the soul," (Hebrews 10:39) for that in itself is miraculous.

In this part of our lesson on the miraculous birth we will provide ample evidence and argument for the virgin birth so that the true student of the Word can "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints." (Jude 3)

## The Gospel Record

Both Matthew and Luke record the testimony that Mary was a virgin and became pregnant by an act of God alone without the instrumentation of man. Those who oppose it search in vain for some thread of support for their perilous position. One of the arguments assumes that since the other gospel writers, Mark and John, do not directly mention the virgin birth then they must have known nothing of it. This is preposterous!

Mark does not record the story of Jesus' childhood and neither does John. Does that mean they did not believe he was ever a child? Certainly not! Mark does in fact allude to the virgin birth in Mark 6:3 when referring to the Jews questioning Jesus' wisdom.

"Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him."

In the Jewish world of Jesus' time there were rules governing the giving of names to sons. A man was named after his father even if his father died before his birth. A child was named after his mother only when the father was unknown. Jesus would have been referred to in this passage as the "Son of Joseph, the carpenter," but he is not. The evidence points to community knowledge that Jesus was the son of Mary, not Joseph. (McDowell, Evidence p117)

John similarly does not tell the story of Jesus' birth but he certainly alludes to it as well in his often repeated appellation of Jesus as the Son of God. In the same way he refers to Jesus as the "only begotten of God." No one else can be given such a title who is not born of God. The word "begat," from which we get "begotten," is a term which is always employed to designate the male part of procreation. The Greek word for begotten, "monogenes," is used six times in the New Testament as applied to Jesus as the only begotten of God. Jesus twice used it of himself. No one else was ever begotten or conceived by the Holy Ghost. No one else was ever born of a virgin. (McDowell, Evidence, p114)

These liberal naysayers also say that the other New Testament writers completely ignore any virgin birth therefore they must not have believed it. This is a very poor argument from silence as we have seen before. In fact, the apostle Paul, who was a close friend of Luke, writes his whole premise of justification by faith in Romans based on the sinlessness of Christ as the new Adam. Jesus was untainted by the sin of Adam that he might redeem us from the curse of the law. His whole argument is premised on the virgin birth, therefore the sinless birth of Christ. (Romans 5:12)

## **The Prophetic Witness**

The virgin birth is attested to in the Old Testament as well. In Genesis 3:15 God promises to Adam that the "seed of the woman" will crush the head of Satan. Notice it is not the seed of the man that will crush Satan's rule of sin, but the seed of the woman – that is, the offspring of a woman will be used of God to reverse the curse.

Isaiah 7:14 which Matthew quotes stands as a monument to the virgin birth.

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

### **We need to point out several things about this passage.**

1. A Virgin: The word virgin in Hebrew is represented by two words. The first and most commonly used is "bethulah" which means a virgin maiden. The second "almah (veiled)" means a young woman of marriageable age. (McDowell, Evidence, p145) This is the word used by Isaiah to distinguish clearly that the woman in the prophecy is not married and is a virgin. It would be as if Isaiah had said "A young virgin, who continued a virgin, will have a child." There is no miracle when a virgin ceases to be a virgin and has a child but when that virgin has the child and still is a virgin that is a miracle.

2. A Sign: Next it is important to note that this birth of a child to a virgin would be a "sign." It would be no sign if what was meant was that a young married woman, a virgin 'til marriage, would conceive and bring forth a son. There is no miracle to that, therefore it is not sign.

3. Immanuel: Finally the name given to the child of this virgin birth is the clincher. She will call him Immanuel, meaning God with us. No one in Israel would dare take on the name of Jehovah or claim to be God with us.

## **The Theological Necessity**

We have already mentioned the argument of the apostle Paul for the theological necessity of Jesus Christ being the spotless lamb of God. Jesus did not become the Son of God gradually as he matured to adulthood. He was the Son of God from the moment of his conception. If Jesus was the fruit of a human sexual relationship (the sperm of man) he would carry the inheritance of Adam's race which is the sin nature which came on every man since Adam's fall. Thus he would have had to atone for his own sin nature before he could atone for mankind. If he had a sin nature he would not be the spotless lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. The importance of Jesus' sinless nature cannot be overemphasized. Jesus alone was without sin. No other man could come close since Adam's sin taints every man. We call this "original sin." The only way Jesus could avoid the contamination of Adam's sin was to avoid Adam's seed altogether and be conceived by the Holy Spirit, thus without sin.

If Jesus had been from Joseph's flesh he would have carried the sin of Adam in him. Also, had Joseph been his physical father Jesus would not be qualified to sit on the throne of David. A little known prophecy of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 22:28-30) declares that there was a curse on the descendants of King Jeconiah. Matthew 1:12 exposes Joseph as a direct descendant of Jeconiah. Jesus therefore would have been under that curse and could not be the heir to David's throne. Mary on the other hand did not come from Jeconiah's line. (McDowell, Evidence, p113)

### **Oppositions to the Virgin Birth**

From the earliest days of the church the virgin birth has been an article of faith without question. The only ones to dispute the issue were the infamous Ebonites and Gnostics who for their own doctrinal reasons refused to believe the testimony of the nature of Jesus Christ. The Ebonites argued that the Isaiah 7:14 passage should be translated "a young woman," not a "virgin."

