

I. JESUS OF NAZARETH, A JEWISH MAN

- A. Old Testament prophecy intentionally leaves us waiting and hoping for a man to come and restore things to what they were like in the garden. Man had unhindered communion with God and dominion over the earth. But they fell, and thus depravity entered into the fabric of the heart of humanity. As the Lord curses Satan, He promises one to come and that would crush his head.
- B. That man would be a Jewish King and Priest from the tribe Judah and from the family line of King David. The scepter would not depart from Him and His government would bring peace.
- C. The Law and the prophets are riddled with whispers of this promise and as time progressed the specificity and expectation would increase within the nation God called Israel. From Ur to Canaan and from Egypt to the Wilderness, God was narrowing the seed to a people group, and one tribe within that group and one family within that tribe.
- D. The Nation of Israel was chosen to be that people. As the chosen people, they would be betrothed to Him in the desert and bear witness to Him in the promised land so that the nations would join into the waiting and the hope for the Seed promised to Eve: the mother of all humanity. He (the Seed of the woman) would bring redemption, He would restore all things, He would be a man, and He would be the Son of God.
- E. No doubt about it. God had promised and had shown Himself faithful to the nation of Israel, He was sending the Seed but when would He come? What would He look like? How would He come? Would they recognize Him? Would they be able to pick Him out of the crowd? The history of Israel's refusal and their previous lack of response to Yahweh gives us a pretty clear indication of the answer to these questions.
- F. Time and time again God had spoken to Israel about what He had chosen them to be and do before the nations and time and time again they forgot Him and turned away to serve and worship the false gods of the very nations they were supposed to witness to.
- G. He had revealed Himself to them in the wilderness at Sinai and given them the law and re-established the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and more specifically, Jacob.
- H. When they went into the land under the leadership of Caleb and Joshua, they were to possess the land and defeat all the other nations and not intermarry, lest they be deceived by their false religion and turn from the true and living God to worship demons and idols, who cannot see, cannot hear and cannot save.
- I. The judges of Israel were set in place to keep order stability and justice until the nation of Israel cried out for a king to rule over them like the other nations. This began this history of the Jewish Kingdom in Israel.
- J. After the reign of King David and Solomon, kings who did not honor the God of their Fathers began to rise and rule over Israel, and the people departed from the Lord to serve other gods and worship idols.

- K. During King David's reign the Jewish people prospered and were not defeated by any armies during his reign. After David dies King Solomon, His son built the temple that David desired to see built in Jerusalem and increases the wealth and prominence of Israel.
- L. When Solomon died, the ten northern tribes refused to submit to his son, Rehoboam, and revolted. (2 Kings 12:16-17) From this point on, there would be two kingdoms of Hebrews: in the north, *Israel*, and in the south, *Judah*. The Israelites formed their capital in the city of Samaria, and they chose Jeroboam to be their king (1 Kings 11:30-31). The Judeans kept their capital in Jerusalem and Only the tribe of Judah would remain under the rulership of the house of David. The temple remained in Jerusalem, yet Jeroboam built alternate places of worship for those in Israel to keep them separate. These kingdoms remained separate states for over two hundred years.
- M. In order to rightly appreciate the incarnation and first advent of Christ we have to take a thorough look at the state of Israel at the time of His coming as well as the religious and political scene He would be stepping into.

II. THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL BEFORE THE FIRST COMING CHIRST

- A. Psalm 78 gives us a clear description of the history of God's dealings with Israel were throughout their time of wandering in the wilderness. It is quite clearly a summation of all that we've discussed up to this point in our El 2.

SFor he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded ourfathers, that they should make them known to their children: 6That thegeneration to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: 7That they might set their hope in God, and notforget the works of God, but keep his commandments: 8And might not be as theirfathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God. 9The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. 10They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law; J JAnd forgot his works, and his wonders that he had showed them. 12Marvellous things did he in the sight of theirfathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.13He divided the sea, and caused them topass through; and he made the waters to stand as an heap. 14/n the daytime also he led them with a cloud, and all the night with a light offire. J 5He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths.16He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. 17And they sinned yet more against him byprovoking the most High in the wilderness.18And they tempted God in their heart by asking meatfor their lust. 19Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can Godfurnish a table in the wilderness? 20Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams ove,flowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for hispeople? 21Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so afire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; 22Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation: 23Though he had commanded the cloudsfrom above, and opened the doors of heaven, 24And had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. 25Man did eat angels' food: he sent them meat to thefull 26He caused an east wind to blow in the heaven: and by hispower he brought in the south wind. 27He rainedflesh also upon them as dust, andfeathered fowls like as the sand of

the sea: 28And he let itfall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. 29So they did eat, and were wellfilled: for he gave them their own desire; 30They were not estranged from their lust. But while their meat wasyet in their mouths, 31The wrath of God came upon them, and slew thefattest of them, and smote down the chosen men of Israel 32For all this they sinned still, and believed not/or his wondrous works.

33Therefore their days did he consume in vanity, and their years in trouble. 34When he slew them, then they sought him: and they returned and enquired early after God. 35And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer. 36Nevertheless they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. 37For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant. 38But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. 39For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passes away, and cometh not again. 40How oft did they provoke him in the wilderness, and grieve him in the desert! 41Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel. 42They remembered not his hand, nor the day when he delivered them from the enemy. 43How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan. 44And had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. 45He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. 46He gave also their increase unto the caterpillar, and their labor unto the locust. 47He destroyed their vines with hail, and their sycomore trees with frost. 48He gave up their cattle also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. 49He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them. 50He made a way to his anger; he spared not their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence; 51And smote all the firstborn in Egypt; the chief of their strength in the tabernacles of Ham: 52But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. 53And he led them on safely, so that they feared not: but the sea overwhelmed their enemies. 54And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, even to this mountain, which his right hand had purchased. 55He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. 56Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: 57But turned back, and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. 58For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. 59When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: 60So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; 61And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand. 62He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance. 63The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage. 64Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation. 65Then the LORD awaked as one out of sleep, and like a mighty man that shouts by reason of wine. 66And he smote his enemies in the hinder parts: he put them to a perpetual reproach. 67Moreover he refused the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: 68But chose the tribe of Judah, the mount Zion which he loved. 69And he built his sanctuary like high palaces, like the earth which he hath established for ever. 70He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: 71From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. 72So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands. (Psalm 78:5-72)

- B. This psalm sums up what had transpired between Israel and the God that chose them. Even still, at the end of the day God remained faithful and preserved the Seed. The Seed was coming through the line of His servant David a shepherd boy, who was after His own heart.
- C. In keeping with Psalm 78 and Deuteronomy 28 however, Israel in the North and Judah in the South had heard the word of the Lord from the prophets God sent to them. They knew that if they did not stay faithful to Him and turn from idolatry, he would raise up adversaries to chastise them. And that is precisely what happened.

Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, every seer, saying, "Turn From your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets. "Nevertheless they would not hear, but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God. And they rejected His statutes and His covenant that He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He had testified against them; they followed idols, become idolaters, and went after the nations who were all around them, concerning whom the LORD had charged them that they should not do like them. (2 Kings 17:13-15)

1. *Israel's Defeat:* The Assyrians invade the Northern Kingdom at Samaria in 722 B.C. and plant foreigners there.
2. *Judah's Defeat:* The Babylonians invade the Southern Kingdom at Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and destroy the temple.
3. *Babylonian Exile:* The Jews in Jerusalem are deported in groups to Babylon, among the captives are the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel. The Israelites are exiles in Babylon for about 70 years.
4. *Daniel 's mourning and Jeremiah's 70-year prophecy:* The word of the Lord to Jeremiah was that the Jewish people would be punished for 70 years as a judgment on them. At the end of the 70 years, Daniel goes into mourning and repentance for the sins of Israel and asks the Lord to have mercy (Daniel 9).
5. *Cyrus and the Rebuilding of the Temple:* God raises up a Persian king named Cyrus (Isaiah 45) who would issue a decree for the Jews to go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and establish their own state again. So, under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, and later Nehemiah and Ezra, the Jews go back and start building the House of the Lord. Though under Persian domination, the Jews had established the law and ritual back into their culture and rebuilt the house of the Lord. Also, during their time in Babylon it seems that they return to their monotheistic roots.
6. *The Inter-Testamental Period:* The 400 years between Malachi and Matthew was considered the dark time in the History of Israel, because during this time there was no prophetic voice and no inspired writer. God was seemingly silent. And Israel's enemies would come and attack her time and time again and take possession of the land. (*Psalm 74:9*) At the end of the book of Malachi, the Jews were still under Persian rule, and after that came Alexander the Great and the land was overtaken by Greece and Hellenistic thought (so much so that the old Testament was translated into Greek)¹

