

People in Christmas celebrations everywhere overlook the content and the intent of the passage we've been studying. The first thing that should impress you in this passage should be how God uses the nations of the world as if they were pawns on a chessboard. We think of this nation in which we live and other nations and empires that have come and gone and we think that some man or group of men determine the destinies of those nations, but we read in Acts 17 that God almighty has determined the time that a nation appears, the boundaries of that nation, and when that nation shall pass. All of these things are for the specific purpose of making it easy to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Caesar thought he was making a great move when he issued the decree that required everyone to return to the town of their birth for a census. But, Scripture tells us that God moved on the heart of Caesar to have this done in order that the prophecy concerning the place of the birth might be fulfilled. We looked at this previously, and we saw that Caesar had tried to require this census years earlier, but a war prevented it, and it was just now at the perfect time that he was able to fulfill his plans.

One of the surest evidences that the Bible is truly the revealed word of God is that every time you read it, you learn something new. Kind of like a flower bud, as it just keeps opening, and opening, and is beautiful at every level. The enrollment was for the purpose of a census only, but as everyone knows, a tax will result from the government shortly after. Each and every person had to go to the city of his birth and of his people.

Caesar issued that decree and people hastened to obey. There was living in Nazareth a couple, Joseph and Mary, both of whom were of the house of David, both of whom had come from Bethlehem. They make the journey, as was required by law. The time of the birth of her baby was drawing nigh. This journey would be a hazardous and severe journey for anyone, but particularly for a pregnant woman.

There is some contention among Bible students as to whether Mary was of the house of David, completely ignoring the study of the genealogies that are presented to us in Scriptures. But, if you study them, you will find that from Abraham to David, the genealogies are the same, then the diversion at Solomon and Nathan. In verse 4, we read that Joseph also went up from Galilee out of Nazareth unto the city of David, because he was of the house and lineage of David to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife. Both of them were of the house of David. We read in other places that she was, I don't know why the contention.

[Luke 2:1-7] Should you desire a thought on which to hang your thoughts, this is it. "No Room for them in the inn." No room for Christ in the world in which he was born. There was no room for them in the inn. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. The question arises, "Is he any more welcome in the world today than he was then?"

Why didn't someone make room? Why was there no place in the inn? From what we read in the Scriptures, we can judge that no one knew. Zechariah and Elizabeth, the father and mother of John the Baptizer, knew of his coming. Their son was six months older than Jesus. There was Simeon in the temple, and the prophetess Anna who knew of his coming, and they all watched and they waited. I'm sure there were others who were paying attention, but apparently, very few knew or cared. They should have known and cared. Not only had the announcements been made by the Lord, but God had given many signs foretelling of his coming birth. My opinion is that this was part of the plan of God because of the image surrounding inns in that they were considered dens of adultery and harlotry and the innkeepers were considered on the same level as adulterers and harlots.

[Matthew 16] I want you to look at the significance of the signs that our Heavenly Father gave, whereby anyone could have known that the birth of the Messiah was approaching. There is an analogy between his first advent and his second; according to Scriptures, the world won't be any better prepared the second time than it was the first. [Matthew 16:1] The significance of the Sadducees and the Pharisees together is that they were the two great religious sects of their day. They were diametrically opposed to one another.

The Pharisees were traditionalists and ritualists, just as their fathers were, with little or no deviation. They believed in God, the supernatural, the ministry of angels, the resurrection of the dead, and they believed in the person, power and work of the Holy Spirit. But, they were so absorbed in the rituals and traditions they had no neither time nor place for the Lord.

The Sadducees were the rationalists and materialists of their day. They didn't believe in the supernatural, the power of the Holy Spirit, they didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead, and they didn't believe in the ministry of angels.