### **Biological Impossibility**

Many have opposed the doctrine of the virgin birth purely on a human level supposing that since it is not scientific it is not possible. They allege that the people of the early church were ignorant and superstitious, easily falling prey to such fables. On that kind of argument we would have to debunk all the miracles of the Bible, the atoning death of Christ and his resurrection. They all were non-scientific and required extraordinary miracles from the hand of God. C.S. Lewis spoke of this fallacy of reasoning in his defense of the virgin birth.

"Thus you will hear people say, 'The early Christians believed that Christ was the son of a virgin, but we know that this is a scientific impossibility.' Such people seem to have the idea that belief in miracles arose at the period when men were so ignorant of the course of nature that they did not perceive a miracle to be contrary to it.

A moment's thought shows this to be foolish, with the story of the virgin birth as a particularly striking example. When Joseph discovered that his fiancée was going to have a baby, he naturally decided to repudiate her. Why? Because he knew just as well as any modern gynecologist that in the ordinary course of nature women do not have babies unless they have lain with men.

No doubt the modern gynecologist knows several things about birth and begetting that Joseph did not know. But those things do not concern the main point – that a virgin birth is contrary to the course of nature. And Joseph obviously knew that." (McDowell, Defense, p189)

## **Early Jewish Records**

Even in the time of Jesus there was controversy concerning his origin, as we have already seen in Mark 6:3. Among the Jews there was the rumor and belief that Jesus was the illegitimate son of Mary. It has been recorded that in an early genealogical table which dates from before A.D.70, Jesus was listed as "the bastard son of a wedded wife." Another scroll refers to him as "so and so, bastard son of an adulteress." The rabbis crudely called Jesus "the son of an adulteress." Some went so far as to say they knew the name of the illegitimate father of Jesus, a man, a soldier by the name of "Panthera.." Other rabbinical texts find references to Jesus ben Panthera ("ben" is the Hebrew word for "the son of.")

Around A.D.160 a Platonist writer named Celsus chronicled the supposed escapades of Mary and Panthera. The document was known to the early church as well. Origen, one of the early church fathers, wrote a dissertation against the claims of Celsus in a work called, *Contra Celsus*. In it he argues convincingly that the spurious accusations against Mary were deliberate slander, obviously concocted to impugn the story of the virgin birth. As Christians we should not be surprised at this. These things were written when Christianity was being accused of cannibalism and blood sacrifices which contributed to the widespread persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire. The Jews from the beginning made up stories in attempts to persuade the multitudes that Jesus was an imposter. (see Matthew 28:11- 15)

The full text of *Contra Celsus* is available on the Web at:

<http://www.yahshua.webhost.com.au/relig/books/lbks/gnostic/contc1.txt>

## **Greek and Babylonian Mythology**

Others have attempted to explain away the virgin birth saying that it was just an attempt to imitate the myths of the Greeks and Babylonians. In posting this argument they try to liken the virgin birth story to the Greek and Babylonian mythologies in which their gods were born in unusual circumstances. These pagan stories however usually resemble the fictitious stories of gods and goddesses having sexual relations with human beings. We need to be very careful in this regard. The virgin birth story never intimates that Mary had sex with a god. In fact, the miracle is that no sexual union was had at all. Such gods having sex are common in false cults such as the Mormons, but do not appear in the sacred scriptures. For this reason Paul and Peter warn the church to flee from such "cleverly devised fables and doctrines of devils." (I Tim. 1:4; 4:7; II Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14 and 2 Peter 1:16) The Greek word used for fables is "muthos" or myths. Sexual relations of humans with spirits is technically called "incubus" and is heathen and devilish in its entirety and a part of witchcraft, not the faith once delivered to the saints.

The virgin birth is not a myth or fable. It is the witness of the Old and New Testaments, of Jesus himself, the gospel writers, the writers of the epistles and the witness of the early church, fought against the Ebonite and Gnostic philosophies which denied it.

## **Roman Catholic Teachings**

### The So-called Immaculate Conception of Mary

It is fitting at this time to take up the subject associated with Christ's birth that has caused confusion and concern through the centuries; that is the so-called "immaculate conception of Mary." The Roman Catholic church has held to this doctrine as part of its veneration of Mary as co-mediator and co-redeemer with Jesus Christ.

Paul makes it very clear in I Timothy 2:5 that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man and he needs no assistance.

"For there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (I Tim. 2:5)

We must ask everyone who believes in the mediation of saints and/or Mary, 'Which part of "ONE" don't you understand?' Jesus himself made it abundantly clear when speaking to his disciples just before his death when he said,

"I am the way the truth and the life, no man comes unto the Father but by me." (John 14:6)

The Roman Catholic church did not always hold to this position. The idea of the mediation of Mary came about during later centuries when so many other church doctrines became as polluted as the papacy and priesthood. It was these extra-biblical doctrines, added to the scriptures by the Church, that led men like Martin Luther to call the church back to the Bible in what we now call the Reformation.

