

The Life and Teachings of JESUS CHRIST

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CHAPTER 1

THE THIRTY YEARS OF PREPARATION

If JESUS of Nazareth is not the Messiah of Israel, then there never was and never could be a Messiah. If it were not for JESUS the Jews today would be either a completely forgotten people, like so many of the lost Asiatic peoples, or, at most, a small obscure tribe, like the Samaritans, or the tribe of Chinese Jews today; so insignificant and obscure, dwelling in some corner of Asia, that hardly anyone would know of their existence.

In this enlightened age, as his mind expands, the pupil of Moses may ask himself, whether all the princes of the house of David have done so much for the Jews as that Prince who was crucified on Calvary. Has not He made their history the most famous in the world? Has not He hung up their laws in every temple? Has not He vindicated all their wrongs? Has not He avenged the victory of Titus and conquered the Caesars? -- Lord Beaconsfield, Jewish Christian statesman.

OUTLINE

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The revival of prophecy.

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THE THIRTY YEARS OF PREPARATION

I. THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (Luke 1:1-25, 57-80)

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years. And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense. And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. 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. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb. And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. 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 show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the temple. And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless. And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house. And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had showed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his father, how he would have him called. And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God. And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea. And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which he sware to our father Abraham, That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel."

THE CESSATION OF PROPHECY

We may well describe the prophecy of Malachi as the farewell message of the Old Testament prophecy, for there followed a period of four hundred years when the voice of a living prophet was not heard. The prophets had delivered their message in full, and now the time had come for the nation to study and to distribute their writings, and during the long winter of Gentile domination, to warm themselves at the fires of Messianic prophecy, and wait patiently for the coming of GOD's King and GOD's Kingdom.

Old Testament prophecy closed with a prediction on the lips of the last prophet. That prediction was the coming of Elijah to prepare the nation for GOD's great day. So as we open the New Testament, we find that the story of the CHRIST begins with the annunciation of the birth of a mighty prophet, who was to be filled with the HOLY GHOST from birth, and who was to prepare the way before the Lord Messiah.

After four hundred years of silence the heavens opened to make way for the angelic announcement of the birth of the one who was to minister to Israel "**in the spirit and power of Elias.**" That one was John, whose birth was announced to Zacharias, an aged priest, and to Elisabeth, his barren wife. He was to be "a herald, making ready a people prepared for the Lord,

running before the royal chariot, proclaiming the coming One, and preparing His way, then leaving his own little footprints to disappear, thrown up in the chariot of dust of Him who was mightier and greater than he."

THE REVIVAL OF PROPHECY

In the first two chapters of Luke's Gospel, the HOLY SPIRIT is mentioned seven times, and is described as inspiring with the spirit of prophecy many chosen individuals. Thus we learn that there was a special outpouring of the SPIRIT before the birth of the Lord JESUS CHRIST -- a sign that Old Testament prophecy was being revived. In these chapters we hear angelic annunciations and SPIRIT-filled, inspired utterances, signs of the opened heavens and the outpoured SPIRIT.

In due time Zacharias' son was born. As a sign of the gracious, divine visitation he was to announce, he was called John, which means "*Jehovah is gracious*." Much of his boyhood, youth, and manhood were spent in the desert, which became his school of preparation. There he pondered the writings of the prophets, brooded over the nation's backslidden condition, sought the face of GOD, and awaited the divine call to his public ministry.

II. THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. 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. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS. (Matthew 1:18-25)

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-7)

THE ANNUNCIATION

GOD decreed that His Son be born of a human mother in order that He might live a complete

human life.

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

"But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Galatians 4:4)

Mary, a virgin of Nazareth, was chosen for the signal honor of becoming the mother of the Son of GOD. Six months after the angelic announcement foretelling John the Baptist's birth, an angel informed Mary that she was to be the mother of the Redeemer of the world, and for this purpose the HOLY GHOST should overshadow her, so that the child should be not only the Son of man, but the Son of GOD too. Mary had been favored of GOD with the privilege earnestly desired by Jewish mothers -- the honor of giving birth to the Messiah.

Before this event Mary was betrothed to a godly man named Joseph. When Joseph found that Mary was with child, he planned to put her away, but learned from an angel who appeared to him that the child was begotten of the HOLY GHOST, and was to be the virgin-born Redeemer predicted by the prophet Isaiah.