Here they are, these two groups that were diametrically opposed to one another are forming a coalition, trying throughout the earthly ministry of our Lord to rob him of his testimony. Here in this passage that we read, they have come to him asking for a sign from heaven. He had shown them plenty of signs from the earth: The water into wine, the healing, the raising of the dead, his power over water and over fish... but, they want a sign from heaven. They want some supernatural phenomenon among the stars and planets. [verse 2: He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, *It will be* fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, *It will be* foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O *ye* hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not *discern* the signs of the times?] These are signs portending the weather.

In this passage in Matthew 16, the latter part of verse 2 and all of verse 3 have been added at some point. However, Luke 12:54-56 does say, "And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when *ye see* the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. *Ye* hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?" It's a valid statement and is indicative of the way men are. They can see the minor things, but they're oblivious to the major things.

God had given signs that revealed his first advent, and the signs had given the approximate time. Man can go outside and look at the sky and can say that because the sky looks a certain way, then the weather will be such and such. “Rainbow at night, sailor’s delight; rainbow in the morning, sailor’s take warning.” He’s saying, “you can read the face of the sky and discern the weather and claim that you are wise, but you’re hypocrites because you can’t read the signs of the times! All you Sadducees and Pharisees and all your party should know that the time of my advent is at hand. Every one of you should know that this is the time the Messiah should appear.”

Signs of the times is what he called them. Now, in the Scriptures, we find many different types of signs: We find chronological signs, topographical signs, celestial signs, the sign of Bethlehem, the sign of the star in the East, the sign of the wise men... Ample signs whereby they could and should have known that it was time for the birth of the Messiah. The point is, I think, that if we read things right, if we look at the signs and what is given to us in the Scriptures, we can know that the second advent is at hand.

[Daniel 9; put a marker in Matthew 16] I want us to look together at the chronological sign. This one should have been easy for them. [Daniel 9:1-2: “books” is referring to books of the prophets] Daniel is saying, “I was studying the prophecies of Jeremiah, and I read there about the captivity of the children of Israel and how they would be captive for 70 years,” and Daniel having been carried captive at the age of 14 and now being in his 80’s could tell that the 70 years of captivity were about to expire.

He began to think, “With the expiration of the 70 years, we’ll be permitted to return to Jerusalem, rebuild the city, rebuild the temple, rebuilt the walls, and reestablish our worship, and surely that will be the time of the coming of the Messiah”, and as he thought about the coming of the Messiah and how it would be accomplished possibly in the next few years, the Lord spoke to him here in verse 23. Here came Gabriel to speak to Daniel and he said, “At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to shew *thee*; [When you started to pray, anticipating the soon advent of the Messiah, the command came to me and I’ve come to show you] for thou *art* greatly beloved: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision.” Daniel had in mind 70 years, he was reading of the 70 years in Jeremiah, and the Lord sent him the message “70 7’s”, not just 70. The word translated as “week” is literally “Sabbath”. “Seventy 7’s are determined upon thy [finish verse 24].”

70 7’s. The first question that confronts us here is, “are these 7’s days, are they weeks, months, or are they years?” Because Daniel was reading of 70 years, thinking of years, praying about years, that here, it’s 70 7’s of years. Now, 70 7’s is 490. 490 years. And here’s what Gabriel is telling Daniel. You’re thinking of 70 years, I’ve come to tell you that it’s 490 years. You’ll find that in God’s dealing with the children of Israel, that he has dealt with them in periods of 490 years.

Now, “Daniel, God has determined 490 years yet upon the children of Israel”. God is saying, “I’m going to deal with Israel as a nation for 490 more years”. Now, in [verse

25] There's going to be issued a decree, for the children to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the city and the temple.

There were actually three decrees issued: One by Darius, one by Artaxerxes, and one by Cyrus. Now, it's immaterial for which one you contend this prophecy applies (I'll show you which one is correct in a moment, but many don't accept that), but there's going to be a period of 7 7's, which is 49, that will be followed by three score and two 7's which is 434, add them together and you get? "Now, Daniel, you're thinking about 70 years and the coming of the Messiah, but I'm here to tell you there's going to be 483 years before the Messiah appears." [verse 25: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off.] At the end of 483 years, the Messiah will be cut off. The Messiah will be crucified. Not for himself, but for you and me. "Now, Daniel, you're thinking the Messiah is coming soon because 70 years have been accomplished, but I have yet 490 years in which I'm going to deal with Israel as a nation."