### **Did the Early Church Know of an Immaculate Conception?**

The answer is yes. At least it was known to the church around the second century. The book was not mentioned in other literature until the middle of the second century. It was rejected by the church as spurious (unauthentic) since its own authorship claimed to be by the hand of James who died before Matthew and Luke were written. Yet the author claims to know of those books. In addition, he claims to have written it "at the time of an uproar in Jerusalem at the death of Herod." Herod died in 4 or 5 B.C. Even the books own proponents say this is impossible and that James, the brother of our Lord, was not the author.

The story of the immaculate conception is contained only in the apocryphal book of the Infancy Gospel of James, which was excluded from the canon for reasons we discussed in the first lesson of this series. Yet we find the Roman Catholic Church in later centuries deriving doctrine from the very books it considered non-canonical and of questionable origin at best. Remember it was not the Protestant Church that approved the canon (the Protestant movement didn't begin until the 1500's), it was the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholic Church has built around this story a doctrine which has greatly influenced the lives and faith of its adherents. It is a dangerous doctrine of another salvation which is not taught in any of the canonical books of the New Testament. Paul warned the church with the severest language concerning those who would teach another gospel than what he preached.

I marvel that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ, but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:6-9 (The NIV says, Let him be eternally condemned." Which is a kind way of saying "Let him be eternally damned.")

We ought to give earnest heed to these words and warn our brothers and sisters who are of the Roman Catholic Church lest in their ignorance they be eternally damned. It is not a mild doctrinal difference to say that any human being is co-equal with Jesus Christ as mediator and co-redeemer. It is blasphemy! The Roman Catholic Church did not always believe this way. It was in 1854 that the doctrine became a dogma of the church by the encyclical of Pope Pius IX:

"And since she has been appointed by God to be the Queen of heaven and earth, and is exalted above all the choirs of angels and saints, and even stands at the right hand of her only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, she presents our petitions in a most efficacious manner. What she asks, she obtains. Her pleas can never be unheard."

Given at St. Peter's in Rome, the eighth day of December, 1854, in the eighth year of our pontificate."

Read the entire document at: <http://www.rc.net/rcchurch/popes/pius9/ineffab.asc>

The Roman Catholic Church has made serious errors regarding the nature of Mary and her position in the eternal state of things.

1. It calls her Queen of Heaven
2. It declares that she is the mediatrix between man and Jesus Christ.
3. It instructs that prayers should be addressed to her for her intercession to Jesus Christ, as well as prayers to other deceased saints.
4. It teaches that she is the co-redemptrix with her son Jesus Christ.
5. She ascended to heaven without dying. None of these are biblical doctrines. They are theological extensions of apocryphal writings which contradict the inspired Word of God.

**(For further reading on this see:**

<http://www.worldlynx.net/enbc/mariology.html>

An article about coredemptrix

<http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/coredeem.htm>

See also the Roman Catholic documents page <http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/>

Finally see a document chronicling the doctrinal changes with the history of the R.C. Church during the last 2,000 years.

[http://cnview.com/on\\_line\\_resources/the\\_truth\\_about\\_roman\\_catholics\\_final.htm](http://cnview.com/on_line_resources/the_truth_about_roman_catholics_final.htm)

### **Where is the Word of God?**

Is it any wonder that the Roman Catholic Church discourages the reading and study of the Word of God by laymen? In every case where laymen are allowed to read and study the scriptures their eyes are opened to who Jesus really is and to the full knowledge of salvation by faith alone and by grace alone.

Someone will surely say, "Pastor, you are being too hard on the Catholic Church." Am I? It is the gospel that is hard on the Catholic church or any other church that teaches contrary to the scriptures. Jesus challenged the Jews to "search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." (John 5:39) And he promised that, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." (John 8:32) And again, "If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:17)

Jesus had no fear that the lowliest of men would misunderstand the Word of God and be led astray. Why should we? The Word of God is a "lamp unto our feet and an light unto our path." (Ps 119:105) Its power to instruct and transform is without precedent, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: The testimony of the Lord is sure making wise the simple...Moreover by them is your servant warned and in keeping of them is great reward." (Ps 19:7,11) It would be well for the membership of the Roman Catholic Church who truly love Jesus Christ to echo Isaiah's words to their wayward leadership and cry, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this world it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20)

The Roman Catholic Church is not an evil church for from it we all have received the canon of scripture and solid doctrines from the early church fathers. But over the centuries its leadership has become sick, errant and self-serving by exalting itself above the Word of God. Let it be known to every church be it Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, or Christian and Missionary Alliance, that the WORD OF GOD MUST BE CENTRAL to all the teaching of the church or it will become "anathema".

