

BIBLE STUDY

The Life of Jesus Christ

Early Events

Study Section 3



Jesus Christ: Study 6

First Visit to Jerusalem

Only Luke's Gospel describes the first few days immediately following Jesus' birth. The formal naming of the baby Jesus took place at the time of His circumcision on the 8th day after His birth. (Luke 2:21) It is, perhaps, interesting to note that the Bible mentions only 4 individuals who were named by Divine instruction before birth:

Ishmael:	a type or fore-shadowing of unbelieving Jews - echoed in the Gospel of John, chapter 8, verses 33-42
Isaac:	a type of Christ
John the Baptist:	the herald of Christ
Jesus Christ:	the Son of God

Circumcision was a sign of the covenant between God and His people.

Bible and Science

Written thousands of years ago, God's law specifically determined circumcision on the 8th day after birth. (Lev. 12:3) Modern science provides us with yet another item of information to confirm our faith that the Bible was written under Divine inspiration. Recent studies have confirmed that the safest time to perform a circumcision is on the 8th day of life. Vitamin K, which causes blood to coagulate, is not produced in sufficient amounts until the 5th to 7th day. On the eighth day the body contains 10% more prothrombin **than normal**. This substance is also important in the clotting of blood. Present day technology enables us to artificially alter these circumstances. Such technology was not available in the days of Moses, so God provided the natural means to protect His people under His law.

Son of Man

This act of circumcision also declared that Mary's child, although of such Holy birth, nevertheless, shared the nature of all the other sons of Abraham.

The Temple

33 days later, Mary took Jesus and went with Joseph to the Temple in Jerusalem, to offer the ritual purification for motherhood that God's law demanded. (Lev. 12:4)

The kind of sacrifice made on Mary's behalf (Luke 2:24) tells us much about the family into which Jesus was born. The offering of a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons, was the concession which the law made to extreme poverty, when the restricted means of a family simply did not allow the more usual offering of a lamb and a pigeon (Lev. 12:6-8).

High Priest Designate

Luke states that at this time Jesus was to be presented to the Lord. (Luke 2:21) This complies with the law given by the Lord to Moses regarding the dedication of the first born. Exodus, chapter 13, verse 2 says: **“Sanctify to me every first born, the first off-spring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.”** Luke correctly records in verse 23 that this is according to the law. But significantly, in repeating that law, he includes a phrase, that is not found in any of the places where the law speaks of the consecration of the first born. **“...Every first-born male that opens the womb shall be called Holy to the Lord.”** (Luke 2:23)

“Holy to the Lord” is a phrase used repeatedly in the Old Testament relative to the High Priest (e.g. Lev. 21:6-8; Exodus 28:36, 38). Luke, who, of course, wrote this Gospel after the death of Jesus, in these early references to Jesus' birth, hints at the truth that the Gospel ultimately disclosed. Through this child, later to become God's High Priest, is a means of cleansing and redemption for all the defilement of sin which is in human nature.

Simeon and Anna

It is in this solemn and beautiful setting in the Temple that Jesus was recognized as the long awaited Messiah bringing joy to the hearts and lips of two who were waiting for the redemption of Israel. The first was Simeon who apparently lived only in the hope of seeing the realization of the glorious promises of God to His chosen people. He was an upright and godly man, who realized the significance of the days in which he lived, and had been rewarded with the knowledge, given to him through the Holy

Spirit, that before his death, he would see the Messiah. (Luke 2:25, 26) So it was that on this wonderful day, God's promise to this faithful man was fulfilled. Divine power guided him to the Temple at this very time, (verse 27) so that he knew for certain that God's purpose, especially concerned the humble family presenting their offerings.

He took the child into his arms, praising God for His mercy and goodness. His words, recorded by Luke, in verses 29-32, confirm that in the wisdom of God's Spirit, Simeon knew that this small child signified the fullness of God's redemption in this world of darkness and sin. Thus Simeon knew that when the time came, he would die in peace, having seen the beginning of the way to salvation and the overcoming of sin that God had promised way back in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve sinned.

Mary and Joseph watched in amazement (verse 33) as Simeon, in deep exultation, proclaimed the destiny of their Son, echoing words of prophecy that had been awaiting fulfilment for centuries.

“For my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou has prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of Revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.” Luke 2:30-32

Most good reference Bibles will have at least three references to prophecies in Isaiah tied into these words of Simeon, spoken in the guidance of God's Spirit or Power.

We have spoken before about echoes in these studies, but we can never understate their value. In this manner, God, in His wisdom, has provided guidance throughout the ages to faithful followers who love His Word. Key phrases in Simeon's statement, immediately direct our attention to three prophecies regarding the wonderful fulfilment of God's plan and purpose in providing salvation and grace through His Son. When we allow such phrases to direct us to the prophecies, a reading of the complete prophecy gives us greater insight into an understanding of what God is doing and how it relates to our own personal salvation. For in these, and in all such prophecies, God is providing vivid descriptions which combine to give us a picture of the conditions in which we can share when His Son returns to establish His kingdom and His Father's glory will fill the earth.

