

Unlocking The Mystery & Treasure Of Our Inheritance
#46 Significant Signs Of Jesus' Birth

The Jews had gone through times of pressure and had failed in their efforts to re-establish themselves, and had given up all hope. There was a growing air of expectancy that the only hope they had left was the coming at last of the promised Messiah. In the East, the oriental empires had come to the place where the wisdom and knowledge of the past had disintegrated and they too were looking for something. When the moment came when the star arose over Bethlehem, the wise men [Magi] of the East who were looking for an answer to their problems saw it immediately and came out to seek the One it pointed to.

Thus, "when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son." [Gal. 4:4]

Isa. 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto 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.

Isa. 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you A SIGN:
Behold A Virgin Shall Conceive And Bear A Son, And Shall Call His Name Immanuel.

Luke 1:26-35 In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. ²⁹ And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. ³⁰ And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. ³¹ And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. ³² 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: ³³ And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. ³⁴ Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? ³⁵ And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Note: Some commentators try to cast doubt on the validity of Isaiah's virgin birth prophecy. 1. Context of Isa. 7: Virgin birth was an important SIGN to Israel. It would not be a significant sign to say: "a woman of marriageable age will give birth." That happened every day!

Further Support For Prophecy's Validity:

1. ~600 years after Isaiah, his writings were officially translated into Greek by 70 leading Hebrew scholars.
2. In Isaiah 7:14 - they chose the Greek word parthenos which in the Bible only describes someone who has NEVER had a sexual experience.
 - a. The Hebrew scholars expected a virgin birth and 150 years later, it was fulfilled.

Background Information:

1. Torah is comprised of: Written Torah handed down by God to Moses [includes some of the prophets' writings, Psalms, Proverbs; total of 24 books]
2. The Mishnah = Oral law in Judaism - oral explanations of the written Torah = rabbinical commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures
3. The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah by Alfred Edersheim
4. The Tower Of The Flock: A Christmas Prophecy By Gary Stearman

Terms To Understand:

1. MIGDAL [Tower] of EDER [Flock] - The shelter in which Jesus was possibly born was a place in the northern part of Bethlehem called Migdal Eder. It was 1000 paces from Bethlehem, [placed by tradition since the time of Jerome], a place of elevation where shepherds would go to watch over their sheep. It had a place underneath that shepherds used during the lambing season to shelter the newborn lambs.

The church historian Eusebius linked the shepherds' fields outside Bethlehem to Migdal Eder. The prophet Micah, who foretold Bethlehem as the place of the Messiah's birth, also mentions Migdal Eder.

2. Ephrathah = ancient name of Bethlehem

1st Mention of Both Terms in Bible is in conjunction with death of Rachel in Gen. 35:16-21

And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath...

Bethlehem = House of Bread

Ephrathah = Ancient Name of Bethlehem = bear fruit; be fruitful

John 6:51 I am the Bread that came down from heaven. I am the Living Bread.

Consider: I will only bear fruit and be fruitful when I dwell with the "Bread of Life."

Note 1: Boaz & Ruth started their family in Bethlehem = House of David

Note 2: Birthplace of David; where he was crowned as king of Israel; became City of David

Gen. 35:16b-20 and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also.

And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

1. Rachel's travail pictures the birth pangs of the Messiah. 2 pictures of Jesus Christ

a. Benoni = Son Of Sorrow

b. Benjamin = Son Of My Right Hand

And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, [bear fruit] which is Bethlehem.

Note: Rachel = little ewe or lamb = female lambs were used for peace offerings

And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day.

35:21 And Israel journeyed, and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. [1st mention -

In the context the "tower of Eder" or "tower of the flock" was located near Bethlehem.]

About a thousand years after Rachel's death the prophet Micah spoke about the Still-Future birth of Israel's Messiah and the place of His birth.

Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. [eternity]

Note: Micah's prophecy was written down 700 years before the Christ the Savior would come from the tiny town of Bethlehem in Israel.

Luke 2:1-3 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

Cyrenius was governor from 6-4 BC and again from 6-9 AD. He had a census taken in each term of office. This one was during his first term. [Acts 5:37 refers to the second one]

Luke 2:4-7 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:) ⁵ 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.

