

Wise Men Special 25-12-28b

We resume our study looking at the other half of the nativity narrative available to us. We saw Matthew on Wednesday looking at the wise men and their experience and the strange come to pass that God allows them to go to Jerusalem and alert that city and King Herod to the birth of the king, which ends up with the slaughter of the male children two years old and under in Bethlehem and all of its surrounding districts. How easy it would have been for God to warn them in a dream on their journey to go directly to where the child was.

The star could have led them. They saw his star in the east. They are prompted to go to Jerusalem, the capital where one would expect to find the king.

And then the star seems to reappear and guide them to where the child is actually staying. And that is an unknown location, certainly well after what we are looking at this morning, which is the visit of the angel and his heavenly companions to the shepherds who immediately and with haste leave their flocks, no doubt in the care of others and make haste and they find Mary and Joseph. So my question is, how did they find them with no angelic guidance, no stellar or interstellar guidance? How did they accomplish this? And we have a suggestion and this is based on wonderful work done by Alfred Edersheim who wrote a must have reference work called the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.

Edersheim by the way is spelled E-D-E-R, Edersheim, S-H-E-I-M. Remember his name as we move forward, Edersheim. So how did the shepherds know? There is scripture that would have informed them, especially given their location in the realms of Bethlehem.

I think to our Wednesday study, when it is presumed or announced that there is a newborn king for Israel, Herod says, where is he to be born? And the scribes go and they find Micah 5 verse 2 and decide that it is Bethlehem. Had they continued, if they had done more than a cursory proof text type of study of their Old Testament scriptures, they would have seen in the context another verse. Turn back to Micah.

If you've memorized your Old Testament books and you get to the minor prophets, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah. Micah chapter 5 verse 2, right after Jonah. And this is of course, you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, out of you shall come forth to me the one to be ruler in Israel.

The scribes got this far. You know that if we had a church building with a sanctuary and had stuff up on the walls, we would have a giant plaque and it should probably say, holy, holy, holy, but we would say context, context, context. It would be on the wall, right? So what is the context? Go back a chapter.

Chapter 4, it shall come to pass in the latter days. The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains and shall be exalted above the hills and peoples shall flow to it. What did the angel tell the shepherds? Good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all

peoples.

How many times are all peoples mentioned in a blessing context in scripture? Not that often. But here's one. Peoples shall flow to it.

Many nations shall come and say, come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways and we shall walk in his paths. For out of Zion, the law shall go forth and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between many peoples and rebuke strong nations afar off. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

On earth, peace toward men of goodwill. If everyone was of goodwill, there would be no wars. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree and no one shall make them afraid.

Fear not, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all people walk each in the name of his God, but we will walk in the name of the Lord, our God forever and ever. In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame.

I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted. I will make the lame a remnant and the outcast a strong nation. When he says I'll make the lame a remnant, he's not talking about they will be rare and scarce.

This is the remnant that is preserved and exalted and blessed and prospered. So the lame who are the outcasts of society are going to be the chosen remnant and the outcast, a strong nation. So the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on even forever.

And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, to you it shall come. Even the former dominion shall come. The kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

To you, O tower of the flock. Tower of the flock. In Hebrew, this is Migdal, which is tower, and Eder, E-D-E-R, is the Hebrew word for flock.

What is our author's name? Alfred Edersheim, Flocksheim, you might say. In any case, we know from another passage of scripture that the scribes did not bother to remember, read, or check where this is, where the Migdal Eder is. You can keep your finger here and turn back, or I can simply read it to you, or you might wanna write it down in the margin.

This is Genesis chapter 35, verse 21. And this is the death of Rachel, where they journeyed. This is verse 16 of Genesis 35.

They journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, they were not far away. Rachel labored in childbirth and had hard labor.

It came to pass when she was in hard labor that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, you will

have this son also, fear thou not.' So it was, as her soul was departing, for she died, that she called his name Ben-Oni, Ben-Oni. Ben is son, Oni is my pain, son of my pain. But his father called him Ben-Yamin, son of the right hand.

And you know, from later excursions in the book of Judges that there were hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of left-handed warriors from the tribe of Benjamin. It's quite a clue to God's sense of humor that the tribe of the son of the right hand has so many left-handed guys. So Ben-Yamin.

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem. It has two names. And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder, the tower of the flock." So this is not in Bethlehem, it is near Bethlehem. And it happened when Israel dwelt in that land that Reuben did a bad thing. So this is where the tower of the flock, Migdal Eder is.