These pictures also provide us with further insight into Jesus' life and teachings. They add further meaning to what He did and why He suffered. In this way, we expand our understanding of God and His Son far beyond the words written in the Gospels.

As an exercise, it is suggested that the Bible student compare these three verses in Luke with the three references in Isaiah. Look for the connecting phrases in the prophetic verses to which we are directed. Then read the complete portions of Scripture surrounding these reference verses and see how they relate to the salvation and the light that God is revealing to the world through His Son. In this way you can anticipate and watch and wait for the joy that He is preparing for those who translate their faith into action and follow Jesus as He opens the way to His Father.

The following are the three verses from Isaiah, which can be seen as linked to Simeon's statement:

Isaiah 52:10 - "The Lord has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God"

Isaiah 42:6 - "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, and I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations,"

Isaiah 49:6 - "He says, 'it is too small a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make you a light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'"

Look at the chapters containing these verses and see the ways in which such Scriptures can be unmistakably recognized as a foreshadow of Christ and His vital part in God's plan of salvation. As an example of this, consider the first verse in Isaiah 49: **"Listen to me, oh islands, and pay attention, you peoples from afar. The Lord called me from the womb; from the body of my mother He named me."**

Remember the statement earlier in this study that only four individuals were named by God before their births. Such a reference immediately narrows considerations down to four people to whom this Scripture might directly relate. As we read through this chapter, a picture unfolds declaring God's covenant, that ultimately His people will be redeemed and restored through the work of His Son.

As a further study guide, don't end your search for understanding of God's Word in the Scriptures to which a reference is made. Look for other references in these

Scriptures. As an example, a study of the references in Isaiah, chapter 52, will lead you to Psalm 98. Here we share in the Psalmist's song of joy as he presents us with a picture of the future work of the Son of God. As you read verses 2 and 3 of this Psalm, they will take you right back to Simeon as he stood in the temple holding the child Jesus in his arms.

“The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered His loving kindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.” Psalm 98: 2-3

As we return to chapter 2 of Luke, beginning at verse 34, we see that Simeon turned his eyes reluctantly from the child in his arms and blessed Mary and Joseph. Then in keeping with his knowledge of the trials and crucifixion that Jesus, the Lord's "suffering servant," would yet have to undergo, he warns Mary of the tragedy that she would have to endure. Ultimately, her soul would feel as if it were pierced with a sharp sword as she stood in helpless sorrow at the foot of the cross, no doubt, sharing with her first born son all the agonies of crucifixion.

By this time this little group was probably the centre of attention in the Temple Court. A clue regarding this is given to us in verse 38. This interest would probably have grown when they were joined by the aged Anna, a figure who would be well known to the multitudes, for she had lived a life of consecrated service and piety in the Temple for probably around 60 years. We can assume that it was no coincidence that she should witness the unforgettable scene and hear the announcement from the lips of Simeon. Her recognition was instantaneous and it found expression in a prayer of deep gratitude, and a desire to speak of Jesus with all those who were looking for redemption. This is certainly a desire in which we all can share.

In the Beginning

This dedication in the Temple was the beginning of the life of Jesus as one who is now consecrated to the Lord. It is interesting to note that during the first 40 days of His life, Jesus was treated as "a son of Abraham," following what the Law of Moses instructed for such a child. Jesus was circumcised after the manner of the fleshly covenant established under the Law of Moses. Thus in this time period we see an echo of the 40 days of probation noted in different events recorded in the Old Testament.

- 40 days: Moses was in the mount to receive the law (Exodus 24:18)**
- 40 days: Moses was in the mount after the sin of the golden calf (Deut. 9:18,25)**
- 40 days: The spies were in the Promised Land, resulting in the forty years punishment in the wilderness (Num.13:26; 14:34)**
- 40 days: Elijah in Horeb (1Kings 19:8)**
- 40 days: Jonah in Ninevah (Jonah 3:4)**

On the 41st day of His life, Jesus was presented in the Temple, to the Lord. Under the law, as the first born male child, Jesus was to be sanctified and belonged to the Lord. Jesus was to live His life as a manifestation of His Father, and on that very first day in the Temple, is declared to be the Light of Revelation through whom will come the salvation of God.

This theme runs as a golden thread throughout the New Testament. As but just one example, Paul presents an excellent summary of this theme in his letter to the Colossians. He states it as an expression of thanks to God for all that is available to the faithful through Jesus.:

“Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the Saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1-12-14

He then declares of Jesus: **“and He is the image of the invisible God, the first born of all creation.”** Colossians 1:15 As Paul also says in Romans: **“...Jesus was to be the first born among many brethren”** (Romans 8:29), who would conform to His Father’s image and transfer them from darkness and sin to the inheritance of light. That day of dedication in the Temple signified the beginning, as Jesus was consecrated to His redeeming work of salvation, as the Son of God. Mark 1:1, Luke 1:2, and John 1:1, all introduce their Gospels with reference to the beginning of

Christ's ministry, but it is John, who puts Jesus' life into complete perspective in relationship to God's plan of salvation.

