

I. Introduction

Good morning! Two thousand years ago, the Romans controlled the area around the Mediterranean Sea and Israel was also under their rule. The Jewish people longed for freedom from the Romans, and the people were waiting expectantly for the Messiah, the Christ, to come. Those who knew the Scriptures well probably kept an eye on Bethlehem, a small town eight kilometers southwest of Jerusalem, because, according to the prophets, this was the place where the Messiah was to be born. Let's read the story of the Messiah's birth from Luke 2:1-7.



II. Scripture Luke 2:1-7

[1] In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. [2] (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) [3] And everyone went to his own town to register. [4] So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. [5] He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. [6] While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, [7] and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

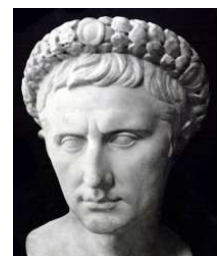
III. Teaching

During the last few weeks, we have watched and waited as Luke told of the momentous events leading up to the birth of the Christ child, Jesus. And after this, Luke will continue to emphasize that this child is the Messiah, the Savior, God Himself come to us. But here, Luke tells the story of the birth of Jesus simply, including only a few details that place the story in history and that reveal the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, but with little comment about these things. I think Luke wants us to draw close and contemplate the wonder of the moment. The long prophesied and hoped for Messiah, the Savior of Israel and of the whole world has been born.



Jesus comes into the world quietly and in poverty. The King of kings does not arrive with shouts and trumpets, but instead He comes almost silently, in a little town. All of heaven's eyes are on the scene, but on earth only a few know of the miracle and come to worship Him. Some shepherds, perhaps some relatives, and later on the wise men, called Magi. The Savior of the world comes in humility, setting an example for us. The One who commands the angels of heaven, is born of a young teenage girl, and laid in a manger, a feeding trough for animals.

Luke is careful to tell us when and where this happens. It is during the reign of Caesar Augustus (photo), at a time when he ordered a census. And, it is at the time when Quirinius was the governor of Syria, and this was the first census that was done during his term as governor. Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth in Galilee to the town of David, Bethlehem in Judea, to enroll in the census, as the law required. These details are important, because they make it possible to verify the history. The Gospel of Luke can be compared to other historical records and verified. And at the time when Luke wrote, it would have still been possible to interview eyewitnesses of these events. Luke gives enough details to allow others to verify his work. This is what good history writers do, and Luke, although he is a doctor by profession, is also a first-class historian. You can rely on what Luke tells you; it is history.



Luke knew that some of his readers would know the Old Testament prophecies, and so Luke records the

information needed to see the fulfillment of the prophecies. But Luke is subtle; he tells us about the fulfillment of the prophecies without quoting them. This way, readers who are not familiar with the Scriptures can read straight through without being slowed down by unfamiliar references. On the other hand, those who know what the prophets said about the coming of the Messiah have the joy and certainty that comes from seeing the words of the prophets fulfilled.

Last week, I sounded a note of caution about interpreting prophecies of Jesus' Second Coming, because it is easy to misunderstand prophetic words which have not yet been fulfilled. However, today we are going to be bold in interpreting some of the prophecies about Jesus' birth. We are able to be bold, because we have the advantage of knowing the history. The Old Testament records hundreds of prophecies about the Messiah, but today we will look at just a few prophecies about the Messiah's birth. As we continue through the Gospel of Luke, we will look at some of the other prophecies from time to time.

The best place to begin is at the beginning, so we should remember that after Adam and Eve first sinned, the Lord God spoke to the snake, Satan, saying in **Genesis 3:15**, **"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."** This is a promise that a Savior will come and prevail over the devil, crushing his head. And it is a prophecy that the Savior will suffer; He will be struck in the heel by the devil, so that He falls. With the advantage of history, we can see the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ in these words. At the cross, Jesus defeated the devil, and through His resurrection, Jesus conquered death. The first prophecy of the virgin birth is also here, for the Savior to come is to be the, "offspring," of the woman, in the original the word is literally, "the seed," of the woman." But we know that a woman does not have seed, the man brings the seed. So in speaking of the, "seed of the woman," the Lord is revealing that something miraculous is going to happen, a virgin birth. The meaning of the prophecy is clear because we know the history of its fulfillment in Christ. (See also Galatians 3:16.)



In **Genesis 49:10**, there is a prophecy about Israel's son, Judah and his descendants. **"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his."** Because we are not very familiar with the ancient culture, this prophecy seems mysterious today, but in ancient times people probably easily understood the meaning. In those times, the king was the highest judge; and his scepter, or ruler's staff, was used in announcing his decisions. So, what Genesis 49:10 says is that the tribe of Judah was to have the authority to judge themselves until the coming of the Messiah, the true judge to whom the ruler's staff belongs. This prophecy was given almost 2,000 years before Jesus was born and during all of those years the tribe of Judah had the authority to judge its own members. But Caesar Augustus took away the authority of the Jews to judge their own laws and to give the death penalty. That is why when they wanted to crucify Jesus they had to take Him to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. The Jews didn't have the authority to give the death penalty, because the ruler's staff had been taken away from them. When we understand the meaning, we see that this is an amazing prophecy and fulfillment.

Isaiah speaks even more directly about the coming of the Messiah. **Isaiah 7:14** tells us, **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."** And **Isaiah 9:6** proclaims, **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."** As the time for Jesus to come approaches, the prophets begin to speak about His coming in more detail. The Messiah will be born of a virgin and He will be, **"Immanuel,"** which means, "God with us." He will be far greater than any man, He will be, **"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."**

By this point, a great deal has been revealed about the coming of the Messiah. But at least two more great prophecies are given to help the Jews recognize the Messiah when He comes and to prove His identity. In **Micah 5:2**, it is written, **"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."** With these words, the



prophet Micah declared that the ruler to come, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. But the birth of the Messiah was not to be His beginning; because from ancient times He already lived. These words speak once again of the true identity of the Messiah, God come to be with His people.

And so, at the right time, in accord with the plan of God, Caesar ordered a census of the entire Roman world and Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem to register. And while they were there, the Christ child, Jesus, was born. God is the Author of history and He fulfills all of His words. The Lord God created time and space and all things; so He knows all things, past, present, and future. He is, “the Alpha and the Omega.” Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega is the last, so this title speaks of the Lord being the first and the last, the beginning of all things and the final ruler over all. And it is the Lord who comes to us in the person of Jesus; Jesus is the, “Alpha and the Omega,” as Revelation 22:13 clearly states.



Let's look at one more prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. **Daniel 9:25**, says, “**Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens,' and sixty-two 'sevens.'** It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble.” The time when Jesus will come to us again is known only to the Father, but the time of Jesus' first coming was announced hundreds of years in advance. In this prophecy, a clock starts with the decree, or command, to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. In ancient Hebrew, when people said, “one week,” or, “seven years,” they just said, “a seven.” The exact meaning came from the context. Here, the context tells us that each, “seven,” represents seven years. Therefore, “seven ‘sevens,’” means 49 years; and “sixty-two ‘sevens’” means 434 years. Adding 49 years and 434 years, we get 483 years.

So, this prophecy says that the Messiah is to come 483 years after the time of the command to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. The prophecy was given during the Babylonian Captivity, and the books of Nehemiah and Ezra record the return from Babylon, including the commands to rebuild Jerusalem. The details are a bit complex, but when scholars calculate the time of the commands to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and then count the years until Jesus came, they find that Jesus came 483 years after the commands to rebuild Jerusalem, just as Daniel 9:25 predicted.

We could look at a lot more Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, Christ Jesus, but I think we can already clearly see that God revealed a great deal about the coming of the Savior hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Before Jesus came, some of the prophecies were misunderstood, but with the advantage of the historical record of Jesus' coming, now it is relatively easy to see how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies. These fulfilled prophecies prove that Jesus really is the Messiah promised by God, and they also demonstrate that God knows the future and reveals it when He chooses. This gives us confidence that God will also keep all of the promises He has given us, promises of blessing and salvation through faith in Jesus and of eternal life in heaven with Him.

IV. Conclusion

Jesus, the Son of God and God the Son, chose to be born in Bethlehem and to live as we do, suffering every temptation that we suffer, and yet never sinning. Jesus walked the dusty streets of ancient Israel, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, casting out demons, teaching the people, forgiving sins, and loving the people. Jesus went to the cross; and in the greatest demonstration of love in the history of the world, Jesus gave His perfect life as a sinless sacrifice to save us from our sins. Truly He is the Savior of the whole world.

Let's close for today with **Matthew 1:21**. When the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, he told Joseph that Mary was pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit and he said, “**She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.**” This was promised by God and it is true. Everyone who trusts in Jesus for their salvation will be forgiven their sins and given the free gift of eternal life.



V. Closing Prayer