It is not far from where Rachel died, which is Bethlehem or Ephrath, Bethlehem Ephratha. So even in Jewish messianic interpretation, which you would think might have been mentioned to Herod, rabbinic tradition connected Migdal Eder with the future revealing of the Messiah and the restoration of the line of David as kings in Israel. So Migdal Eder was associated not only with care of the sheep, but with messianic expectations, expectations of the Messiah, the son of David.

If you read Alfred Edersheim, and I wish we had time, he is a beautiful writer. It's, he can really put you in the place and in the time. But he has documented from early records that the fields around Bethlehem were used for sheep that had a special purpose.

These flocks were bred, were tended, and were cared for to provide sacrifices for the altar at the temple in nearby Jerusalem. So temple sacrificial flocks were tended in the fields around Bethlehem. These sheep were special sheep.

Some animals are bred for their wool. Others are bred for their offspring. These sheep were bred for sacrifice.

And in order to ensure that they were pure, and you remember how fanatical the chief priests and the priests under them, and the other religious leaders were about cleanliness. And why do your disciples eat with unwashed hands and so on? And Jesus said, you all wash the outside of the cup, but inside it's full of impurity. You whitewash the outside of the tombstone, inside it's full of dead men's bones.

You're great on purifying the external. They were fanatical about purity. And so these flocks would have been overseen by Levites.

Levites would ensure that nothing tainted or defiled these sheep so that they were pure and unblemished as sacrificial lambs. So the shepherds in this region weren't just any old

shepherds. They were knowledgeable.

And these shepherds in particular were chosen by God to receive the revelation from the angel of the birth of the Messiah, much as the wise men who were willing to travel all the way from the East to come and worship him. These shepherds are equally motivated. When they hear that there is born to you a savior, a savior, mashiach, they're ready to go.

And they not only know the special care that these sheep and lambs receive, but they know what migdal eder is used for. So the angel says you will find the child lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes. This is not a random detail.

Homes had mangers as we've discussed on the ground floor where they would keep their transportation animals and their milk animals. And they would have goats, sheep, and so on to provide milk and cheese and so on. But lying in a manger tells the shepherds something.

There may be a lot of mangers, but you know where there are special mangers that would be worthy of this child at migdal eder? Now, this is something of an assumption on our part. It is a speculation, but there is plenty of evidence because the tower of the flock is associated scripturally with deliverance. Rachel dies near there.

And Rachel is the mother of Joseph, who is one of the strongest foreshadowings of the Lord Jesus. Thought to be dead, blood-spattered coat presented to the father, and yet through humility, through hardship, through mistreatment, he eventually becomes the savior of his people in Egypt. You know that story.

These shepherds would understand the need for ritual purity and if this is a babe that the angels have announced, where can he go in the region of Bethlehem that is the holiest? He isn't going to be cradled at the temple in Jerusalem. He is in Bethlehem. So where is the sanctified spot in Bethlehem? It is at the tower of the flock where the sacrificial animals are kept sanctified and undefiled.

So these shepherds understand ritual purity and the significance of newborn life that is associated with sacrifice. So the shepherds hear the angel say, you will find him carefully wrapped and lying in a manger. Where would you find a sanctified manger? At the tower.

I don't think they had to search the town. I don't think they had to go from door to door and house to house and raise a shout and who's got a newborn baby? I think they proceeded with haste because these are knowledgeable guys. That's why God sent the angels to them.

They know because they know their scriptures. They know their job. They know the significance of the pictures, the Levitical offerings and sacrifices that foreshadow God's work of salvation.

These men know that. And they're not just doing their jobs as random shepherds. They are doing them with energy and with enthusiasm because they know what they are engaged in because they are men of faith.

You can tell by their response to the word of the angel. These are great men of faith, perhaps the greatest in all the land of everyone in Israel. This is who God chooses to announce on the day of the birth.

There's born to you this day. Child is some hours old by the time that it's night. So it's a specific kind of birth.

And it is in a location that is tied to sanctification and worship of God. So would it surprise us to hear in John 1.29, John the Baptist sees the Lord Jesus walking in the midst of the crowd. And he says, look, behold, the Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world.

First description anyone hears of the Lord Jesus. The Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. This also suggests being familiar with sacrificial lamb imagery and a theology of worship and recognition based on what God has revealed.

You come to 1 Corinthians 5.7, and the apostle Paul, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, an Israelite of the Israelites, steeped in the law, says, Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. Christ our Passover. 1 Corinthians 5.7, the Lord Jesus Christ fulfills the entire sacrificial system.

Most explicitly, he is crucified at the season of Passover. He is crucified on Passover as the sacrificial lambs that came from the Bethlehem fields were being sacrificed at the temple. And elsewhere in Israel, the Lord Jesus is laying down his life and shedding his blood on the cross.