He presents Jesus' ministry as an echo of God's creative work in Genesis. By the power of God's Word alone, light entered a dark and formless world. **"Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness."** Genesis 1: 3-4

Jesus was the beginning of a new spiritual creation, so John presents this allusion to Genesis, so that his readers would clearly realize this. God's creative work is now manifested in His Son. His Word has become flesh. **"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth"** John 1:14 John declares to all readers of his Gospel, that from the beginning of His life of dedication, God's "Word," His Son, was with Him, in that He lived a "Godly" life, fully, completely, absolutely. Of all mankind, this could only be said of Jesus, that right from the beginning of His days: **"He was in the beginning with God"** John 1:2 This is verified through a consideration of the phrasing in verse 1: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** John 1:1

Greek text and concordances provide a great deal of help in effectively reading God's Word, which is why we recommend that they be used whenever possible, especially when reading what may be seen as difficult to understand verses. A definite article is usually used with the word "God" in New Testament Greek, signifying the Supreme Deity. In this first verse from John's Gospel, this article is used with the first use of "God," but not with the second. Thus, after referring to Jesus as the Word with God, John then proclaims the Divine reflection of God in His Son. In fact, Moffat, in translating the Bible renders is as **"...and the Word was Divine."**

God, through His creative Word, caused light to shine in darkness in the early days of creation. Jesus, His "Word made flesh," was the light to shine in a spiritually dark world filled with sin. Thus began a new Spiritual creation out of mankind, as the "Word dwelt among us." But the majority, in Jesus' day, rejected the new creation of light in Him, and did not see the light: **"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."** John 1: 4-5

LESSONS FOR US

In Jesus' time there was a faithful remnant that feared the Lord and watched and waited for the signs of His activity. In these darkening Gentile days, we can find strength and comfort in this evidence. But there is also a subtle warning on the distinction between watching and waiting. All Israel was watching for the coming of the promised Messiah but only a remnant was waiting for Him.

It is not difficult to watch the signs of the times, but only a life of devotion, and a quiet submission of the heart, will prepare us for the true spirit of waiting as well as watching.

“...Wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.” 1 Thess. 1:10

Jesus Christ: Study 7

The Visit of the Magi

The visit of the “Wise Men” is recorded only in Matthew’s Gospel. On the surface, it might seem strange that the most Jewish of the four Gospels is the one that offers a record of these Gentiles coming to honour Jesus. The early Church was faced with the problem of blending two very different groups of people into one unified body, as followers of Christ. The unification of Jews and Gentiles into one harmonious body was an issue that we find the Apostles faced with throughout the New Testament. Therefore, it appears to be logical that Matthew would include this record possibly in order to better commend Gentiles to his Jewish readers.

The fact that these men were Gentiles is evident from their ignorance of the Micah prophecy (Matt: 2: 5,6) which all Jews were familiar with (John 7:42). It is also implied by their use of the expression “King of the Jews”, as we note that every New Testament occurrence of this phrase comes from a Gentile. The Bible record does not state that they were Kings, nor does it say how many were involved. It simply says “Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem”. In the Old Testament, the term “Magi” is associated with Babylon. As an example of this we can look to Jeremiah 39, verses 3 and 13. Nergalsarezer, the Rab-mag (chief of the Magi) is named along with other leading officials of the King of Babylon.

Daniel, the most prominent Biblical name among the Jews in King Nebuchadnezzar’s Court, during the Babylonian captivity, was eventually appointed Chief of the Magi. This group included magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. (Dan. 5:11) From these clues, and from historical data relative to the Babylonians and Chaldeans, we can reasonably assume that these visitors seeking the new King were from a group of men in Babylon who were considered to be scribes and the custodians of knowledge and wisdom. History also confirms that this group set great store by omens and were skilled in astronomy.

Daniel, in his capacity as master of the Magi, would probably have related to them the hope of Israel, which would include the 70 weeks’ prophecy, (490 years) foretelling the birth and work of Jesus Christ. (Dan. 9:25). As scribes, they would pass the

records of such information from generation to generation. Their belief in omens and their association with astronomy would predispose them to act upon the sighting of a bright star or some unusual activity or phenomena in the sky to the East. This omen, coupled with the fact that it had been about 490 years since the prophecy regarding the birth of a great King had presented through Daniel, probably provoked their journey to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem would be the logical choice since the hope of the Jews in captivity in Babylon had always been to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. The scanty information given in the Matthew record would also suggest that once this caravan of wise men began their journey, the star disappeared. From that point forward their trip would have been a journey of faith, taking approximately four months. (Ezra 7:8,9)

