

## CHRISTMAS AS SEEN FROM HEBREW SCRIPTURES

JROC/Week 3 & 4 – The First Coming and the Second Coming

December 10 & 17, 2023

Jesus was born into chaos. Jesus was born into a dark and violent world! The Roman Empire began ruling and oppressing Israel in 46 BC. Crucifixion (devised by the Persians) became popular in the Roman occupied Holy Land. In 4 BC 2,000 Jewish people were crucified and there were mass crucifixions during the first century AD.

There was inner corruption in Israel. There was no king from David's line on the throne. Herod was a puppet king placed on the throne in Jerusalem by Rome. The person placed in the High Priest's position (Simon Maccabee) was unqualified as he was not from the correct line of the priesthood.

Greek philosophy which is man-centered, had captured many in Israel including the Sadducees. Sadducees controlled the two most important institutions of Jewish society: The Jerusalem Temple (known as Herod's Temple) and the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin was the governing body for both religious and legal issues of the Jews.

After the Prophet Malachi's warnings to Israel, for 430 years (intertestamental times), God did not send a prophet to speak words of warnings to Israel. And then, following 430 years, the silence was broken!

The angel Gabriel was sent by God to tell Zacharias, a priest, that he would have a son who would be named John. John would announce the Messiah, Jesus, Who would come as the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

The angel Gabriel came to Zacharias who was serving in the Temple in Jerusalem at the time of sacrifice! What a message God proclaimed to the world. We have a sacrifice theme laid out for us at Jesus First Coming!

Zacharias' name means "Remembered by God"!!

As we read through the Christmas accounts in Matthew and Luke, we're told that the people in Judea were discussing all that was transpiring prior to Jesus' birth (Luke 1:21; Luke 1:63; Luke 2:18) And, they were MARVELING at the happenings. They knew about the Messiah from the Tanakh. And, the events of the 430 years following Malachi were inciting more anticipation for the DELIVERER!

Are we marveling as we walk with God at this time in our world? Are we marveling at what God is doing NOW in setting the stage for Jesus' Second Coming? Are we marveling at what God is doing in our lives – in changing us and molding us to be more like Him?

The Christmas accounts from Luke and from Matthew speak to Jesus' first coming and His second coming!

Luke 2:4 – Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to be registered for the worldwide census decreed by the Romans. Mary, Joseph’s betrothed wife, was with child.

Luke 2:8-12 - *Now there were in the same country (in the area of Bethlehem) shepherds (Jewish shepherds) living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. <sup>10</sup> Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. <sup>11</sup> For there is born to you this day in the city of*

2

*David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.* This doesn’t make much sense unless you know what was written about the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Firstly, why would an angel of the Lord appear to shepherds? These Jewish shepherds were under a rabbinical ban since they were living in the fields and couldn’t obey the regulations in the law of Moses re: washings, purification rites, and foods. They were looked down upon by the Rabbis and by the Jewish community. What a message God is sending to the world: God’s grace reaches down to the lowest of the low...to everyone!

Where were the shepherds watching their flock? In the “same country” (Luke 2:4) – in the Bethlehem area. Where was Jesus born?

Micah 5:2 - *But you, Bethlehem **Ephrathah**, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.*

Why does Scripture speak of Bethlehem Ephrathah? Firstly, there were two Bethlehems in Israel...one in Galilee (Josh. 19:10, 15) and this Bethlehem in Judea. Gen. 35:16-20; 48:7 – points to a place one mile north of present-day Bethlehem and four miles from Jerusalem. The Bethlehem in Judea is where Jesus was born.

Micah 5:2 specifically tells us that Jesus, the One to be Ruler in Israel...the One Who is Eternal - would be born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. Ephrathah was the northern part of Bethlehem on the road to Jerusalem.

NOTE: sheep that were destined to be sacrificed in the Temple in Jerusalem had to be tended/kept within a certain radius of the Temple in Jerusalem. Ephrathah was within that radius. This ruling was made by the Rabbis. This was the ruling in Jesus’ day.

Scripture tells us in Micah 5:2 that Jesus came into the world in the part of Bethlehem known as Ephrathah where only sheep that were going to be sacrificed in the Temple were kept!! (24/7; sacrifices year-round – morning and evening. Ex. 29:38ff; Num. 28:3-4). This is the Christmas message! It is a message of SACRIFICE!

In Ephrathah there was a tower – a watch tower which was called the Tower of the Flock (Migdal Eder). The sheep that would be sacrificed were kept in the Tower of the Flock.

Alfred Edersheim recorded in the writings of the Rabbis re: the Tower of the Flock in his classic work, "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," Book2/Chapter 6. "It will be the place where the Messiah will be revealed."

MIGDAL – Hebrew for "tower". Root word: "to become great"!

EDER – Hebrew for "flock".

Gen. 35:21 speaks of the Tower of the Flock. Jacob's wife, Rachel, in giving birth to Benjamin at the site of the Tower of the Flock, died. Rachel's name means "ewe" – a mama sheep. I'm suggesting that this is a foreshadowing. Ewes were brought to the Tower of the Flock to give birth to lambs that would be sacrificed. Because of Rachel's death in this area, Bethlehem became known as a place of sorrows. Jesus was born in Bethlehem Ephrathah. At His first coming Jesus would suffer and die.