The Shepherds and the Angels

Luke 2:8-12 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks at 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 to them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. This will be A SIGN TO YOU: You will find a babe WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHES AND LYING IN A MANGER."

Why Bethlehem? Why is this a SIGN to the shepherds?

1. Prophecy: mysterious location - strange edifice - a watchtower that is presented as the key to understanding the birth of the Messiah.

In his classic text, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Alfred Edersheim wrote, "That the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem was a settled conviction. Equally so was the belief that He was to be revealed from Migdal Eder, 'the tower of the flock.'"

Note: Micah 5:2 = Messiah would be born in Bethlehem

Micah 4:8 = Prophetied = Messiah would be announced at the Tower of the Flock
And you, O tower of the flock, The stronghold of the daughter of Zion, To you shall it come,
Even the former dominion shall come, The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

1. Migdal Eder was a two-story tower that had been built in a pasture outside Bethlehem. The remains of the tower had recently been discovered. [Early 1800's]
2. Migdal Eder was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks which pastured on the barren sheep ground beyond Bethlehem, but it lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem.
3. Early Christian testimony refers to this area below Bethlehem as "the shepherds' place" or the place of the "sheepfold."
4. These watchtowers of the flock (Migdal Eder) were like "forts" where the shepherds would watch over their flock from the second story.
5. The Mishnah describes MIGDAL EDER as the WATCHTOWER OF THE FLOCK; the flocks that were specifically Destined For The Passover Sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem. [A passage from the Mishnah leads to the conclusion that 'the flocks, which pastured there were destined for Temple sacrifices...' (*Shekelim 7:4*)]
 - a. These flocks had been carefully bred over many years to be free of spot or blemish.
 - b. The regulations specified: The flocks had to be within 5 miles of the Temple.
 - c. These were the animals the pilgrims from far off bought to serve as sacrifices during the Holy Days, rather than take the risk of bringing one on the long journey from home.

The Shepherds: Passages from the Mishnah

1. Ordinary shepherds were banned from caring for these special "Temple" flocks.
 - a. They were not trained in the religious ordinances pertaining to the sacrificial offerings.
 - b. Their manner of life would make it virtually impossible to abide by the strict legal and religious observances.
2. Special shepherds, taught by the Temple priests, cared for these flocks which were the male lambs destined for Temple sacrifice. ["Holding place for sacrificial lambs"]
 - a. Quote from Rabbinical writings: "They were actually priests from the temple who were doing shepherding work to assist in the birthing of the sacrificial lambs so that they would be unblemished for sacrifice. While the shepherds were keeping watch over the flock from the top floor of the tower, the shepherd-priests would bring the pregnant sheep in from the field to the tower's bottom floor, where the sheep would give birth."
 [On the ground floor of the tower was a room designated for delivery and protection of these special lambs after birth. Here a manger [like feeding trough] was kept ceremonially clean due to the sacred role of these little lambs.]
 "As soon as a lamb was born, the priests [Temple shepherds] would wipe off the newborn lambs prior to their inspection. They would wrap the lamb with strips of cloths made from old priestly undergarments. This was done to keep the lamb from getting blemished. The priests would then place the lamb onto a manger to make sure it would not get trampled." *Wow!!!*
[The lambs were destined to be offered as a sacrifice at the Temple just 5 miles away in Jerusalem.]

"So when these shepherd-priests went into Bethlehem and saw the baby Jesus wrapped in cloths, laying in a manger, they must have exclaimed, "There is the Lamb of God, prepared for sacrifice, unblemished!" They had to be excited beyond description, because they were the only ones who could have understood the sign. *It was just for them from God. It was personal!*" "Being born in the Tower of the Flock places Jesus' birth in the traditional location for Passover lambs to be born. Fitting, since He became the Passover Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world. This also explains how the shepherds knew where to go to find the newborn babe — and why it being wrapped in swaddling clothes would be significant clue. Finally, it explains why those shepherds were notified as it was their holy calling to certify Passover lambs upon birth." Consider: Jesus was born: In the "tower of the flock", Migdal Eder, surrounded by holy shepherds, set apart to certify the birth of the ultimate Passover Lamb." The MIGDAL offers its inhabitants a place of refuge, splendor, and vantage. Prov. 18:10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous run into it, and is safe.