It is estimated that Jesus was probably around 12 months old at the time of their visit. This can be deduced from 4 points:

- 1. It was certainly after Jesus' presentation in the Temple. If the Magi's gifts, which included gold from their treasures had already been presented, such devout people as Joseph and Mary would not have given the cleansing offering of two young pigeons. They would have been able to afford to offer the lamb.**
- 2. The Magi did not visit Jesus in the manger. His family was already living in a house by the time they came. (Matt: 2:11)**
- 3. The word used by Matthew for "child" in verse 11, means "a young child, a little boy". This is in contrast to the word used in Luke (Luke 2:12), which refers to "a babe in arms".**
- 4. When Herod was unable to locate the child Jesus, he had all the male children up to two years old in Bethlehem slain in an effort to eliminate what he saw as a threat to his family throne.**

Bethlehem

The Magi came to Jerusalem searching for the child King because they had no knowledge of His birth place. They knew nothing of the local political issues, or of King Herod's madness. Otherwise, they would not have openly declared their

purpose. They would assume that Jews everywhere would exult in His birth as they inquired of people in Jerusalem:

“Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to worship Him.” Matthew 2:2

They would probably have found it hard to understand the apparent unconcern of the Jewish people. However, news of the wise men’s visit would spread through the city quickly and Herod soon heard about it and as Matthew records in verse 3: “he was troubled”. And when King Herod was troubled, all of Jerusalem was troubled.

Little did these travellers suspect the evil they had aroused in the dark soul of the Idumean King, who ruled Israel. By craftiness, he had obtained a dispensation from Rome to rule Israel. His anxiety to retain that rule had become an obsession, which was only satisfied by the blood of every rival. In fact, he had already murdered his wife and some of his children because he thought they were plotting to overthrow him. In his old age he was a victim of his own vice. Those around him were potentially victims to his lust and jealousy. Living in the luxury of his new palace, this descendant of Esau, surrounded himself with spies, and lived in perpetual fear of retribution from an outraged people, jumping at every shadow and imagining the activity of enemies in every political move. Living anywhere near Herod was to live in great peril.

He certainly would have been aware of the events of the previous months - the story of Zacharias in the Temple, the words of Simeon, Anna the prophetess. The wise men’s visit coming on top of all this would, indeed, worry Herod. Their reference to a star, coupled with all these events, would have no doubt reminded him, or one of the Bible scholars around him, of a prophecy in the book of Numbers:

“There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab...and Edom shall be a possession...” Numbers 24: 17, 18

Herod was an Edomite, so the knowledge of such a prophecy, in the face of these present events would alarm him all the more and strengthen his resolution to thwart its accomplishment. So he called together the Chief Priests and Scribes and demanded to know where the Christ was to be born. Verses 5 and 6 in Matthew 2, confirm that they answered him with the prophecy from Micah 5:2, stating that His birth would take place in Bethlehem, land of Judah.

Herod immediately plotted to kill the infant Jesus, and secretly called in the Magi, determining from them, just when they had first seen the star. (Matt: 2:7) Faking a zeal to match that of the wise men, he sent them to Bethlehem, asking them to report back to him when they had located the child so that he, too, could worship Him. (Matthew 2:8)

Leaving Herod's court, the wise men travelled south to Bethlehem, and as suddenly as they had seen it before, the star reappeared. This time, it went before them, "till it came and stood over where the child was." Their hearts were filled with excitement and joy as they saw this outstanding God-given sign, following it to the house of Jesus. (Matt: 2:9,10)

At this point, we might consider why no one else saw this great light. If what they saw when they left Herod's palace in Jerusalem, was, indeed, a star, how could it lead them to a specific house in Bethlehem, not too many miles away, and then come to rest directly over top of it? If we look even at the moon as the brightest light in the sky over our city at night, it is difficult to determine how we could pinpoint it as being over one house because of the great distance involved between the earth and this light in the sky. We can see a relationship to this "star" that the Magi were following to the house in Bethlehem and the great light which shone on the shepherds the night that the angel announced the birth of the Christ child to them. In that case, it was identified as "the glory of the Lord shining around them". (Luke 2:9)

In the record of Matthew, describing the Magi being led to the house of this future King, we can find an echo of a great prophecy given in Isaiah, which speaks of the Glory of the Millennial Kingdom which will be ruled by Jesus. The echo of these prophetic words found in the record of the Magi, could also provide a foreshadowing of events to come. Thus we read:

"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you. And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." Isaiah 60:1-3

And again:

“A multitude of camels will cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba will come; they will bring gold and frankincense, and will bear good news of the praises of the Lord.” Isaiah 60: 6

If the glory of the Lord led these Magi to Jesus as a foreshadow of that great day when God’s glory will fill the earth and there will be no darkness as a result of His grace in the sacrifice of His own Son, it would explain why there was no excitement among the rest of the people and no attempt by others to follow the star, as the wise men did.

On an earlier occasion in the record of God’s Word, the Glory of the Lord was “a cloud and darkness” to the Egyptians, but “it gave light by night” to Israel to lead them to the Promised Land. They could see and follow this light, but the Egyptians could not.

This visit could also foreshadow the day when the nations of the earth will present their gifts, and give honour to the risen Jesus in the Kingdom of God as foretold in Isaiah 60. The Magi entered the house, saw Jesus with His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. Opening their treasures, they presented Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The Gifts

Apart from the echo to Isaiah, chapter 60, in these gifts (gold and frankincense) we can see a possible significance. From early Christian times they have been thought to represent:

THE GOLD	a symbol of the Messiah’s Kingship
THE FRANKINCENSE	a symbol of His Divine origin as the Son of God
THE MYRRH	a symbol of His death
Biblically, each of the gifts is significant:	
GOLD	a symbol of tried and precious faith (1 Peter 1:7)
FRANKINCENSE	is a symbol of prayer (Exodus 30:34)
MYRRH	(from a word that means bitterness) is a symbol of sacrifice and can relate to subjection to God’s Word (Revelation 10:9, 10; Ezekiel 3:14)

The greater significance, however, is found when we consider the fact that these three gifts in particular, that were presented by the Magi, are all associated with the High Priest in his service before God under the Law of Moses.

- The High Priest wore, on his forehead, a golden plate: “Holy to the Lord”. (Exodus 28:36).
- In the sanctuary, he carried a golden sensor where incense burned, with frankincense being the main ingredient. (Exodus 30:34)
- His office of High Priest began with his anointing with the Holy Oil in which myrrh was an essential ingredient. (Exodus 30:23)

In the echo provided by the presentation of these three gifts, from these Gentile worshippers, we can find reference to the fact that this new King of the Jews was also to be “A priest after the order of Melchizedek”. (Psalm 110:4)

In his letter to the Hebrews, the author compares Christ with the Priesthood of Melchizedek, and says:

“Now the main point in what has been said is this: We have such a High Priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the majesty in the heavens,” (Hebrews 8:1)

Having been warned by God in a dream, the Magi then departed for their own country, taking a route that would enable them to avoid Herod, so they did not reveal the location of this child whom Herod so desperately sought to murder.

LESSON FOR US

Those who hear and heed God's Word, will seek out Jesus Christ and will lay before Him Spiritual gifts that evidence a life given to God in mind, affection, and action. The Son of God opens the way to the Glory that is His Father's

“I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship”. Romans 12:1

Test Yourself

- 1) Who was Simeon and what are the lessons that we can learn from the words that he spoke about Jesus?
- 2) In what way is Jesus the Light of the World?
- 3) Who were the Magi who brought gifts for Jesus?
- 4) What did the gift of Gold symbolise?
- 5) What did the gift of Frankincense symbolise?
- 6) What did the gift of Myrrh symbolise?

Jesus Christ: Study 8

Sanctuary in Egypt

Only Matthew provides detail regarding the period between the departure of the wise men and the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, moving to Nazareth. (Matt. 2:13-23) Luke does refer to their return to the city of Nazareth (Luke 2:39), but omits everything between the presentation at the Temple and this move to Nazareth. As soon as the wise men left, an Angel appeared to Joseph, also in a dream, warning him to arise and flee into Egypt. He was to stay there with the child and His mother, until he was told to leave. Herod was going to seek the child Jesus to destroy Him. (Matt. 2:13) In this we might see a reflection of the statement made in Psalm 91 regarding one who dwells in the shelter of the Most High.

“For He will give His Angels charge concerning You, to guard You in all your ways.” Psalm 91:11

“For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper,” Psalm 91:3

Following this warning, Joseph did not hesitate. Hurriedly, he arose, and under the cover of night, he left Bethlehem for Egypt, where he stayed until Herod died.

Bible Echo

This flight enabled fulfilment of another prophecy concerning Him, which had been foreshadowed previously through God’s children.

“Out of Egypt did I call My Son” Hosea 11:1; Matt. 2:15.

From Abraham’s time onward, Israel’s call was to “come out of Egypt.” Abraham had gone into Egypt, suffered affliction, and then had come out with great possessions. (Gen.12: 10, 17; 13:1-2)

Drought also drove Israel to Egypt in Joseph's time where eventually they became slaves, but God gave the nation deliverance through Moses. (Ex. 12: 51; 4:23)

Now, Jesus, as the Spiritual embodiment of the nation, experienced the same fate. In a sense, we are all like Jesus for when we are called to depart from sin, the sin we leave behind is Biblically represented by Egypt or the world. If we would gain the Kingdom of God, ungodly ways of the world must be abandoned.

