

*The Gospel According to*

SAINT MATTHEW

SAINT MARK

SAINT LUKE

SAINT JOHN

NOTHING RECORDED

NOTHING RECORDED

CHAPTER 01, VERSES 5-25

NOTHING RECORDED

**1:5** - THERE was in the days<sup>1</sup> of Herod<sup>2</sup>, the king<sup>3</sup> of Judaea<sup>4</sup>, a certain priest<sup>5</sup> named Zacharias<sup>6</sup>, of the course<sup>7</sup> of Abia<sup>8</sup>; and his wife<sup>9</sup> was of the daughters<sup>10</sup> of Aaron<sup>11</sup>, and her name was Elisabeth<sup>12</sup>.

**1:6** - And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances<sup>13</sup> of the Lord blameless<sup>16</sup>.

**1:7** - And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren<sup>14</sup>, and they both were now well stricken<sup>15</sup> in years.

**1:8** - And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course<sup>7</sup>,

**1:9** - According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot<sup>17</sup> was to burn incense<sup>18</sup> when he went into the temple<sup>19</sup> of the Lord.

**1:10** - And the whole multitude of the people were praying<sup>20</sup> without at the time of incense.

**1:11** - And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord<sup>21</sup> standing on the right side<sup>22</sup> of the altar of incense<sup>23</sup>.

**1:12** - And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him.

**1:13** - But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son<sup>24</sup>, and thou shalt call his name John<sup>25</sup>.

**1:14** - And thou shalt have joy and gladness<sup>26</sup>; and many shall rejoice at his birth<sup>27</sup>.

**1:15** - For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord<sup>28</sup>, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink<sup>29</sup>; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost<sup>30</sup>, even from his mother's womb<sup>31</sup>.

**1:16** - And many of the children of Israel shall he turn<sup>32</sup> to the Lord their God.

**1:17** - And he shall go before him in the spirit<sup>33</sup> and power<sup>34</sup> of Elias<sup>35</sup>, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children<sup>36</sup>, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just<sup>37</sup>; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord<sup>38</sup>.

**1:18** - And Zacharias said unto the angel, Whereby shall I know this<sup>39</sup>? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.

**1:19** - And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel<sup>40</sup>, that stand in the presence of God<sup>41</sup>; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings<sup>42</sup>.

**1:20** - And, behold, thou shalt be dumb<sup>43</sup>, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed<sup>44</sup>, because thou believest not my words<sup>45</sup>, which shall be fulfilled in their season<sup>46</sup>.

**1:21** - And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long<sup>47</sup> in the temple.

**1:22** - And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

**1:23** - And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house<sup>48</sup>.

**1:24** - And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived<sup>49</sup>, and hid herself five months<sup>50</sup>, saying,

**1:25** - Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men<sup>51</sup>.

**CHRONOLOGY:** **Approximated to be in the month of January between 9BCE and 2BCE.** John the Baptist was born 6 months prior to Jesus' birth. The Savior was born on April 6th. Establishing the date of this chapter requires that we work backwards 6 months and then an additional 40 weeks for Elisabeth's pregnancy. It is estimated that Elisabeth conceived on or around January 7, 5BCE. The annunciation would therefore have taken place in **late December 6BCE / early January of 5BCE\***.

\* The established year for this chapter is based on the year of Jesus' birth, which is highly debated. Below is a list of possible years for Jesus' birth. The chronology of Jesus' life in this book is based on the author's belief that Jesus was born in 4BCE. The most likely years for Jesus' birth are 1BCE, 4BCE and 5BCE. The other years are problematic.

- Year theories:
- 1 BCE - Supported by **the Apostle James E. Talmage** & Secular Biblical Scholars Pearson and Hug & the creator of Gregorian Calendar: Dionysius Exiguus.
  - 2 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholar Scalinger.
  - 2/3 BCE - Supported by early Christian writers and historians Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Africanus, Hippolytus of Rome, