

This passed week the country of Israel held elections (again) in which Ariel Sharon overwhelmingly defeated Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Sharon who is a former Israeli general has pledged to bring peace and security to the region, but has a history of taking a tough line with the Arabs.

In Jordan the *al-Aswaq* newspaper declared "Sharon wins ... extremism rules Israel today," "Sharon might postpone peace, but he will not be able to assassinate it," an editorial in *al-Aswaq* said.

Sharon won by a landslide as Israelies rejected Barak's trade off of "territory for peace" which hasn't brought peace, only more conflict. Under pressure from the Clinton administration it made Israel look weak.

Israel goes back and forth politically looking for a solution to their age-old conflict with the Arabs...looking for someone who can bring them peace. The problem is they just don't know how to identify their deliverer. That's a problem they've struggled with for thousands of years.

A few months ago Peter Jennings did an ABCNEWS two-hour special called The Search for Jesus. The special was billed as providing "extensive, thought-provoking insights into his 2000-year-old story."

Before the special was aired Peter Jennings commented, "Some people who heard we were doing this said, 'Oh, don't try that, you're going to offend a lot of people, but in this country alone, what we call the 'Christian' tradition seeps into every facet of our political and ethical debates. Whatever your religious beliefs, Jesus' life and words still have such a powerful influence, and what people believe about him has an effect on us all. Is it really any network news journalist's business to ask, 'Who was Jesus?' Absolutely."

It seems that our supposed Christian nation still can't seem to identify their deliverer either. When it comes to the question of identifying our real hope, of a nation or of this world, how do we know for sure when we have the right one?

Two months ago we embarked on a study of Luke's NT Gospel account. Somewhere around 65 AD Dr. Luke was writing to Theophilus, a friend from Greece. Luke was living in the port city of Caesarea while waiting for the Roman judicial system to determine the fate of his friend, the apostle Paul, who had been charged with inciting a riot in the Temple area in Jerusalem. In the interim, Luke used his free time to interview Jesus' mother, Mary, and many of the disciples in order to write a full and accurate account of Jesus' life and ministry.

Along with Luke's painstaking research God's Holy Spirit breathed out His words through Luke's pen so that his gospel became part of the inspired Biblical record.

Two weeks ago when we began chapter 3 we saw John the Baptist preaching in the region around the Jordan river. John was truly a unique guy. He wore clothes made of camel hide, and ate a diet of locusts and honey. But what made John truly unique wasn't so much his diet as what he had to say.

He said I am, *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; Make His paths straight.'"*

John the Baptist said to his fellow Israelites who hadn't heard from a prophet in 400 years, "get ready because God's got something to say."

Now see prior to that 400 years of silence God had a lot to say. Over the centuries God had raised up a nation of people from the descendants of a man named Abraham.

He made special promises to Abraham that involved three things. The first was land. God brought Abraham into what is now Israel around 2000 BC. He said I give this land to you and those who will come after you.

The second was his seed. God said I will make you the father of a great nation. Multitudes of descendants.

The third was the blessing. God said, "In you all nations of the earth will be blessed."

Abraham's descendants are the Jewish people and the land is Israel. But what about all the earth being blessed in him? What's that all about?

Fast forward 1300 years from Abraham to 700 BC. The Jewish prophet Isaiah wrote, *"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."*

A virgin would give birth to a child whose name means, "God with us."

Before we look at our passage in Luke I'd like you to see two other things Isaiah said about this child.

Turn to Isaiah 53 pg 710

In Jewish synagogues around the world today this is the one chapter that's never read.

Read vs 3-6

The world would be blessed because God was going to come into the world born as the son of a Jewish virgin. He would be a man of sorrows, rejected, wounded, and ultimately made to be a sacrifice for sin. All of our sins would be placed on Him.

One more of Isaiah's prophecies: **Isaiah 9 Pg 662**

If your familiar with Handel's Messiah you've heard these verses: **Read vs 6-7.**

In fulfillment with these, and hundreds of other prophecies, a child would be born to a Jewish virgin. He would be called the "Mighty God." He would bless the world as he took our sins upon Himself. And finally he would be a descendant of Israel's king David and would eventually rule.

No wonder the Jewish people wrestled with interpreting their own prophets.

Was this Messiah to come be human or divine? Was he to suffer or was he to rule from a throne?

That brings us to Luke chapter 3 and our passage for today. **Turn Luke 3 pg 993**

John the Baptist's message was simple. "Get ready. The one we've been waiting for is at hand."

But still there was a question, "How can we be sure?" How do you spot this unique one that had been prophesied? **Read vs 21-22**

Luke gives us almost a synopsis of Jesus baptism. Look with me at Matthew and John's accounts and we'll see some additional details.

Matthew 3:13 pg 937 Read vs 13-17

John 1:29 pg 1025 Read vs 29-34

Approximately 18 years have passed since the 12-year-old Jesus was "found" by his parents in the Temple "doing His Father's business." Apparently, some time within those years Joseph had died and Jesus had taken up his father's trade of carpentry to

provide for his widowed mother as well as his brothers and sisters. At the age of 30, He was moved by the Holy Spirit to begin his public ministry.