**Links for further reading:**

Contra Celsus: <http://www.yahshua.webhost.com.au/relig/books/lbks/gnostic/contc1.txt>

Read the entire document at: <http://www.rc.net/rcchurch/popes/pius9/ineffab.asc>

For further reading on Catholicism see: <http://www.worldlynx.net/enbc/mariology.html>

An article about coredemptrix <http://www.jesus-is-lord.com/coredeem.htm>

See Roman Catholic documents page <http://www.catholic-pages.com/documents/>

The history of the doctrinal changes within the of the R.C. Church during the last 2,000 years. [http://cnview.com/on\\_line\\_resources/the\\_truth\\_about\\_roman\\_catholics\\_final.htm](http://cnview.com/on_line_resources/the_truth_about_roman_catholics_final.htm)

**Sources and Recommended Reading: (It is not necessary to buy these books.)**

Hurbert Lockyer, All the Doctrines of the Bible, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1964

L. Berkhof, Systematic Theology, Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, 1939

Josh McDowell, Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1979

Josh McDowell, A Ready Defense, Compiled by Bill Wilson, Thomas Nelson Pub, 1993

Keathley, J. Hampton III, Angels, God's Ministering Spirits Internet Article on Angels,

# Chapter 8 - The Shepherds

## Bethlehem

Bethlehem is a small village about 6 miles southwest of Jerusalem, about a 2 hour walk. Originally it was called Ephrath, meaning beautiful, describing the rich fertile soil of Bethlehem. David's father was a weaver of the veils of the sanctuary - hence David's reference to the size of Goliath's spear. Bethlehem is called the city of David since he was born and raised there. Rachel's grave is there (Genesis 35:19), explaining Matthew's reference to "Rachel weeping for her children" when Herod destroyed the male children 2 years old and younger. There are wells of fresh water in Bethlehem that David craved. During Jeremiah's time (2 Chronicles 42:17) there was a caravan inn near Bethlehem (2 Samuel 19:37-40) which was the starting place for caravans going to Egypt. This could well have been the inn of Bethlehem where no room was found for Mary and Joseph. (Fausset p.90)

Northeast of the city are the rolling hills where the shepherds would have been watching their flocks when the angels visited. Justin Martyr of the second century wrote that the Lord's birthplace was a cave near the city that served as a stable. The cave was about 39 feet long by 11 feet wide and 9 feet high. In 132 AD Hadrian's forces destroyed the city leaving no traces of what it once was. Since then, several churches have been erected over the grotto believed to be the birthplace of Christ. Micah 5:2 heralded Bethlehem as the place where the Messiah would be born. (Zondervan Vol.1, pp.538-539.)

So it was on or around the 9th of Tebtheth (the Jewish month that straddles December and January) in BC 4. Mary and Joseph arrived in the overcrowded city of Bethlehem and settled into a comfortable grotto-stable somewhere outside the city. It is most probable that the stable itself was crowded with beasts of burden and loaded with fodder for camels, donkey, and oxen, smelling like any other stable. It was there among the common things of everyday life that Jesus came into the world - probably much like any baby coming into the world, with loud crying and hunger for love and nourishment. The scripture records that they wrapped him in "swaddling clothes" and laid him in a manger. (Luke 2:7) Swaddling clothes were strips of cloth customarily used to wrap a baby - perhaps a primitive diaper.

# Shepherds

There were shepherds not far removed from Bethlehem in the remote wilderness where it was most common for them to be, but near Bethlehem on the road to Jerusalem. There was a watchtower (the Migdal Eder by name) from which shepherds could spy their sheep over vast stretches. These were not ordinary shepherds, nor ordinary sheep. They were shepherds entrusted with the sheep destined to the temple sacrifices in Jerusalem. They were the shepherds who year round watched over those prepared for sacrifice. What wonderful symbolism hidden in this report of the shepherds "keeping watch over their flocks by night". The angels chose to herald to them (and not the crowds in Bethlehem) that the Great Shepherd and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world was born. The scripture tells us further that these temple-shepherds carried the news with them to the temple, perhaps alerting Simon and Anna to the great event of the Messiah's birth. "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." Luke 2:17 (Edersheim, p.131-132)

## Shepherd's Watchtowers: Migdal-Eder

Migdal-eder was a small plain located just to the southwest of Jerusalem, between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Bethlehem was about six miles away. And just a couple of miles from Jerusalem, out in the fields, there was an ancient tower which had been built as a watchtower so that shepherds could be on the alert for marauders and thieves who might steal from the flock. It was called "Migdal-eder", "the tower of the flock". The Levitical shepherds watched over the flocks which were raised for sacrifices in the Temple. They erected towers (migdal) from which they watched over the sacrificial flocks. It is one of these towers that is referred to in the prophecy.

It was probably named by Jacob. It was at Migdal-eder that Reuben, Jacob's first-born, committed incest. That was something Jacob could not forget. It haunted him to the end of his days. When he pronounced his blessings on his sons, he said of Reuben, "You're like water -uncontrollable. You've lost your preeminence because you went up to my couch." He still can hardly believe it! And it is as though he turns to his other sons and says, "He went up to my couch." That was a disaster in Jacob's life, and it happened at Migdal-eder.