Now, the first division of this 490 years is 7 7's or 49 years. After they returned, it took 49 years for them to rebuild everything. Then, add to that, 62 7's of years and we come up with the time of the Messiah being cut off. 483 years.

Here in verse 26, we see that after the three score and two years, which is after the 7 7's, which gives us a total of 483 years, the Messiah will be cut off. Take the decree of Cyrus, or the decree of Darius, or the decree of Artaxerxes, and anyone who was paying attention could have figured out that from that time, 483 years was at an end. He's saying here, "Daniel, 483 years from the going forth of this decree, the Messiah will have appeared and have been cut off."

[Isaiah 44] I want to put your mind at ease as to which decree this is referencing, whether the one from Cyrus, Darius, or Artaxerxes. There's much discussion on the subject, but here in [verse 28; this is talking about the Lord God Almighty]. God tells us that Cyrus is the messenger and he will issue the decree and from the time that Cyrus issued the decree until the time the Lord is speaking to them in this passage in Matthew 16, the Messiah had appeared and will be cut off. The chronological sign was that 483 years from the time that Cyrus issued the decree to return to Jerusalem, the Messiah will appear and will be cut off (crucified), and all the Pharisees and Sadducees could have and should have known that the time had come. Many of them probably did know.

That's the reason he called them hypocrites. He said, "You cannot read the signs of the times." But, that's 483 years for the cutting off of the Messiah. That leaves one period of seven years that has not been fulfilled; one period of seven years in which the Lord will be restoring Israel to her land. He'll deal with her once again as the way he did in the days of old until the 490 years has been fulfilled. Of course, that's another study in itself, but I want you to see here this first sign that has been given. Any of them could have known that the time of the advent of our Lord was at hand.

Another sign is to be found in [Genesis 49]. Jacob has gathered his sons around his bed as death is approaching and he said to them as death is approaching, gather around and I'll tell you of the things that are going to happen to you in the days that lie ahead. And here, as he gives these things to his sons, he gives them a preview of the coming history of the children of Israel. [Genesis 49:9] Here, he announces the blessing upon his son Judah. Now, here's the prophecy [verse 10]. "The scepter shall not depart until Shiloh shall come". Shiloh is one of the names of Jesus Christ. The scepter shall not depart until Jesus shall come.

The scepter was the emblem of civil authority. Judah, being appointed the king of the tribes after Reuben had defaulted and given up the birthright, was now in the position of being the judge. When Reuben blew it, that position devolved upon Judah, and the tribe of Judah shall have the scepter until Shiloh comes. In other words, when the scepter is gone, you can look for the Messiah.

The scepter, representing civil authority takes us back to Genesis 9:6, which says, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." God laid down there at the beginning of history that capital punishment for capital offenses is the basis for all civil government. Capital punishment for capital offenses is the basis our foundation for all civil government. The power to execute capital sentences for capital offenses would not leave Judah until Shiloh comes; the scepter would not depart from Judah until Shiloh has come.

Understand that as we study the crucifixion of our Lord. Judah and Israel were under Roman government and Herod was king over Judea, and Pilate was ruler in Jerusalem. The indictment against Jesus was blasphemy (he claimed to be God) and he had come to be a king (he had come to replace Caesar), or so they said.

He was guilty of capital offenses, and they wanted to put him to death. They had two choices: They could do what the Lord said, or they could shut him up. They chose the latter; rather than obey his commandments, they would execute him; they would shut him up and silence him once and for all. They wanted to put him to death, and they had these two capital offenses: Blasphemy and usurping the throne of Caesar. The Sanhedrin met, and with perjured testimony, they convicted him of those crimes and sentenced him to die.