Jesus walked the 70-75 miles from the northern city of Galilee, past the city of Jerusalem, and down the Jericho Road until he arrived by the banks of the Jordan river on the east side of the oasis called Jericho. When he arrived he saw the people gathered on the banks of the river as John preached and baptized. Moving towards his cousin John, he presented himself to John.

At this point nobody, except His mother Mary, knew who Jesus was. Not even John. It took God's revelation for John to fully understand. This isn't something John just guessed at. It wasn't his own personal opinion. He didn't piece together all the clues. His understanding came from supernatural revelation.

At His baptism by John, the HS, the 3rd person of the trinity, came upon Jesus to empower Him for what He was about to do for the next 3 years. That was God's sign to John that the Messiah had finally arrived.

The HS who has no bodily form, appeared as a dove, descended and remained upon Jesus.

In Palestine doves were considered sacred birds. They weren't hunted and they weren't eaten. The Jewish rabbis always associated Genesis 1:2 *the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters* with a dove.

A dove was a fitting sign to John of God's declaration the Jesus was the one. But just so there was no mistake a voice rumbled from the heavens which said, "*You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.*"

Now naturally when we read these accounts some questions come up. And the most perplexing question to most people is why was Jesus baptised?

John's baptism was called a baptism of repentance. He was calling people to admit their sin because the Lamb of God was coming to die for their sin.

For Jesus to die for sinners He needed to be sinless. If I were broke and owed a debt you couldn't help me out if you were broke too. The only person who could help me would be someone who wasn't in the same situation I was.

One sinner can't die for another sinner. We're all accountable for our own sin. *All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way* But Jesus came as the sinless lamb. *The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

So why the baptism? This is so important.

The Jews had been suffering under the heels of nations down through their history. Now they were under the iron boot of Rome.

If Jesus would have come riding into Jerusalem on a white horse, using His sword on every Roman soldier that got in His way Israel would have gladly claimed Him as king.

If He would have come denouncing the enemies of the Jews and their paganism and idolatry Israel would have proclaimed Him God's prophet. Those were the pre-conceived ideas they had as to how to spot their Messiah. Instead He came first as the lamb of God. He came first as the suffering servant of Isaiah 53.

How could they have been sure? How can we be sure today? Jesus Christ fulfilled specific, detailed prophecy. And in front of a multitude of witnesses God gave His confirmation. *"You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."*

One author said, "The Father out of a heart of love for his Son and the world was willing to send his Son to earth to die for the sin of lost humanity. The Son, out of a heart of love for his father and the world, was willing to agree with the Father to go to the cross; and the Spirit was willing to strengthen the Son to fulfill the Father's redemptive plan for lost humanity. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all interested in our salvation." God the Father officially recognized Jesus as Israel's king, and approved of his person and Messianic ministry.

The religious Jewish community of Jesus' day rejected the idea that Jesus is the son of God. Unfortunately, nothing has changed throughout the years.

Judaism today says that Jesus was a good man. Some even call Him a prophet. But never the Son of God.

Islam: Jesus is a prophet but he was not the Son of God and He did not die for sins.

Christian Science: "Jesus is the human man and Christ is the divine idea."
One sacrifice, however great, is insufficient to pay the debt of sin."

Jehovah's Witnesses: "Jesus Christ is not God. He was the first son that Jehovah God brought forth . . . His perfect life was laid down in death, but not for sin and in punishment."

Mormonism: "Jesus Christ by obedience and devotion attained to the pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a god, even in his pre-existent state."

The New Age: (which is nothing more than a rerun of Eastern mysticism): "The historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, is separated from the Christ consciousness which Jesus attained that is found within himself. Jesus is not the God-man, but one of a long line of "masters" along with Buddha and Krishna who had themselves realized divinity. Salvation comes by realizing that you are to "be still and know that you are God," and when you know that you are God you will begin to live Godhood."

A Christian from India was asked why her father remained a Hindu priest, and she quickly replied, "We would all rather be a god than serve one." That sums up the lie of the evil one since the beginning of our humanity in the Garden of Eden. To reject the witness of the Father, the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist is to reject Jesus as the Son of God. If Jesus is not the Son of God we are left in our darkness, helplessness and hopelessness, as well as remaining dead in our sins, shame, and guilt.

How can we know that Jesus is the Son of God? We have the witness of the Father, and we also have what we might call

II. The Witness of the Fathers

In the rest of Luke 3 and the beginning of Matthew we have genealogies. They might not make for the most interesting reading but they are crucial to understanding the identity of Jesus.

Remember the prophecies. This one who was to come was to be "God with us" but He was to be born as a human being. He was to be a descendant of David. *Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom...*

To Israel's greatest king, David, God had made two irrevocable promises:

Psalm 89 The throne of David would be everlasting.