So I would suggest this is something we can check when we get to glory and are able to ask questions for which scripture doesn't give explicit answers. Given that temple lambs are raised near Bethlehem, Migdal Eder has associations with the Messiah and deliverance for Israel. The shepherds are explicitly told to look for the child in a manger, and the Lord Jesus Christ is explicitly identified as the Passover lamb.

It is not too much of a stretch to believe that God orchestrated the timing and the location of the birth of the Lord Jesus. The timing signified by the star. The wise men noted what time the star appeared.

That's timing. The shepherds give us the location. And there is a significance to the geography.

There is a significance to the timing because given these suggestive details of what the shepherds are doing at night and staying out with the flocks, this may even have been at or near the time of Passover when the Lord Jesus was born. I am reminded for no particular reason of Samuel Clemens, Mark Twain, who was born when Haley's Comet was in the sky. And 89 years later, when that comet reappeared, that's when he died.

He was born and he died under Haley's Comet. And it would not surprise me at all that the Lord Jesus both came and left his earthly existence at the season of Passover, if not on the actual day. So who are the first beyond his immediate family to see the Christ child? Shepherds who know a lamb when they see it.

A lamb without blemish. And God's sinless son. Lambs born for sacrifice.

The Lord Jesus born to sacrifice his life for all those who will receive it by faith. These lambs were watched by shepherds and the Lord Jesus is revealed first to shepherds. These lambs were offered at Passover.

The Lord Jesus was crucified at Passover. God has a plan and purpose for each one of us. We can enter into it.

We can travel that narrow road that leads to the straight gate and enter into life when we take seriously what the word of God reveals as the shepherds did. What Peter and James and John did, when they heard John the Baptist was preaching and they traveled from Galilee down to hear the Baptist preaching. And they were present when he announced the lamb of God and they immediately followed him.

This is the kind of people we want to be as we head into a new year. We think we're going to break old bad habits and form new ones. Wouldn't it be wonderful that this upcoming year reveals us to be this kind of people, to have God's word and keep it, to express our love for him in that way so that he will come and make his home with us and he can reveal to us hidden truths.

In our revelation study, we've seen that there is the promise of the hidden manna. I think this is like Peter, James, and John going to the upper room and seeing the young girl who has died being raised, Talitha, Kumi, little girl arise to climb the mount of transfiguration. Anybody that's done significant climbing, that's an effort, but they climb because Jesus invites them to come.

And when they arrive at the top, they see this vision of the Lord Jesus glorified with Moses and Elijah. And they are discussing, those three are discussing his impending, the Lord Jesus' impending departure. And Peter and James and John are there to witness it and to hear it and to record it and share it with us eventually.

This is the kind of person we want to be, the shepherds, humble and stationed, but with a job they recognize as culturally, theologically, and spiritually significant. And they don't take it for granted. And God reveals the birth of the child to them and they cannot wait to go and see him.

You can think of these shepherds, not just at the Christmas season. You can think of these wise men, not just at the Christmas season, but anytime we think that we are at a great distance from what God is doing, wise men are very far away. They are weeks, perhaps months journey away.

The shepherds have what many would consider to be a job that isn't impressive, that isn't significant, but they see it for what it is. They recognize the place. The wise men recognize the time.

Others to whom it is revealed completely miss it. And there are tragic results. But as with the

Lord Jesus teaching in parables, to those who are outside, everything is in parables so that seeing, they see, but they don't perceive.

Hearing, they hear, but they don't understand. Churches across this nation are opening their Bibles and looking at the word this morning. And we pray that like the wise men who see a revelation in God's heavens and in nature and know the prophecies of Balaam concerning the star that will rise in Jacob and smite the brow of Moab, who understand the significance and see in circumstance a sign of the times.

We endeavor to do that as we study the revelation. We wanna see the signs of the times, but most importantly, we want to be the people that God is looking for. We don't blend.

We don't stick with the crowd because it's safe and socially acceptable. We are those who will get up and move and go and see the revealed glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, the everlasting Son of God. I hope this has been a helpful review in keeping with the season and motivating for us as we face the upcoming year.

We'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the wonderful richness that is to be found in your word. It is a treasury of truth that sustains and guides us both in the mountains and in the valleys, both in those things that are clear and obvious and those that require reflection and meditation and comparing scripture with scripture.

We pray that we can be those people to whom your spirit will reveal truths that enable us to live in a way that glorifies the Lord Jesus, that represents him on this earth as his body. We can be a presence that draws others who are interested in relationship to you and be a beacon of truth, a beacon of hope, and when others see the hope that is in us, they will ask us a reason, and we can share with them the wonderful truth of your word and of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.