The Slaughter

As the wise men left, and Joseph fled into Egypt with his family, Herod waited impatiently. It soon became apparent that the Magi were not going to return. In fact, as he saw it, they had played tricks with him (mocked or made a fool of him - Greek). Herod's only clue as to where this rival king, as he viewed it, was to be born was that supplied by the Chief Priests - Bethlehem. From what the wise men had said it was about a year or more since the strange sign had been seen in the sky. Allowing a margin for error, he resolved that every boy in Bethlehem up to the age of two should die, but not only in Bethlehem, but also in the countryside around it. (Matthew 2:16)

It was something so criminal, that public conscience was revolted. A shudder of horror passed through the land, and the cry of Jeremiah 31:15, "Rachel weeping for her children," who "refuse to be comforted," was heard in the land., (Matt. 2:18) This event re-enacted the tragedy of over six centuries before, when the people had been assembled at Ramah, before being driven into exile in Babylon. (Jer. 40:1) Rachel, who had desperately desired children (Gen. 30:1), and whose tomb was near Bethlehem, (Gen.35:16-19; 48:7), is seen as representative of all Israelitish mothers who have been deprived of their young ones.

Foreshadow

This reference provided by Matthew, in taking us back to Jeremiah, leads us to Jeremiah's additional prophecy regarding the eventual restoration of Israel. Although Jeremiah in his time, spoke in reference to the return of the children of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, this event, and this prophecy, coupled with Matthew's reference, provide us with a foreshadow of the day when Israel would be once again restored. We, today, have seen the beginning of this fulfilment in 1948 when Israel once again became a nation.

“Thus says the Lord, restrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, declares the Lord, and they shall return from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, declares the Lord, and your children shall return to their own territory. Jeremiah 31:16-17

Herod’s Death

No one was sorry when, a short time later, (in about B.C. 4), Herod died in misery, full of diseases and vindictive to the end against everyone. History records that he died of a terrible disease at Jericho, at the age of 69, after a long reign of 37 years. The Jews made the day of his death a permanent Feast Day, yet this was the man who had supplied all the resources for the rebuilding of their Temple.

The Return from Egypt

The news of Herod’s death would no doubt, quickly reach Egypt. But once again we see Joseph’s faith and obedience. He had been told to remain there (in Egypt) until advised to return. (Matt. 2:13) When the Angel appeared in the dream, Joseph once again, obeyed without hesitation and took the child and His mother out of Egypt into Israel. (Matt. 2:19-21)

After Herod died, Augustus Caesar had divided the country between three of Herod’s sons. Archelaus, the worst of the three, was the new ruler in Judea. This made Joseph afraid to go to Judea. His fears were well founded for Archelaus was vicious and brutal. History records that at his first Passover, he had 3,000 Jews massacred in the Temple, because of a revolt against the Romans while he was away in Rome.

Once again, God intervened and being warned in a dream, Joseph headed for the regions of Galilee, where Herod Antipas, a much milder person, ruled. (Matt. 2:22) Thus the family took up residence at Nazareth, and the stage was set for the growth to manhood of the Son of God. (Matt. 2:23)

A Nazarene

Matthew says that this was done “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” No specific prophecy to that effect appears in the Old Testament. It is obviously a general message concerning Jesus that

Matthew has in mind, which he weaves together by a play upon words. Nazareth, in despised Galilee, (John 1:46; 1 Kings 9:11-13; Isaiah 9:1), would bring to mind such prophecies as Isaiah 11:1 concerning Jesus as the “root out of a dry ground” and “the branch” and, certainly, Isaiah 53:3, concerning the despised and suffering sin-bearer.

“He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” Isaiah 53:3

There were other prophets, also, who prophesied much the same thing. For example: Jeremiah 23:5-6; Jeremiah 33:14-16; Ezekiel 17:22-24; Zech. 3:8; 6:12.

Further we note that a Nazarite under the Law of Moses was one who separated himself to God (Num 6:2) and some like Samson were dedicated to God from birth (Judges 13:7) Thus everything that happened to Jesus was necessary to fulfil the Divine Plan concerning Him.

LESSON FOR US

Like Joseph, we should be prepared to follow God’s way as revealed in His Word, without question, and in absolute faith.

Just as Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, we can follow Christ as He leads us out of the way of worldliness, maintaining our faith and confidence in Him, without looking back.

“Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe.” Jude, verse 5

Test Yourself

1. Why did Joseph take Jesus into Egypt?
2. What did Herod do when he realised that he had been deceived by the Magi?
3. Why was Jesus called a ‘Nazarene’?

Jesus Christ: Study 9

The Early Years

All that is known about Jesus up to the age of 12 is covered by one verse:

“And the child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.” Luke 2:40

Prophetic Fulfillment

The prophecies of the Old Testament come to life both in actual fulfillment and in the foreshadowing of fulfillment as the Gospel Records begin to unfold the life of Jesus. As we read this verse in Luke, references in the margin immediately take us back to the Prophet Isaiah, who presents a wonderful picture of the Messiah’s reign in the future millennial Kingdom. Isaiah begins this prophecy by describing the coming forth of a shoot or an offspring from the stem of Jesse, (King David’s father), and that a Branch from this offspring’s roots will bear fruit.