Shepherds Keeping Watch Over Their Flocks:

1. The shepherds that raised and cared for the sacrificial sheep were the first people the angels delivered the message: The birth of the Savior.
2. The purpose of the Temple flocks: Born to die for the sins of the people
3. The arrival of the ultimate Lamb of God was revealed to those responsible for watching over the sacrificial lambs that had always pointed to THE LAMB.

Swaddling Cloths:

1. These cloths were also used to wrap the dead. They would wear these linens under their clothing when they traveled so they could be buried in their own linens in case they died on the trip. [Custom of Middle Eastern women in Jesus' day]
 - a. If swaddling linens were customarily burial linens, then the Messiah, the Christ Child, was wrapped in burial cloths immediately after His birth. This would be another unmistakable sign to the temple shepherds that the Messiah who would sacrifice His life for His sheep would be wrapped in burial cloths - perhaps even the swaddling clothes of His mother.
2. Swaddling clothes were cut from worn out priestly garments. Many were braided together and used as WICKS for the four great four-branched menorah placed in the Temple courts during the Feast of Tabernacles. These giant lamps were so tall that priests had to lug buckets of oil up 30-foot ladders to keep them burning, and it's said that the light they produced illuminated the entire city. These linen cloths were the first earthly garments to adorn our High Priest, the Light of the World.

Luke 2:13-16 Suddenly there was 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 had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us."

And they Came With Haste and Found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in the manger.

Note: There was no need for the angel to give these shepherds directions to the birthplace. The Shepherd's found the babe, for they understood what THE SIGN [swaddling clothes lying in a manger] meant. They knew to look for the Messiah in a manger at the tower of the flock in their fields in Bethlehem. They knew the prophecy of the Prophet Micah [4:8], who foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, and He would come to the "the tower of the flock." "

And you, O TOWER OF THE FLOCK, The stronghold of the daughter of Zion, To you shall it come, Even the former dominion shall come, The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem."

They made the connection to Messiah, just as it had been told them. Then, they made known everything they had seen and heard.

The Visit of the Magi

Matt. 2:1-2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "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."

Questions: 1. Who are the Magi, wise men?

2. How did they obtain knowledge about the Messiah of Israel and that he would be BORN King of Israel?

3. Where & how did they get the sign of a certain star that would herald his birth?

4. Why would they make a long and perilous journey to come see a Jewish child and to worship him? They were Gentiles!

The Magi From The East

1. Magi = a caste of wise men specializing in astronomy, astrology, natural science

2. Dan. 2:2 > 1st reference -They were in the court of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the CHALDEANS, to show the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

3. The Role of Daniel

One of the titles given to Daniel was Rab-mag, the Chief of the Magi.

He was the principal administrator in the Babylonian and subsequent Persian Empires.

Dan. 2:48 Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

4. According To Tradition:

a. Daniel formed a group of Persian priests and shared Gabriel's message with them.

It would be announced in due time by a star. He admonished them to pass this information down.

b. He set aside the bulk of his personal wealth as a gift for them to present to the Messiah when the time came for His birth.

c. Bible reveals: 200 years after Micah identified Bethlehem as the Messiah's birthplace, the Lord told Daniel in 537 BC the exact date of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. The trigger to start the 173,880 days [483 years] was March 14, 445 BC when Artaxerxes gave the specific commandment to rebuild Jerusalem after the Babylonian captivity.

The Priesthood of the Medes

1. They were descendants of Daniel's priesthood. Note: They were NOT kings.
2. The ancient Magi were a hereditary priesthood of the Medes credited with profound and extraordinary knowledge of astronomy and religious knowledge.
3. After some Magi, who had been attached to the Median court, proved to be expert in the interpretation of dreams, Darius the Great established them over the state religion of Persia.
4. Over the following 500 years after Daniel, they became a powerful priesthood that was so influential in the affairs of the Parthian Kingdom: NO King Could Reign Without Their Approval.
5. The Magi became the supreme priestly caste of the Persian Empire, and continued to be prominent during the subsequent Seleucid and Parthian periods.