came the Roman Empire, by far the deadliest and strongest empire to take over that region. Rome was in power at the time of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. Ironically, this troubled period of time for Israel added strength to their zeal for the law and the Messianic hope that come forth from the scriptures.

III. ISRAEL AT THE TIME OF JESUS' BIRTH

- A. Israel was back in her own land and under cruel Roman rule. The political climate and tension was thick in the land due to a rebellion and uprising that had taken place during the Syrian rule. The Religious and Political climate had changed drastically compared to the 400 years before.
- B. Judea had regained independence during the Macabean rebellion and was a province of the Roman Empire; the High Priest did not have royal status but still retained His priestly function. Thus, at the center of Jewish life and the very pride and joy of Israel was the Temple. It was what separated them from everyone else around them. As well, there were new developments within the structure of Jewish religious and political life.

1. Political and Religious Climate

- a. Herod the Great: was appointed as the Governor of Galilee under the Roman procurator and after He appealed to Rome, He was made king of the Jews. He increased the splendor of the temple in Jerusalem and added striking renovations to the work of the Babylonian exiles that had attempted to rebuild the one Solomon built. ²
- b. The Synagogue: A place of instruction in the scriptures where scribes would read and expound on the law.
- c. Scribes: They were committed to making every Jew personally responsible for keeping the whole law. They attempted to extract a detailed code from the Law that would govern daily life. The scribes were trained experts that studied God's word for a living.
- d. Pharisees: They were a sort of religious political party. They held to and attempted to hold others to an oral code as well as the written one. They instituted a lot of traditions and instituted a practice called "fencing the Law"; which was creating a stricter code of Laws around the original law so as not to break it. They were very influential leaders in Judea.
- e. Sadducees: These were wealthy and influential aristocrats who were Jewish yet did not believe that the Law had any application to politics. They rejected the oral traditions of the Pharisees and did not believe in the resurrection. They were leaders of the Temple in a political way.
- f. The Herodians: Those in the land that were loyal to King Herod, they would do anything to further his government.
- g. The Sanhedrin: It was sort of the senate of Jewish politics. It Was comprised of the elders, the chief priests and the scribes.
- h. The Common People: These were those tax collectors and sinners, carpenters and fishermen far removed from the filthy political and religious corruption that surrounded the aforementioned groups. They were waiting for the Consolation of Israel and these were those who, for the most part responded to Him.

IV. THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST

And without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh (1Tim. 3:16)

And the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name Immanuel (God with Us). (Isaiah 7:14)

Now in the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, Rejoice highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women! But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the highest; and the Lord will give Him the throne of His father David and he will reign over the House of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end. Then Mary said: "how can this be, since I do not know a man?" And the angel answered her and said to her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Highest will overshadow you, therefore that Holy One who is born to you will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:26-35)

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, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace and of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it from that time forward and forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