The person that Isaiah is about to describe is from the family of David, but this cannot refer simply to David’s son, Solomon. Although Solomon ruled the Kingdom of Israel at the height of its glory, that natural kingdom was but a foreshadow of the Millennial Kingdom to come.

As the prophecy unfolds, the reader will see that the Branch to which Isaiah refers can only be the Messiah, for the conditions that he describes in this wonderful kingdom have never yet existed on this earth, and will not exist until Jesus returns to establish and rule His Father’s Kingdom in the millennial age.

“Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit, and the Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And He will delight in the fear of the Lord,” Isaiah 11: 1-3

The words used by Luke to describe Jesus during His developing years as a child are a direct echo of Isaiah's description of a Branch who will come out of the root of Jesse.

Jesus' First Words

Luke is the only writer to provide a record containing details about Jesus' life from His return from Egypt into Nazareth until His ministry begins at the age of 30. From His ministry and teachings, we can deduce some things with a reasonable assurance of accuracy. His knowledge of Scripture and God's law with which He was able to challenge even the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees, would confirm that He very faithfully studied the Scriptures. The devout faithfulness of Mary and Joseph would certainly suggest that they fulfilled their responsibility of teaching their children the law of the Lord. It was a father's sacred trust in Israel, even after all those centuries of disobedience and travail.

“And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your hearts; And you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.” Deut. 6: 6-7

It is not beyond reason to surmise that in His God given destiny as King of the Jews, He would have thoughtfully and carefully written His own copy of the law, which Moses had described as a duty for every King of the Jews. (Deut. 17:18-20)

Although Joseph had a skill as a carpenter, we might also safely assume that Jesus was brought up in very humble circumstances, and in a struggle against poverty. The parables of Jesus are full of homely scenes which might have had their source in His own early experience. The patched garment, the widow's feverish search for a lost coin of little value, father and children sharing a bed, the one raised lamp which could illuminate the whole house - all these seem to reflect what might have been some struggling circumstances from His youth.

From this background, from Mary and Joseph's loving devotion, from Jesus' attention to God's word, from the strength of God's grace upon Him, and His growing wisdom in God's way, would come a youthful obedience and subjection to Mary and Joseph as a dutiful child. In fact, Luke states that He “continued in subjection to them.” (Luke 2:51)

Luke states in verses 40 and 52 that Jesus kept increasing in wisdom. This “wisdom” can have reference to nothing but the divine wisdom of the Scriptures, for, Biblically, there is no other wisdom.

The Visit to the Temple

Luke, in his record of Jesus’ life, jumps from Jesus’ presentation in the Temple at the age of 41 days, while they were still living in Bethlehem, right to Jesus’ 12th year, by which time they were living in Nazareth, following the return from Egypt. He then describes the next record of a visit to the Temple by Jesus beginning at verse 41 of chapter 2. All male Jews were required to attend at the Temple three times in the year, at Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. (Exodus 23:14-17). It was not obligatory for women or children to attend the feasts, but Mary did so, with Joseph, “every year” (verse 41) at the Passover time. Attendance at all three festivals was difficult with Jews scattered all over the Roman world, but many made the effort once a year.

The year of this journey in Luke’s record was a special occasion, for Jesus was 12 years old. At that age, as with other Jewish boys, in their thirteenth year, He became a “Son of the covenant,” or “Son of the precepts,” and it was His responsibility thereafter to keep the law.

We might well imagine the feelings going through Jesus’ mind as He entered the Temple on this special occasion. He stood on the sacred spot that God had chosen that His name might be there. It was on this rock that Abraham had shown the faith of complete dedication in offering His son of promise in obedience to God’s command. It was here that Solomon had received divine instruction to build a house in which God should dwell. It was here that when the building was finished, mortal man reached his highest point of communion with his Maker. It was here that God accepted the petitions of His people in a glory that filled the house, preventing the entrance of the Priests.

All these echoes of history, pointing forward to the ultimate Sacrificial Lamb provided by God, merge together, finding a completion and fulfilment in Jesus, who stood at that point as a Son of the Covenant at this Passover Feast. Passover is followed by the seven days of Unleavened Bread, and since attendance at this was not obligatory, many would have returned home immediately after the Passover Sabbath. But the family of Jesus remained. They spent the “full number of days” (Luke 2:43).