[John 18] Remember what Jacob said concerning Judah: The scepter shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh has come; when it reaches the point that Israel cannot execute the capital sentence for a capital offense, then you know that Shiloh has come. [verses 28-30; accusation=indictment] "now, you quit worrying about the offense or the crime; if he weren't a criminal, we would not have brought him to you, and that's enough!" They knew their charges were false, and they weren't about to repeat them to Pilate.

[Verse 31] The scepter has departed from Judah! Someone there should have said, "Remember what Jacob said? The scepter will not have departed from Judah until Shiloh has come... Shiloh must be here!" They could have said, "Yes, 483 years from the

decree of Cyrus has passed, and now it's time for the Messiah to be cut off, and now the scepter has departed from Judah... Shiloh must be here!" That's the reason the Lord called them hypocrites; to see signs as plain and evident as these were, and they paid no attention to them at all.

[Numbers 24] We also have a celestial sign. Balaam had accepted a promise of great honorarium or reward if he would curse Israel and cause God to forsake them, thereby making it easy for Balak to overcome them, but every time Balaam would open his mouth to curse them, God spoke words of blessing. [Verse 17] Balaam's speaking, not knowing what he's saying...

"There shall come a star out of Jacob." This star was reckoned by many of the prophets to be a literal star. Many stars were studied. We read in Psalm 19 that until the law was given by Moses and written in books that the gospel was written in the stars. They read the gospel in the stars; they studied the gospel in the stars. That is not astrology! Don't get excited and go looking for the horoscopes in the daily paper, because they're worse than nothing: "Nothing" may not get you into trouble, but these things will get you in serious trouble because they put you in intimate contact with Satan and his minions.

A star shall come out of Jacob. One day, the silence and quiet undisturbed life of Jerusalem was shattered with the question, "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." The announcement of the appearing of a star, in the form of a question was made in the streets of Jerusalem. According to Scriptures, the star appeared in the east. These men who made that announcement and asked that question, spoken of as the wise men, made that proclamation. It doesn't say how many there were. Some suppose that because of the three gifts that were spoken of, it was three men; others suppose it was a large caravan; it's really immaterial. Where the Bible is silent, it becomes us to be silent.

"We have seen his star." His star. Balaam prophesied of that star, now here's that star being announced. The interesting thing about the star is that the Bible tells us that the star appeared in the East. The Scriptures do not say it led them to Bethlehem, and I don't think it did. It was about two years before these wise men showed up in the streets of Jerusalem, they didn't find the baby in a manger; they did not find a baby at all; they found the young child. That's a different word entirely. They found the young child in a house with his mother Mary; not a baby and not in a manger or a stable.

As we read concerning that star in Matthew 2, we read that these men had come into the streets of Jerusalem, asking, "where is he that is born king of the Jews", giving evidence of the birth of the Messiah, but they came because they had seen His star, which manifested at the time of his birth, and they said, "we saw his star in the east and we've come to worship him". They knew he was the king of the Jews, and they knew that Jerusalem was the capital of Jewry, and they knew that the palace was in Jerusalem, and they knew that the king should be born in the palace.

They came to Jerusalem. They needed no star to guide them. We hear nothing more about that star until after Herod called his advisers together and asked them (this is a truly amazing question: these wise men asked where is he that is born King of the Jews), but Herod turned to his advisers, and he asked, where the Christ would be born. Herod knew something that most people don't know even today: The King of the Jews and the Christ are one and the same.

He said, "Where's the Christ to be born". They didn't even have to look in their books, they said, "Bethlehem!" "Everybody knows that!" Why? Because it's written in the book of the prophet Micah. These wise men knew the Messiah had been born in Israel, and they came to worship him. They had probably been exposed to the prophecies during the Babylonian captivity. I'm not sure why they were unaware of the prophecies in the book of Micah, but they were certainly aware that the Messiah and the King of the Jews had been born.