3

Micah 4:8 mentions the Tower of the Flock and tells us that the kingdom comes to the tower of the flock. Who will bring the Kingdom to this earth? The King of the Kingdom...JESUS!  
Could this be where Jesus was born?

PERHAPS Mary and Joseph traveled to this Tower of the Flock after they were told that there was no room at the inn (Luke 2:7).

Bible commentators and historians have speculated re: Jesus' birthplace. Some have suggested a stable; Scripture doesn't tell us that He was born in a stable. Some have suggested a cave; Scripture doesn't tell us that He was born in a cave.

I'm suggesting that Jesus was born in this Tower of the Flock. Scripture doesn't specifically state that Jesus was born in the Tower of the Flock; however, Scripture points to that possibility – from what we've read in Scripture (Gen. 35:21/Micah 4:8)

Scripture does tell us that Jesus was laid in a manger. There were mangers/feeding troughs in this Tower of the Flock for all the lambs that would be sacrificed. The Tower of the Flock was well-known in the Jewish culture. It was part of the sacrificial system. Jesus came at His first coming to sacrifice Himself.

Consider if Mary gave birth to Jesus in this Tower of the Flock where SACRIFICE was the focus...what a message God was proclaiming to the world: here is My Son - the perfect Lamb of God Who will be sacrificed for sin! Proverbs 18:10 – He, JESUS, is a strong Tower!

Luke 2:9 - *the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.*

The Glory of God, as seen by man, is God's manifested presence. "Glory" in Hebrew is *Kavod* which means weighty-ness speaking of God's character, His attributes, His reputation.

In the OT God chose to manifest Himself in the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day as He led the people through the wilderness. The glory of God filled the tabernacle in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem. The glory of God departed from the temple in Jerusalem in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 10, because of the abominations in the Temple (!!).

The glory of God is back at Jesus' incarnation! How many in Bethlehem and the surrounding area saw His glory?! John 1:14 – *The Word was made flesh and dwelled (He tabernacle) among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten (unique one; not created) of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Luke 2:10 - *Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.*

The Jewish people had been oppressed for about 900 years. They hadn't had "good tidings...great joy" in a long while.

Isa. 41:27 tells us that the Messiah will bring good tidings at His first coming! "I will give to you Israel One Who brings good tidings." These good tidings/good news (the gospel) speak of forgiveness of sin (I Cor. 15:1, 3).

And these good tidings would be for ALL people – both Jews and Gentiles. God's plan of salvation is offered to the WORLD!

Luke 2:11 - *For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*

4

The Jewish shepherds knew that the Messiah would be from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) – a descendant of King David (II Sam. 7 – the Davidic Covenant; Jer. 23:5).

A "Savior"? Being saved is a very Jewish teaching in the OT! God told the Jewish people in Isaiah 46:13: *I will place salvation (Yeshua) in Zion – Jerusalem for Israel My glory.*

Isa. 45:22 – *God told Israel, "Look to Me and be saved"!*

Isa. 64:5 – (You are indeed angry for) *...we have sinned and we need to be saved.*

The Hebrew word for salvation is YESHUA!

Luke 2:11 tells us that the Savior - the One Who will bring salvation...Who will rescue – is the Messiah.

Born? The Messiah would be born?

Isa. 7:14 - *A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel (God with us; God in the flesh)*

Isa. 9:6 - *Unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

Luke 2:12 – *And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.* HOW is this the sign? ALL babies were wrapped in swaddling cloths so that their limbs would be straight.

How are they, the shepherds, going to find this special baby – this Savior - wrapped in swaddling cloths if ALL babies were wrapped this way at birth? Think OT/Hebrew Scriptures. Think of

what God required of the Jewish people re: sacrifices? The sacrifices had to be without BLEMISH.

Lambs born to ewes in the place where the sacrificial lambs were kept, in the Tower of the Flock, were wrapped in swaddling cloths. Animals coming into the world kick, flail (thrash), and bruise themselves. Guess what? They would no longer be eligible for temple sacrifice. Lev. 22:27 – lambs, goats and bulls were eligible for sacrifice at 8 days old! The lambs destined for Temple sacrifice had to be wrapped in swaddling cloths! So that they wouldn't bruise – so they would be without blemish!

As part of the sign...the Babe was to be found lying in a manger/feeding trough for animals. Wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. What a lowly birth!

Here then we have in the account of the shepherds, two images of lowliness and humility - the shepherds who were shunned by their community, and in lowliness the Messiah came.

Luke 2:13-14 - *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, on whom God's sovereign pleasure rests.'* And then the angels departed.

Luke 2:15 - *...the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."*

Did the angel tell the shepherds where to find the Baby? NO!

Did the shepherds ask? NO!

5

Animals were kept in homes (I Sam. 28:24; Judges 11:31).