### The Prophecy: Tower of the Flock

"In that day, "declares the Lord, [the day when the mountain of the house of the Lord is established] "I will assemble the lame, And gather the outcasts,

[ "Those who are shunned because they are morally defiled" is the meaning of the term used here. That is the kind of people God loves - the lame, the weak, the outcasts.] Even those whom I have afflicted. I will make the lame a remnant, And the outcasts a strong nation, And the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on and forever. And as for

you, tower of the flock [or, "Migdal-eder"], Hill of the daughter of Zion, To you it will come -- Micah 4:6-8

On the strength of the prophecy in Micah 4:6-8, the ancient rabbis, before Jesus' time, predicted that it would be at Migdal-eder that the announcement would be made that Messiah had come. For in the very next chapter, just a few verses away comes the prophecy that we westerners are more familiar with - Micah 5:2

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

This was part of the expectancy of Israel. And it was at Migdal-eder, the tower of the flock, that the shepherds were gathered that first Christmas night, when the angel of the Lord announced the coming of Jesus. There were shepherds, shepherding their flocks by night, and the angel of the Lord appeared and said, "I have good news for you. Today in Bethlehem there is for you born a savior, the Messiah." They left their flocks and walked the three or four miles down to Bethlehem, and there they worshipped Jesus. Is that not like the Lord, to take a place like that, which had such terrible memories, and make it the very place where the promise of the ages is announced?

Footnote: <http://www.pbc.org/dp/roper/3370.html>

## Chapter 9 - The Magi

The term "wisemen" is a tactful way of referencing the strange intellectuals from the east. The word "wisemen" in the Greek language is "magos" a term that often referred to sorcerers. (Acts 13:6,8) The more appropriate name for these visitors is Magi. The Magi were eastern Median priests from Persia who were skilled in many different pseudo-scientific skills of the age such as astrology, necromancy, and interpretation of dreams. Daniel was promoted to head of the magicians (Magi) while in Babylon. Though he did not practice the curious arts he was considered wise in the mysteries and especially gifted with the ability to interpret dreams. It would not be necessary then to believe that all Magi were equally into the cults. Certainly Daniel was not. The Magi are mentioned in the Old Testament in Jeremiah 39:3, 13 and in Daniel.

The most likely place of origin of these Magi was Persia. Jews were dispersed among all nations during the Babylonian captivity but a large portion lived in Babylon. Babylon was located in what we know today as Iraq and Persia is Iran. The center of activities for the Magi would have been in Persia during the 7th century B.C. The Magi formed themselves into a guild of scholars and seers who among other things studied the movement of the stars and planets and believed that the destinies of men and nations could be discerned from the heavens. They were a priestly cast who were highly regarded for their wisdom. Royalty sought advice from them. Generally speaking the Medo-Persian Magi believed in the primacy of the elements: fire, water, earth and air. Their worship centered around a perpetual flame which was believed to have come from heaven. They permitted no images. Their temples were merely shelters for the sacred fire. They offered blood sacrifices. They had no defined theology until Zoroastrianism was introduced in the 6th century which became the state religion of Persia and Media.

It is important for us to understand the political ramifications of the Magi coming to Jerusalem. For centuries the Persians and the Jews had a history that intertwined. It was to Babylon that the Jews took their scriptures and religious influences during their captivity. Daniel, as well as many other Jews, found their way into the political power and influence beginning with Nebuchadnezzar's reign, and then in the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians. According to one historian, the Persian and Medo-Persian history "was studded with Jewish nobles, ministers and counselors" eventually even some of the kings themselves were apparently of Jewish blood. (Zondervan, Vol. 4, p. 34)

The Selucides had conquered both Persia and Palestine after which the Parthians gained control of the region just prior to the Roman domination. The Persians were still the dominant ruling party within the Parthian Empire. It was the Parthians that had aligned themselves with Antigonos against Herod and invaded Palestine, successfully removing Herod from power for a time. When the Parthians invaded and won they allowed for Jewish sovereignty over their own people, but this freedom lasted but for a

moment. The Romans returned with a vengeance and once again conquered Palestine and reinstated Herod as "king of the Jews." The Parthians continued to be a formidable threat to the Roman border countries. The Magi had an important political and religious role in the Parthian Empire. They were the king-makers. They alone had the power of absolute choice over who would be king over the realm. It is also suspected that at the time of Christ's birth the Magi were actively looking for the next successor to the Parthian throne.

It is into this caldron of political intrigue that a troop of strangely dressed Magi, probably traveling with all their pomp and pageantry, accompanied by a military escort to guarantee their safe passage through this hostile territory, came riding into Jerusalem. Such a scene would attract much attention and arouse grave suspicions. It seemed a calculated political insult to Herod, who they knew was not even a full Jew, and who bribed his way into power, to arrive asking for the one who was born "King of the Jews." Herod must have been outraged! (Zondervan, Vol 4, p. 34)

No one knows for sure how many Magi arrived in this caravan to worship the "King of the Jews." Tradition says there were three and even records their names as Gaspar, Melchior and Baltasar. Early second century art depicts three Magi dressed in their traditional Persian garb:

"The Magian priesthood dressed in white robes and wore tall, somewhat conical hats made of felt which had long side flaps covering their cheeks as far as the chin. They carried small bundles of divining rods, known as barsoms, with which they offered sacrifices; these rods also were utilized in divining and soothsaying by arranging them in various patterns on the ground while chanting their incantations." (Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol 4, p. 31)