II Samuel 7 He promised David that his physical descendant would sit on his throne.

David was unconditionally promised that lineal descendants of his would be preserved to sit on the throne.

Enter Joseph and Mary. When you read the genealogies in Matthew and Luke it's obvious that they're different. That's because Matthew traces Jesus' genealogy through Joseph and Luke through Mary. But interestingly both Joseph and Mary were descendants of king David. They were distantly related, not close enough to be a problem, but they were related.

Living in poverty and obscurity like Joseph and Mary did I'm sure that they both clung to this little shred of dignity and fame.

They were descended from the king. There was royal blood in their veins. That was why Joseph had to go back to Bethlehem for the census.

This all is absolutely significant and ties right in with why there had to be a virgin birth.

Turn with me now to Matthew 1 pg 935 Remember Matthew gives Joseph's genealogy from Abraham forward.

Read vs 6

The Bible tells us that David had several sons, but the legal right to sit on the throne only passed through one of them - Solomon. So only those of the kingly line (though Solomon) inherited the right to the throne. To put it another way, it was possible to be a physical descendent of David and yet have no legal right to sit in leadership in Israel.

Joseph was in line for the throne because he could trace his blood line back through Solomon to David.

But now look with me at vs 11+12

The 14th descendent of David in the royal line was a king called Jeconiah (sometimes called Coniah). Because of sin God pronounced a curse on Jeconiah.

Jeremiah 22:30 says: *Thus says the LORD: 'Write this man down as childless, A man who shall not prosper in his days; For none of his descendants shall prosper, Sitting on the throne of David, And ruling anymore in Judah.'*

It wasn't that Jeconiah would have no children. He would have descendants. But he was to be counted as childless. In other words as if he had no children to carry on his line because none of his descendants could occupy the royal throne.

Now at this point it seems like we have an unsolvable problem.

Joseph, the husband of Mary, was a direct descendent of Jeconiah. that means that although Joseph inherited the legal right to the throne of David because he was of the kingly line of Solomon, he couldn't sit on the throne because of the curse placed on the descendents of Jeconiah.

Now understand, if Jesus had been the physical son of Joseph He would have been disqualified by that same divine curse.

Three main conditions had to be met for Jesu to be Israel's Messiah:

1. Jesus had to be the lineal descendent of David to fulfill God's promise to David that his seed would sit on the throne.
2. He also had to be the legal son of Joseph in order to inherit the right to sit on the throne.
3. And yet, He couldn't be the physical son of Joseph without coming under God's curse on Jeconiah.

That really makes Isaiah 7:14 *Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son...* crucial. Jesus was the legal son of Joseph through adoption and therefore inherited the legal right to the throne.

But he wasn't the physical son of Joseph so he didn't come under the curse.

Matthew is very careful to point that out in verse 16. **Read vs 16.**

Through this entire genealogy runs the verb *begot*. So-in-so begot so-in-so who begot so-in-so and on and on. Until you get to Joseph because he didn't beget Jesus.

Instead he says *of whom* (and that word *whom* happens to be feminine in Greek, referring to Mary) *of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ*.

I know this is somewhat detailed, but there's still one condition that's a problem. The prophets of Israel predicted that Messiah would be a lineal descendent of David. An adopted son isn't a lineal descendent.

The answer is found back in the Gospel of Luke. **turn back to Luke 3 pg 994**

Luke presents Jesus genealogy through Mary starting with Jesus and working back.

Read vs 23 +24

You'll notice instead of using the word *begat* Luke uses the phrase *the son of*. Actually all the way through in Greek it just says *of*, not *the son of*. That is except for Joseph. There it uses the Greek word υιος, or *son*. That shows that the parenthesis in verse 1 should include Joseph. *Jesus as was supposed the son of Joseph*.

Jesus wasn't the son of Joseph, he was just thought to be. The next name *Heli* was Mary's father or grandfather.

Now drop down to verse 31. **Read vs 31**

Mary was also a descendent of David but through another of his sons, Nathan, not Solomon. That means that the curse on Jeconiah didn't affect her or her son, but Jesus was still the lineal descendent of King David.

Talk about a marriage made in heaven.

When it comes to the question of identifying our real hope, of a nation or of this world, how do we know for sure when we have the right one?

The rabbis of Jesus day had all the evidence they could ever need but they rejected Jesus, not because of evidence, but because he didn't fit their preconceived idea.

The Israelies today are wondering can Sharon finally bring peace? Our culture today is still asking the question 'Who was Jesus?'

According to the overwhelming evidence He's the: *Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*.

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 with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Jesus Christ died as the Lamb of God who came to take away the sin of the world. *He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him...All who trust Him have forgiveness and eternal life.*

What about the throne? the Bible tells us He's coming again the second time. When He does it will be to rule the nations with a rod of iron.

He'll take His rightful place on David's throne in Jerusalem and rule the world.

His second coming will be a day of righteous and fearful judgment. Today is still the day of salvation.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."