It is important to note that the "virgin birth" is not the same as the "immaculate conception." The latter term refers to the Roman Catholic dogma to the effect that Mary was born without the taint of original sin. It was necessary that the Saviour come through a virgin because the sin nature is transferred to the child through the seed of man. By coming to the world through the seed of a woman (Genesis 3:15) CHRIST was the only person born without a sin nature or original sin.

The child was to be called JESUS, which means, "*GOD the Saviour*" and is the Greek version of the Hebrew name *Joshua*. He would be called "**Emmanuel**" to His people -- a visible token that GOD had revealed Himself to man in a way never before known, GOD is with us.

Upon the historical fact of the virgin birth is based the doctrine of the Incarnation, which teaches that GOD entered the world in the person of His Son to reveal Himself to men and win salvation for them.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." (John 1:14).

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." (II Corinthians 5:19)

THE BIRTH OF THE SAVIOUR

In those days there went forth a decree from the Roman government that every Jewish householder should go to his ancestral home in order to be registered for taxation. This decree was the providential occasion of the birth of the Messiah in the town mentioned by the prophet of old -- Bethlehem. David's great Son was born in David's home town.

"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." (Micah 5:2)

JESUS' Davidic ancestry connects His mission with the ancient promise made to David. As a reward for his faithfulness, David was promised an everlasting dynasty, and eternal sovereignty over Israel was given to his house.

"And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever." (II Samuel 7:16).

This was the Davidic, or throne, covenant. From that time dates the expectation that, come what might to the nation, there would surely appear, in GOD's time, a king belonging to the stock and lineage of David. Jehovah would come down for the salvation of His people, at which time there would be on earth a living descendant of the Davidic family, through whom Jehovah would deliver and then rule His people. The New Testament writers present the coming of JESUS as the fulfillment of this promise: **"And thou shalt call his name JESUS, for he shall save his people from their sins."**

Isaiah predicted that the Jewish nation would be almost destroyed, and the house of David would cease as a royal house -- would be hewn down to a stump. Yet from that stump would come a shoot, from the roots of that stump a Branch -- the King-Messiah.

"And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:" (Isaiah 11:1)

"For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." (Isaiah 53:2).

Hundreds of years after the royal house of David had ceased, an angel appeared unto a Jewish girl and said, **"And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the highest: and the Lord GOD shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."** (Luke 1:31-33).

This was in partial fulfillment of Isaiah 9:6,7 **"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."**

A Deliverer had arisen from the house of David. At a time when the house of David seemed reduced to its lowest estate, when the living heirs were a humble carpenter and a simple maiden, then by GOD's miraculous agency, the BRANCH sprouted up from the hewn-down stump and grew into a mighty tree that has provided shelter for many people.

III. THE RECEPTION OF THE CHRIST-CHILD

MATTHEW 2

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 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. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

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. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, 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. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

LUKE 2

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 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. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 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, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

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. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived

with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

ADORED BY HUMBLE SHEPHERDS (Luke 2:8-20).

Simple shepherds were chosen to be the first heralds of the news that the Lord Messiah was born in Bethlehem, and to hear the angelic choir rejoicing over the entrance into the world of Him who was to bring glory to GOD and peace and good will to men. After gazing upon the Babe in the manger, they spread the tidings everywhere that He who is Israel's hope and glory had entered the world.

WELCOMED BY JEWISH SAINTS (Luke 2:21-39).

When JESUS was eight days old, He was circumcised according to the law of Moses, and so became a member of the covenant people. Later He was taken to the temple, and, as the first-born of the family, was consecrated to the Lord.

*****How interesting is that concept, the Lord was consecrated to the Lord. "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?" (Hebrews 1:5).**

For hundreds of years Jewish saints had patiently awaited the appearing of the Messiah; year after year passed without any sign of His coming. but at this time there was an aged saint, named Simeon, to whom the SPIRIT had revealed the good news that he would live to see the Messiah. Led by the SPIRIT, he came to the temple, met the parents, and had the joy of holding in his arms Israel's Messiah. At the same time, the child was welcomed by Anna, an aged prophetess,

who announced the good news to those devout Jews who were living in daily expectation of the manifestation of the Lord's salvation. The spiritual remnant in Jerusalem took courage. Deliverance was at hand!

*** Even as there are those that are patiently waiting for His second coming, so too were there those awaiting His first coming. Who says there were no blood-bought believers in the Old Testament. And can you imagine knowing that you would not die until you cast your eyes upon Him that was to come, promised by the prophets? Would that GOD would do the same for our present generation. That we should not taste death before He came. Do you all not see it, here is a veiled prophecy of the Rapture in the second chapter of Luke!