One might wonder how these foreign dignitaries knew about the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah. We must remember that Persia was still filled with Jews. The Jewish scriptures were librated with all the other sacred scrolls which the Magi spent their lives studying. When they saw the Star they must have recollected the prophecy of Numbers 24:17 concerning "a Star which would arise out of Jacob, and a Sceptre out of Israel." Strangely enough, this prophecy came not from the lips of a prophet in Israel but from another foreigner, Balaam, (whose name means "devourer") a soothsayer from Mesopotamia! (Joshua 13:22) Balaam was from Pethor which Fausset believed was "the headquarters of oriental Magi" at that time. Perhaps beyond the sacred scriptures the Magian libraries of oracles contained this prophecy of Balaam too. (Fausset, p. 71)

## **Chapter 10 - The Star**

The star of the Magi has been discussed in hundreds of publications. That there was a star of extraordinary brilliance we are certain. It was that star that alerted the Magi to search the ancient scrolls for its significance. That the star evidently disappeared and reappeared when the Magi were about to leave Jerusalem for Bethlehem is also certain from the biblical story. What seems most amazing is that the Star traveled, or appeared to travel before the Magi, until they arrived in Bethlehem, where it then stood still over the place where the young child was. (Matthew 2:9) Attempts have been made by various scholars to debunk the star as a myth. Other equally scholarly works both Christian and Jewish have tried to explain the appearance of the star from an astronomer's perspective. These studies are interesting "asides" to the story but hardly necessary to "prove" that there was a star of Bethlehem. If we had to rationalize and prove scientifically every miracle of the Bible there would be no more miracles. If we would succeed in explaining scientifically what the star was and how and when it appeared we would be taking some of the miracle out of the most miraculous event in human history. For those with a scientific bent it might be interesting to read some of these theories and perhaps they can be of some use in apologetic discussions with unbelievers. Alfred Edersheim presents a lengthy treatment of this topic in his work *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. I recommend it to you. You can find it in its entirety in our Online Electronic Library.

### **The Mysterious Star of Bethlehem**

The story of the birth of Christ is filled with mystery and awe. Among those mysteries none is so awe inspiring as the appearance of the Star of Bethlehem that led the Wise Men to the Christ Child. Through the years many have taken in hand to explain, or discredit the star as either non-existent, or a naturally occurring phenomenon. It is not our intent to explain-away the star of Bethlehem but to show that it was not a localized event viewed only by the wise men. Recognizing that many today have dismissed the Star of Bethlehem as a myth, we find it important to show the scientific evidence to support the appearance of the star.

Genesis 1:14 And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

Numbers 24:17 I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

Matthew 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him...7 Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared... 9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before

them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Stars themselves have always been an awe inspiring mystery. Throughout the eons of time men have looked to the stars and presumed they held the secrets of future events. Perhaps that comes from the fact that God created the stars, and said "Let them (the lights of the firmament) be for signs...seasons... days and years." (Genesis 1:14) Wise men have studied the stars, measured their travel and distance, deciphered their composition (planet or star), and watched their changes.

Astrology and astronomy have developed as sciences. Astronomy is the scientific study of the heavens and celestial bodies, while astrology is the mystical, religious, superstitious study and projection of fortune-telling from the position of the stars in the heavens. We make the division between astronomy and astrology but it seems apparent that the ancients did not. Both superstition and science were at the core of stargazing. God condemns astrology as a form of witchcraft.

Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. - Isaiah 47:13

In fact it was difficult to draw a clear line through science and superstition in biblical times. Science in any of its forms was not purely science. It always had its roots in some religious belief or superstition. Even the renowned Jewish scholar of the first century, Philo of Alexandria, stated that astronomy/astrology was an integral part of the first century education. He interpreted Genesis 1:14 as legitimizing the use of stars for "timely signs of coming events" since they were created "for signs." All cultures believed that the stars conveyed messages, or portents of things to come.

The full blown development of astrology as a form of witchcraft is well known even in our own day and age. Astrology divides the night sky (the heavens) into zones, or the zodiac, (the twelve constellations that the sun passes through during a year - Pisces, Capricorn, Taurus, etc.) by which daily horoscopes are divined. Scientists, that is, true astronomers, will tell you that there are 24 constellations, not 12 as astrologers purport.) This form of superstition is astrology, not astronomy, and is witchcraft, not science. \*

\*<http://www.griffithobs.org/I PSRealConst.html>

### **Astronomical Evidence**

The great astrologer Kepler, in 1604 AD, attempted to show that the star of Bethlehem was the massing of Jupiter, Saturn and Mars, which occurred only once every 805 years. He tried to prove that it was a portent of great men or great events in history such as the birth of Moses, Isaiah, Christ, Charlemagne, and the Reformation. \* Unfortunately his dates for such an event were two years before Christ, thus an inadequate explanation of the Star of Bethlehem.

For Kepler to presume that the Wise Men traveled to Jerusalem simply because of the BC 7 conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn would be speculative. We must look at the whole of what the Wise Men were seeing in the heavens. There were three distinct and significant celestial events which for the Wise Men were incontrovertible signs of a major earthly event.

### **Sign 1: THE TRIPLE CONJUNCTION OF JUPITER AND SATURN IN BC 7.**

In May, October and December of BC 7 there was the highly unusual triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation Pisces. Such an event only occurred once every 900 years. That year it happened three times!