Herod called these wise men aside and said unto them, "now listen fellas, you've come to worship the Messiah, and I admire him and believe in him and want to worship him too, now you go and find him, and when you've found him, send word back to me, so that I can go and worship him". Well, they were warned in a dream by God not to go back to Herod, but to go on another way, and Joseph and Mary were told to take Jesus down into Egypt. So, when Herod saw that the wise men paid no attention to him, he got this calendar, and he studied it and he figured as near as he could when this star appeared, and having ascertained to his own satisfaction the time of the appearing of the star, he sent to Bethlehem and had all the male children 2 years old and under slain, according to the time when he determined the star appeared.

Now, to show you why the star didn't lead them from the East to Jerusalem, we find that when the wise men departed from the palace of Herod, the star that they had seen in the East appeared. Matthew 2:10 tells us, "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Great joy! They knew then that their mission was successful, because there was the star they had seen a couple year earlier. Then the star led them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and it came to stop over the house in which the young child Jesus and his mother Mary were.

Now, that star, the star out of Judah, out of Jacob, the star of our Lord having appeared, should have revealed itself as an omen of something to many people. The appearance should have created some great excitement and some disturbance. The going down of the wise men into Bethlehem, in fulfillment of the prophecy should have made many people stop and think.

The Lord had given all these signs. You hypocrites, you're talking about signs from heaven; you can read the signs of the sky and prophesy the weather of tomorrow, and the next few days, but you can't read the signs of the times. I told you that 483 years after Cyrus gave his decree to rebuild the city that the Messiah would be cut off. And you can take your calendar and see that the 483 years are about up. I told you the scepter would not depart from Judah until Shiloh had come, and the scepter has departed! You should

know that Shiloh is here. I told you that a star was going to appear out of Jacob and the star has appeared and the wise men came, they announced it, and the star led them to Bethlehem and you didn't believe. I told you in Micah that he was going to be born in Bethlehem and you believed it not. I'm not going to give you any more signs; you've got all the signs I'm going to give you.

It's a wicked and adulterous generation that seeks for a sign. All those signs pointing to the first advent. They didn't believe the Scriptures, the revealed word of God, they didn't believe the prophets of old, they didn't believe the signs that were visible to the eye, and which were recognizable to the brain or the mind, as they studied. They laid him in a manger there in the stable because there was no room in the inn, and there wasn't any room for them in the inn, because no one believed in the prophecies of God.

Jesus is coming back, and he's coming soon. But, nobody believes the signs that point to his coming. Sometime in the near future, we're going to look at some of the outstanding manifest signs of our Lord's soon return. But, he came and he's coming again. Why did he come? We have a motive, we have a purpose, and we have an accomplishment.

Why was he born in Bethlehem; why did he lay aside the glory he had with his father and take upon himself the likeness of his creature, apart from sin? Why did he do all that? It's all summed up in one verse: For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish!

What was the motive of his coming? He came to save you and me. Think about heaven and earth being moved to accomplish the advent of our Lord! And it wasn't in vain, as far as I'm concerned. (I have believed, and I am saved forever.) It's not in vain as far as I'm concerned, but for how many millions of people did he come in vain?

The motive of his coming was to save. What prompted his coming? It was the love of God. For God so loved the world. What was the accomplishment of his coming? Life to all who believe.

One thing about studying the birth of Jesus outside the Christmas season is that during the Christmas season, he has little prominence in the world, and it's growing less every year. He's less thought of, less honored, less respected, less worshipped, less loved... Mammon has become the god of the season. Christmas can be summed up in the experience of a group of children unwrapping toys, toys, and more toys, throwing them aside, and finally saying, "is that all?" They haven't even looked at them or paid attention to them, and they want more, more, more.

But, the birth of Christ means something to us; it means something to you and me. Christ died for our sins, according to the Scripture, was buried and rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures. Listen, to what I'm trying to say: God loved me and gave his son for me that if I believed on Him I will have everlasting life, and I may have life for the age to come. I have believed on Him, so I will have everlasting life. I hope you have this same knowledge and certainty as I do.