SOUGHT AND WORSHIPED BY GENTILE SCHOLARS (Matthew 2:1-12).

There came to Jerusalem one day some Gentile scholars from the East, who enquired where they might find the King of the Jews, whose birth had been announced to them by a strange star. After a consultation with the Jewish priests and scholars, Herod the king directed them to Bethlehem.

Who were they? From their name, the Magi, we conclude that they were members of a priestly class from Babylon or Persia who specialized in the study of the stars and the interpretations of dreams. It may be that from Jews living in their country they had heard the news that a great King was to be born in Judea who should be the Redeemer of the world. Perhaps their ancestors had known about this for many hundreds of years. Balaam, who was a member of their class, had prophesied of the coming of a Star from Jacob: **"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."** (Numbers 24:17); and Daniel, who was once head of the college of the wise men of Babylon, had foretold the coming of the Messiah: **"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed"** (Daniel 7:13, 14).

They came probably from the same country where Abraham received his call, modern Iraq, and where he learned that all nations should be blessed through a people descended from him. But whatever the country of their origin, we may regard them as earnest seekers after the true GOD, who were attempting to find His truth in the stars, and whose earnest desire was rewarded by the vision of an extraordinary star that led them to the Saviour.

Let by the star, they came to the house where the CHILD was, and when they saw Him, they worshipped Him, and offered gifts as a token of homage and consecration -- a prophecy of the time when millions of Gentiles would acknowledge the Messiah as their King and consecrate their lives to Him.

"When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the

kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:10-12).

*** Wise men still seek Him. It is interesting here to note that JESUS CHRIST was not a baby in a manger when the Magi came to bestow upon Him their gifts. Note this verse: "**And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him.**" They did not come to the Babe in the manger, but to the boy in a house. He was perhaps two years old at this time. We know that JESUS was about two here because immediately after, Herod sought to kill all children two years and younger.

HIS PRESENCE IGNORED BY JEWISH PRIESTS AND SCHOLARS (Matthew 2:4-6)

When the Wise Men enquired concerning the place of Messiah's birth, King Herod called a meeting of the priests and scholars, who informed him that Bethlehem was to be the birthplace of the King. They had an intellectual knowledge concerning the Messiah, but were utterly oblivious of the fact He was in their midst. "Among the Jews the political head (the king), the religious leaders (the chief priests), and the foremost in learning (the scribes), all alike were ignorant of the presence of their true King, and yet Gentiles had come for the Far East expressly to worship Him!" As the adoration of the Wise Men was a foreshadowing of the Gentiles' acceptance of the CHRIST, so the Jewish leaders' ignorance of His presence was a foreshadowing of Israel's later rejection of Him.

*** The Gentiles traveled hundreds of miles to see this King while the people that He came for wouldn't travel the distance of thirty minutes to see. "**He came unto his own, and his own received him not**" (John 1:11).

PERSECUTED BY ISRAEL'S KING

At that time the land was ruled by a cruel, oppressive king named Herod, half-Jew, half-Edomite, who had been placed upon the throne by the Romans. He was heartily hated by the Jews who could not in their hearts acknowledge as king a foreigner in sympathy with the hated Romans. This Herod was of a suspicious disposition and was in constant fear of plots to dethrone him. Besides, at this time, there was great excitement in Judea. There was a fierce hatred of foreign rule and this was being aggravated by the rabbis and false prophets. People had been deceived by false messiahs. Some had led the people to the Mount of Olives to see the walls of Jerusalem fall. Others had brought them to the desert to wait for the sign of the Son of man predicted by Daniel.

*** It is good to bear in mind that this was not a small traveling troupe of three seekers. In fact, it was a huge caravan consisting of possibly dozens of men. The Magi were themselves royalty, if not kings themselves. ("We three kings of Orient are . . ."). However, what fact seems to support this? Matthew 2:3 says, "**When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.**" This "troubling" is prior to Herod's mad attempt to slay the children of Israel - rather, this has to do with their city - quite small in comparison to many of our towns, was inundated with this troupe of searchers and their serving men.

Therefore when the Wise Men spoke of the birth of a king, Herod immediately planned to

destroy Him, and to this end instructed the Wise Men to bring word when they had found Him. But, warned in a dream, they returned to their own country by another way, while the parents of JESUS were warned by an angel to flee to the land of Egypt. When the Wise Men failed to return, Herod was enraged and commanded that all the children of Bethlehem from the age of two and under should be killed. Like Moses, JESUS escaped the murderous design of a cruel king, while many of His fellow babes perished.