### **Sign 2: THE MASSING OF THREE PLANETS IN BC 6. (Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars)**

Three planets came together which only occurred every 800 years. This time they came together in the constellation Pisces, thus indicating to the Wise Men another portent of a significant earthly event. Pisces indicated for the Wise Men that that event was to be in Israel.

### **Sign 3: THE APPEARANCE OF A COMET IN THE SPRING OF BC 5.**

An unusual comet appeared in the east in the constellation Capricornus, which to the Magi signaled the rapidly approaching birth of the significant king in Israel. This was a "tailed" comet. The Chinese kept excellent records of celestial events and marked the date and duration of the appearance of this star. They marked it as occurring on March 9 to April BC 6 in 5, continuing in the sky for 70 days. It is the only tailed comet on record near that time.

### **A Comet**

Comets were associated with both calamities and great events alike. The third century historian, Origen, argued that the Star of Bethlehem was a comet. He stated:

"The star that was seen in the East we consider to be a new star... partaking of the nature of those celestial bodies which appear at times such as comets... If then at the commencement of new dynasties or on the occasion of other important events there arises a comet... why should it be a matter of wonder that at the birth of Him who was to introduce a new doctrine... a star should have arisen?" 19

The overriding fact that is often overlooked in this triple sign of Christ's birth is that Herod inquired diligently of the Wise Men concerning the timing of the star's appearance. Had it been only the one star that hinted at Christ's birth Herod would not have ordered the murder of children under two years of age. But if they had described the triple sign,

BC 7, BC 6, and BC 5, then Herod would have good reason to destroy children born in Bethlehem from BC 7.

The comet theory gives us the best scientific evidence of the existence of the Star of Bethlehem. It meets all the criteria of both biblical evidence, historical timing, and astronomical data. According to the biblical record of Matthew chapter two, the star had three distinctive characteristics:

- 1.It was a star that newly appeared in the heavens
- 2.It was a star that traveled through the sky originating in one part (in the east, the morning sky) and concluding in another part of the sky (in the south west, the evening sky).
- 3.It appeared to go before the Wise Men and stood over Bethlehem where they inquired of the birth-child.

As we have already established, only the comet of BC 5 would fulfill such criteria. The Chinese recorded no other astronomical event that would approximate it. The star (comet) appeared suddenly, as all comets do. It lasted 70 days, more than enough time for the Wise Men to travel the 550 miles from Babylon on camels to arrive in Jerusalem to inquire after the King. It apparently was not visible for a time, perhaps because of cloudy skies, then appeared again after the Wise Men were told that the King would be born in Bethlehem. Its appearance was as a star that "pointed" and "stood over" the city of Bethlehem. Josephus, the famed Jewish historian, described Halley's Comet of 12 as heralding the death of Marcus Agrippa and stated in similar language as the New Testament account of the Bethlehem Star, "the star called comet stood for several days over the city [Rome]" and again described the comet of 64 AD as, "a star, resembling a sword, stood over the city." So we can conclude that a comet perfectly fits the description of the Matthew narrative. \*<http://www.crystalinks.com/bethlehem.html>

#### Assigned Reading::

Edersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Book 2, Chapter 6, "Nativity"

Edersheim, Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, The Magi

Other Resources:

\*<http://www.griffithobs.org/IPSRealConst.html>

\*<http://www.crystalinks.com/bethlehem.html>

[http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/p\\_greetham/wisemen/home.html](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/p_greetham/wisemen/home.html)

<http://www.eclipse.net/~molnar/>

## Star Date?

Much confusion arises over the date of Christ's birth due to the errors in our calendar. If you will remember from our study of the Intertestamental Period, in 527 AD, Dionysius Exiguus, a monk, originated our calendar arbitrarily fixing the birth of Christ as 1 AD, as Anno Domini, the year of our Lord (hence AD). His guesstimate of Christ's year of birth was wrong. We know that because of historical records of Herod's death, which occurred one year after the Star of Bethlehem appeared, placing that date as BC 4. Putting that together with the appearance of the Comet in the Spring of BC 5 we know that this would have been the exact time of Jesus' birth.

## The Quirinius Question

"In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)"

The actual date of Christ's birth has been disputed. The main argument is that Luke made a grave error in referring to Quirinius when he said, "...this first census took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria." The argumentative historians say that Quirinius was not the governor of Syria at the time of Christ's birth because his governorship did not begin until ten years later. Therefore, they conclude, Luke misspoke and did not know his history. Historians revel in that they have found ancient documents that record such a census in A.D. 6 (Acts 5:37) but no record of such a census in 4 B.C.

To such an argument we must respond. His full name was Publius Salpicus Quirinius. The King James Version renders his name "Cyrenius" which is a transliteration of the Latin into Greek, then to English.

Quirinius was a notable Roman soldier who rose through the ranks to political power without the aid of wealth or family heritage. Dates are vague but it seems that he ruled as proconsul about 15 B.C. Between 12 B.C. and 5 B.C. he was engaged in military actions particularly in the mountains of Pisidia.

The problem comes when Luke, himself a notable historian, states that in 6 B.C. Quirinius was governor of Syria. It is common historical knowledge that Quintilius Varus was governor of Syria in BC 7 - 4. There are now notable scholars who believe there is

evidence that Quirinius was governor of Syria during two periods of Roman history, an early date and the later date mentioned by Gamaliel in Acts 5:37.