Political Background Since the days of Daniel, the fortunes of the Persian and the Jewish nations were closely intertwined. Both nations had, in their turn, fallen under Seleucid domination. Subsequently both regained their independence: the Jews under the Maccabee's leadership and the Persians as the dominating ruling group within the Parthian Empire. It was at this time that the Magi, in their dual priestly and governmental office, composed the upper house of the Council of the Megistanes ("magistrates") whose duties included the absolute choice and election of the king of the realm.

The Magi - Parthian Priests

1. Central to their philosophy was the belief handed down to them over the centuries that one day God would send One who would be BORN to the throne.
2. The general time of the coming of this King was known to them from Daniel's teaching as was the confirming sign they would be given. They began searching the heavens for the promised sign, a new star in the Eastern sky.
3. They remained true to Daniel's commission. Upon seeing His star, they set out for Jerusalem and sought an audience with King Herod.
4. There were undoubtedly more than 3 of them since dignitaries traveled in a great entourage both for protection and as a sign of their importance.
 - a. Also, they were traveling through enemy territory. Parthia had earlier repelled a Roman invasion. Romans were entrenched in Israel. The Magi represented an enemy country.

Parthian Empire [Iran & Afghanistan]

1. Independent kingdom in 250 BC - large empire by 1st Century BC
2. Judea is a buffer zone between Parthia and Roman Empire. Parthia had several successful clashes with Rome.
3. 63 BC: Pompey, 1st Roman to conquer Israel, attacked Parthia
4. 55 BC: Romans lost 30,000 troops in a clash with Parthia.
5. 37 BC: Parthia "clobbers" the Romans again. Drove all Roman opposition out; Parthia actually had the land of Israel at this time.
6. Herod had been given the title "King of the Jews" by Caesar.
However, he could not enter the city for ~3 years. It took a 5 month siege by Roman troops before it was safe for Herod to be there.

Herod's Slippery Rock: He gained the throne of a rebellious buffer state situated between 2 mighty contending empires. His own subjects [the Jews] might at any time seek the aid of the Parthians. Remember: Herod was an Edomite - enemy of the Jews.

A Precarious Visit: It was a group of Persian-Parthian "king makers" who entered Jerusalem in the reign of Herod.

Matt. 2:1-2 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.

Herod's Response:

Matt. 2:3 When King Herod heard this he was troubled, and All Jerusalem with him.

1. Herod's reaction was understandably one of fear when one considers the background of Roman-Parthian Rivalry that prevailed during his lifetime.

2. Herod is not Jewish. He was an Idumean [Jordanian] who had been APPOINTED king by the Roman Senate; a pretender to the throne in Israel.

3. Some powerful foreign magi were coming to claim there was one who was BORN to be King of the Jews.

a. Surely he would have a more powerful claim to the throne than a foreign appointee.

Summoning the chief priests, Herod repeated the question and was referred to Micah 5:2 where Bethlehem is identified. Everyone seems to know the prediction.

It Was Already Known From Prophecy, it was a settled conviction from the days of eternity, regarding the place in Israel where the Ruler would be born.

Matt. 2:4-6 When he had gathered all the people's chief priests and scribes together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, "In Bethlehem in Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, 'and thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for Out Of Thee Shall Come A Governor That Shall Rule My People Israel.'"

It is fascinating that neither Herod nor the Jewish spiritual and political leaders went to Bethlehem themselves.

1. They were made aware of the prophecy in Micah 5:2.
2. They received the dual confirmation of the star and the arrival of the Magi from the East.
3. Herod's response is understandable. He wasn't even Jewish and feared the discovery of a rival claim to the throne.
4. Israel had been waiting for centuries for their Messiah.
 - a. These leaders had the same knowledge as the Magi.
 - b. Their prophecies were written in their own Scriptures and being fulfilled Right Before Their Eyes. They should have been the first to investigate.
 - c. Problem: Jewish leadership had long before departed from a LITERAL interpretation of Scripture. The ruling Sadducean party had rejected predictive prophecy as unreliable and not meant for their time.
 - d. Result: They deemed this event as irrelevant, ignored it and Missed The Event For Which They Had Longed.