On this occasion, at the end of these seven days, Jesus was left behind when His parents set out for home. This does not suggest carelessness on the part of Mary and Joseph. Following practice in a large group, the women and small children went ahead, and the men followed with the bigger boys. Joseph and Mary might each have thought that Jesus was with the other. For a full day they journeyed, looking for Him among the travellers (Luke 2:44), before they concluded that He must still be in Jerusalem. We might well imagine the anxiety that was building in them from the time they missed Him and returned to Jerusalem, until they found Him after three days in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking questions. (Luke 2:46)

It is reasonable, at this point, to picture Mary as an anxious mother, breaking into this quiet circle of discussion, having conflicting emotions of relief at finding Him and distress because He had stayed behind. This location in the Temple was a customary place for teaching. The teachers in the Synagogue in Nazareth would probably not have been of the calibre of those in the Temple in Jerusalem. As we look at verse 47, we gain insight into the educational system of the day, which put emphasis on listening, asking questions, and answering questions. In other words, it was a discussion giving scope for the student to both ask and answer questions. We note the level of His wisdom as the teachers were amazed at His understanding and His answers.

It is logical to assume what one of His questions might have been. At Passover time, according to the commandment of Exodus 12:26, and according to universal Jewish custom throughout the centuries, the first born of each family was to put forward the question: “what does this rite mean to you?” (Rite of Passover) The answer which Scripture supplied was: “it is the sacrifice (of a specially selected lamb) of the Lord’s Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt.”

This passing over was a protection, the Lord “not suffering the destroyer to come in unto the houses” of His people, covered by the blood of the lamb. (Exodus 12:27, 23) That specially selected lamb was now sitting in the midst of these teachers. Now, if not earlier, the cross was already casting its shadow across His path. Psalm 88 is one of the saddest in the book of Psalms, describing in detail the calamities facing one in a crisis that threatens his life. It abounds with references to untimely death. And it has been suggested that it points forward to the sacrifice of Jesus necessitated by our sins. One line from this Psalm reads: “I am afflicted and ready to die from a boy.” (Verse 15)

When Mary and Joseph found Him, Mary reproached Him, her motherly love overcoming any embarrassment at interrupting these learned teachers.

“Son, why have you treated us this way? Behold, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.” Luke 2:48

We then read Jesus’ quiet reply, not a rebuke, but rather a declaration that something wonderful has happened in His life.

“Why is it that you were looking for me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” Luke 2:49

These words introduce us to the first statement of Jesus recorded in the Gospel record. Before the clouds eventually take Him out of the sight of His devoted Apostles (Acts 1:9) we will read of many gracious utterances that fall from His lips. But, in these first recorded words the purpose of His life is crystallized. He must be about His Father’s business - fulfilling His Father’s purposes. This resolution was to make great demands of Him. It would put Him to the test in the wilderness, try Him among seething, clamouring multitudes, strained relationships, and at times, even bewilder His dearest friends and followers. It was to demand a loyalty in which earthly relationships were to be forgotten. His family would be those who did His Father’s will. It was finally to make the supreme demand of life itself. The life of Jesus is the record of how He did all these things with quiet confidence and unflinching faith, and with a clear perspective of the work He was doing in relationship to the purpose of His Father.

His answer shows that this early in His life Jesus had an idea of the importance of the service of God and that He stood in a special relationship to God. The expression “My Father,” is noteworthy since no parallel to it is noted in the Scriptures. The Jews, when referring to the Father, added “in heaven” or used “our Father,” or words to that effect. Jesus’ choice of words is, indeed, a recognition of His unique relationship to God, and the necessity of being in His house.

Neither Joseph nor Mary captured the full meaning of these words, but Mary kept all these sayings in her heart. However, Jesus returned to Nazareth and was subject to His parents, and He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:51, 52)

The absence of any further reference to Joseph in the Gospel records, after Jesus was 12, would suggest that he probably died sometime during the 18 years prior to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. As the oldest son, this would leave upon His young shoulders the responsibility of the home.

Nothing more is said of His growth to manhood. Yet what is said is enough to give the picture of a youth whose whole attitude was God-centred. He did not attend any of the great centres of learning (Luke 4:22). On the contrary, He regularly attended the Synagogue (Luke 4:16), and He was filled with lessons woven from life observed with a mind which God had quickened. This was the Man, who at age 30, was presented to the nation. As He grew, there was another young man who was also growing in favour with God, undoubtedly, straining at the leash, eager to be out and busy calling a wayward nation back to its God, preparing the way for the Messiah. (John the Baptist)

LESSONS FOR US

When we picture this innocent young man, Jesus, in the Temple on that occasion, and remember the significance of the Passover Feast, might each one of us remember, with sadness, that it is our sins that demanded His sacrifice. It is only through God's grace, and Jesus loving obedience to His Father, that we can receive forgiveness of sins, and escape the bondage of death. As we read of His life, might each one of us remember with humble thanksgiving, that He gave His life for us.

“...Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29

Test Yourself

- 1) How old was Jesus and what special feast did Mary and Joseph go to Jerusalem to celebrate?
- 2) What was particularly relevant about this feast to the Lord Jesus?
- 3) What did Mary and Joseph say to Jesus when they found Him and what was His reply?