## **Two Possibilities**

There are two possibilities set forth by great scholars.

1. The one asserts that Luke's language here leaves room for various interpretations.

"This census was first taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria." We know Quirinius was governor of Syria in 6-9 AD. Roman census took a long time. They usually were spaced fourteen years apart. The census was due in 7 B.C. Varus would have just assumed his new office as an untried governor. He was a failure as a soldier having lost three legions in the Teutoburger Forest in Germany - one of the most devastating fiascoes of Roman military in that century. Herod at the same time had lost favor with Augustus. The time of a census was not a pleasant time for the Jews since the priest looked on it as against the will of God. (Remember the results of David numbering the people.) It would not have been unusual for Augustus Caesar to assign this dangerous and potentially explosive job to a tried and true military officer like Quirinius. Seeing that Quirinius eventually was given the post strengthens this argument.

We must, however, admit that there is no physical evidence of this taking place. It is all speculation based on Luke's precision as a historian. Barring any new archeological evidence, we must wait in faith knowing that all other arguments against Luke's accuracy have been laid to rest by later archeological finds.

2. Another explanation is proffered by the esteemed historian and writer Alfred Edersheim. He argues from the accuracy of Luke's historical references and from the wording of Luke 2:2 that the census which was begun in the year of Christ's birth was not effectively completed until after Herod's death when Quirinius was governor of Syria and after Judea had become de facto a Roman province. (Edersheim p.128)

## **The Date of December 25**

We have already covered the year of Christ's birth in a previous lesson, so we will not repeat that here. (See lesson 1, Intertestamental Period) Traditionally, Christmas is celebrated on December 25. How did we choose this date, and is it a tenable date for Christ's birth?

The first mention of any observance of Christ's birthday appears around 200 AD. The day of December 25 was first mentioned in 336 AD. Eastern Orthodox churches celebrate it on January 6. We may never know for certain the exact month and day of Christ's birth because the bible does not give us that information. Edersheim believes there is no real reason to question the December date. Here is his reasoning.

"A curious piece of evidence comes to us from a Jewish source. In the addition to the Hegillath Taanith (ed. Warsh. P. 20a) the 9th Tebbeth is marked as a fast day, and it is added, that the reason for this is not stated. Now, Jewish chronologists have fixed on that day as that of Christ's birth, and it is remarkable that, between the years 500 and 816 AD the 25th of December fell no less than twelve times on the 9th of Tebbeth. If the 9th of Tebbeth, or 25th of December, was regarded as the birthday of Christ, we can understand the concealment about it. Comp. Zunz, Ritus d. Synag. Gottesd. P. 126." (Edersheim, p.132)

### **A Spring Date**

In our discussion of the Star of Bethlehem we have already made references to the possibility that the Lord was born, not in the winter as Edersheim speculates, but in the Spring of the year. Evidence for this is supported by the date of the appearance of the Star as reported by Chinese astrologers, and by the evidence of Herod's death, one year after that event. Which, if you remember, took place at or around the Passover.

### **Sources and Recommended Reading:**

(It is not necessary to buy these books.)

Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. 1, 3, 4 Merrill C. Tenney, editor, Zondervan, 1975

Fausset, Andrew. R. , Bible Encyclopedia and Dictionary, Zondervan, Grand Rapids,  
NIV Study Bible,

Edersheim, Alfred, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Hendrickson Pub., 1993.

Edersheim, Alfred, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson Pub., 1994.

The New Bible Dictionary, Douglas, J.D. editor, Eerdmans Pub. Grand Rapids, 1962

The Online Bible electronic software.

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## Video Links

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### **Jonathan Cahn reveals Christmas Mysteries**

<https://youtu.be/dt7CCSM6mSs> (17 min)

### **Jonathan Cahn: Secret of the Magi (Christmas Mysteries 3)**

[https://youtu.be/ha3\\_yLQ20As](https://youtu.be/ha3_yLQ20As) (52 min)

### **Biblical Archaeology Article (long comprehensive article)**

<https://biblearchaeology.org/research/the-daniel-9-24-27-project/4368-pinpointing-the-date-of-christ-s-birth>

### **Shepherds**

<https://youtu.be/0rIImCs5uxw>

### **Wise Men**

<https://youtu.be/unMemFazy1U>

### **Angels - heavenly host**

<https://youtu.be/epNOO9ntkFA>

### **Value of Magi Gifts**

<https://youtu.be/YWK2UxjIbaE>

### **Why Joseph?**

<https://youtu.be/PH3coO6VzD0>

### **Why Mary**

<https://youtu.be/1q5FxxEaDFA>

### **Swaddling Clothes - Manger**

<https://youtu.be/1sayt8GUNHc>

### **Holy Night**

<https://youtu.be/yjHy83Z4S24>

### **Was Jesus Born on December 25?**

<https://youtu.be/ptlsXtTf6n0>

### **The Star (opinions)**

### **That crazy star? John**

<https://youtu.be/qBuHDz1BRCU>

### **Mr Wilson - The Star**

<https://youtu.be/nK9BKJKHsEo>