Wow, thank you for sharing this with us, Cathy! What a blessing to hear how many Jewish people came and were moved by the gospel message. You have such a needed ministry, especially now with all that's happening in our country and world and satan's ramped up attacks on God's people. We know Christ is so much greater! I will pray those who heard will come to faith and that God continues to use you in their lives. Thanks again and I hope to talk with you in person sometime soon.

Have a wonderful Christmas!

Luke 2:16 - *And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger*

I believe they knew exactly where to find the Babe because they knew the prophecies in the Scriptures (Gen. 35:21; Micah 4:8; Micah 5:2; Prov. 18:10). The shepherds knew where the sacrificial lambs were birthed and kept...BECAUSE THESE WERE THE SHEPHERDS (the Levitical Shepherds) THAT TOOK CARE OF THE SACRIFICIAL LAMBS!

I'm suggesting that they found Him, Jesus Who is our strong tower (Prov. 18:10; Psa. 61:3; Psa. 144:2), in that watch tower in Bethlehem Ephrathah – in the Tower of the Flock! The tower where the sheep were born – the sheep DESTINED FOR TEMPLE SACRIFICE...this tower might very well have been the birthplace for Jesus Who came first as the Suffering Servant – the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

The account of the shepherds in Luke speaks to the Messiah Who came as the LAMB OF GOD/ the ultimate sacrifice – Who came to die for our sins at His first coming. Scripture speaks of a gap between the Messiah's first coming and His second coming.

*Matt. 2:1-2 - Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men (we're not told how many) from the East came to Jerusalem,<sup>2</sup> saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star (kochav – blazing) in the East and have come to worship Him.'*

The Magi appear on the scene following a gap of possibly two years from the time of Jesus' birth. The Magi/the wise men visited Jesus with a different “agenda” than the agenda of the shepherds. The Jewish shepherds found Him as a newborn lying in a manger (Luke 2:12, 16). The Magi found the Child in a house (Matt. 2:7-11).

The Magi weren't Jewish; they were Gentiles who, while they were in the East, saw the star (“blazing”) when Jesus was born. They traveled first to Jerusalem (Matt. 2:1) to find the “King of the Jews”. That was their agenda. And so, they traveled to Jerusalem where King David reigned and where the Messiah will reign as King at His second coming! At Jerusalem the Magi encountered Herod who told them to go to Bethlehem.

Gentiles came to worship the King of the Jews! (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 49:6)

The shepherds found Jesus as the LAMB of God Who would be sacrificed! When was Jesus sacrificed as the LAMB of God? At His first coming.

The Magi looked for a King. When does Jesus come as King? At His second coming.

6

We know there's a GAP between Jesus' first coming and His second coming. There's a GAP between the shepherd's visit and the visit by the wise men.

The Magi were NOT kings. They were KING MAKERS. The wise men looked for kings! How had they heard about the King of the Jews? About 500 years previous to this time, the Jewish people from the Kingdom of Judah were in exile in Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar was the King of Babylon at the time. He had captured many of the Jewish people including Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, put Daniel in charge of the wise men because God had given Daniel the ability to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dreams. Daniel became the CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR/master over the wise men (Dan. 2:48).

Daniel wrote – in the book of Daniel - about when the Messiah would appear in Israel (Dan. 9:26 – before the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD). Do you think he might've shared

that with the wise men? I believe so. And that information was passed down from generation to generation among the Magi – the wise men.

Fast forward – to the time of the wise men’s visit to Jerusalem to look for the king of the Jews. History teaches that their king, the Persian king, was dethroned. The wise men were looking for a new king. And so they traveled to JERUSALEM to find the ONE they had heard about from their ANCESTORS through Daniel – the ONE WHO would be the King of the Jews – JESUS!

King Herod and the Jewish scribes directed the Magi to Bethlehem – but they didn’t go with the Gentile King makers to find the Promised One of Israel!!!

And, they brought the child gifts:

Gold – symbolizing royalty – this Child Who will be King!

Frankincense – speaks of deity – this Child is God!

Myrrh – was used to embalm the dead – this Child will die and be laid in a tomb!

And, the star? Num. 24:17. “Star” in Hebrew means a “blazing” – I’m suggesting that the Magi, while in Persia when Jesus came into the world in Bethlehem, witnessed the glory of God SHINING!

In the Christmas accounts in Luke and in Matthew we so clearly see Jesus’ two roles: the Suffering Messiah, the LAMB of God; and the Conquering King. We see His two comings: His first coming to suffer and die; His second coming to reign as King.

As there was heightened Messianic fervor among the people prior to Jesus’ first coming, are we fervently/excitedly anticipating His ANY MOMENT RETURN FOR US?

### CHRISTMAS!

- What a glorious time to celebrate the One Who came through the Jewish line because of God’s unfailing promises to Israel.
- What a glorious time to celebrate Jesus’ first coming to die for “my sin,” and to anticipate His second coming to reign as King!
- And let us praise God together in proclaiming GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST. We are celebrating His plan for both Jewish people and Gentiles that we see unfolded in the Hebrew Scriptures.