- A. After 400 years of the absence of the word of the Lord and the scarcity of a prophetic voice in Israel, God breaks the silence with the helpless cries of a little baby. The seed promised was going to be born of a little Jewish girl named Mary.
- B. This mystery, Paul says, is so great that no one can contend with it. It is without controversy, the greatest mystery. The second person of the trinity put on flesh and has become a human being forever. His name is Jesus.
- C. We must gain understanding of the significance and reality of the second person of the trinity who was with God in the beginning, who made all things and without Him nothing was made that is made. If we lose sight of the fact He is and has always been God, our hearts will fail to respond to the scandal that occurred 2000 plus years ago. When God became a human being.
- D. Has your mind ever thought about the fact that the baby growing inside the womb of Mary created Mary in her mother's womb? Or that the God who is omnipresent, had to be carried on her hip for the first couple years of His life? How can it be that the One who opens His hand and satisfies the desires of every living thing, was dependent upon the breast milk of his mother to live? The all Powerful and all knowing God grew in wisdom and stature as a young man!
- E. The mystery of the incarnation is set in place to cause our hearts to marvel and stand in awe of the great humility of God. That He would come so low to be near us and to give us an unveiled

revelation of His glory, in the not so attractive Jewish face of Jesus of Nazareth.

- F. The incarnation is more than just a doctrine; it is an object of contemplation it is the place where angels and humans alike stare at a mystery as deep as the Almighty Himself It is true joy to ponder that which cannot be fully fathomed.
- G. We can only think about God because of Jesus. Jesus has made the contemplation of God possible. The only reason we know what God is like is because He has revealed Himself fully in Jesus.
- H. God was making a statement about His nature in coming as a baby, He was saying "I am approachable" "I want to be near you, so draw near to me!".

Jesus did not experience God, He was God. He never at any given moment became God; He was God From the start. His life was only the process by which this innate divinity came into its own. His task was to place divine reality and power squarely in the realm of His human consciousness and will; to reflect holy purity in his relation to all things, and contain infinite love and divinity's boundless plenitude in his heart of flesh and blood ...

"I know men; and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not [merely] a man. Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires, and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and whatever other religions the distance of infinity....

Everything in Christ astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and his will confounds me. Between him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by himself. His ideas and sentiments, the truth which he announces, his manner of convincing, are not explained either by human organization or by the nature of things....

The nearer I approach, the more carefully I examine, everything is above me--- everything remains grand, or a grandeur, which overpowers. His religion is a revelation from an intelligence, which certainly is not that of man....

One can absolutely find nowhere, but in him alone, the imitation or the example of his life....

I search in vain in history to find the similar to Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach gospel. Neither history, nor humanity, nor the ages, nor nature, offer me anything with which I am able to compare it or to explain it. Here everything is extraordinary...³

- G. The second person of the Godhead took on a human form. He stepped down from the heights of glory into the dust and sand of a poor little fishing town called Nazareth in Galilee. Jesus is God in human terms; no other founder of any other religion is also fully God. Jesus Christ is the revelation of the one true God.

V. THE SEED IS REVEALED

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. (Luke 2:2-16)

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said:

"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the/ace of all peoples, A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel" And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." 36 Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanael, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37 and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years!! who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord!! and spoke of Him to all those who looked/or redemption in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:25-38)

- A. God's promise to Eve was now being realized before the eyes of the common people who were still waiting and hoping. They had heard stories of the Seed and of Eden and of the garden and the days of God's nearness to His people. They had against all odds, kept the hope within their hearts that He was coming, a frail hope that had been passed down through the generations.
- B. And then one day, in the fullness of time, God sent His Son born of a woman. The Jewish King and Savior, the Seed of the Woman that would crush the head of the evil one.
- C. Understanding the State of Israel adds Dramatic impact to the glory of the first coming of Christ and to the events that will unfold before He comes again to finish the fulfillment of all those things that were spoken of Him to their Fathers.

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. God's story of redemption is playing itself out in front of our very eyes, and as forerunners, we are dynamically connected to it. We must become acquainted with the story and tell it to the nations before the great and terrible day of the Lord.
- B. The Story of Redemption gives us insight into who God is, His fight to win His people back in mercy and to judge wickedness. In Christ, we have been given the clearest picture of what God is like that has ever been revealed to humanity on this side of our resurrection. And by His Spirit, we have been given the ability to know what He is doing and why.
- C. Oh the beauty of Jesus, His Incarnation, Life, Death, Resurrection and Coming Kingdom. Tell the story! It is our glory as His friends!