Herod's slaughter of the children of Bethlehem was quite in keeping with his character. He had murdered his wife, many of his sons, and some of the best men of the nation. Knowing that the Jews would rejoice at his death, he had thousands of the most prominent Jews imprisoned in Jericho and gave secret orders that immediately after his death they should be killed, so that at least they and their friends should have cause to weep for his death. Fortunately, the order was not executed.

SHELTERED IN A GENTILE LAND. (Matthew 2:13-15)

The holy family remained in Egypt until the death of Herod. As the chosen people, during its infancy, was sheltered in the land of Egypt, so Messiah, Israel's representative, was given refuge in the same country. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy, "Out of Egypt have I called my son."

IV. THE CHILDHOOD OF JESUS

And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. (Luke 2:39-52)

THE SETTLEMENT IN NAZARETH

"After the death of Herod, Joseph planned to settle in Judea, the rightful home of the Messiah. But since a cruel king was reigning there, GOD warned him to make his home in Galilee. This was according to prophecy which taught the Messiah was not to grow up recognized as such, but was to be in a state of humiliation, with those around Him ignorant of His dignity and destiny."

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:5-7).

"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." (Isaiah 53:1, 2)

Still, as a great prophet and miracle-worker, He was to bring light to the despised land of Galilee. **"Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isaiah 9:1, 2).**

This is what a noted Jewish scholar writer says about Nazareth and Galilee:

"The village itself was very small; indeed it was so obscure that it never once receives mention in the Old Testament. . . . Galilee had once been a place inhabited by half-breed Jews, but from the time of the Maccabees, it became a center of the most intense Jewish patriotism. The people there were not so well educated as those in Jerusalem, but for all that, they were not lacking in extreme devotion to GOD and fervent faith that He would send the Messiah to rescue them from the talons of Rome. Indeed, the spirit of rebellion against Rome was fiercer in Galilee than almost anywhere in Palestine. About an hour's walk from Nazareth was the important city of Sepphoris, and we know from history that this was a time a stronghold of the revolutionists. All around Nazareth there were other cities and villages where the spark of rebellion lay always ready to be fanned." Galilee, as a region, was a center of rebellion against Rome.

Among a people who were looking for a warlike, political Messiah, lived the true Messiah, who was to deliver His people from their real bondage -- the bondage of sin.

THE FIRST VISIT TO JERUSALEM

Luke is the only Gospel writer who mentions an incident concerning the childhood of CHRIST. Since his Gospel emphasizes the perfect humanity of CHRIST, he is led to show that JESUS, though the Son of GOD, grew normally like any other child. The Gospel writers maintain a comparative silence concerning the childhood of CHRIST, for the purpose is not to satisfy our curiosity, but to relate just those facts that are necessary to our salvation and the confirmation of our faith.

Luke tells us that JESUS, when He was twelve years of age, visited Jerusalem with His parents to attend the Passover. As they were returning they missed the Lord, and after much searching they found Him in the temple reasoning with the learned rabbis. When they remonstrated with Him, He expressed surprise, and said, **"How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"** The parents did not understand this saying, for, after all, they

were simple folk, and they had a child whose knowledge and wisdom was far beyond theirs, and whose divine nature surpassed their understanding. Only after the Day of Pentecost did they really understand the mission of Him of whom they had been privileged to be the early protectors.

The main purpose for recording this incident is to teach us that JESUS, while a child, knew that He was the Son of GOD and was conscious of a special mission in the world.

THE EIGHTEEN YEARS OF SILENCE

These years were passed in Nazareth, in the home of Joseph and Mary. There He worked as a carpenter. **"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."** (Mark 6:3) After the death of Joseph, He supported His mother, thus sanctifying by His example the duties of home life and the obligation of honest labor. There in Nazareth He **"increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man,"** and awaited GOD's call to active service.

*** Now, my dear Catholic readers. I appreciate the fact that you are here and reading this study and trust that you are receiving a blessing from it. I must say to you, that the Word of GOD will fit you to avoid any teachings that are, frankly, untrue. One of those teachings is that Mary remained a perpetual virgin throughout her life. This is simply untrue. If you will just revisit the verse in the paragraph above, it is stated most clearly that JESUS had four brothers and an unknown number of sisters. Note that the verse does not say that they were half-brothers. I pray that you will love and trust the Word of GOD, even if it contradicts the teaching of a church.

~ end of chapter 1 ~
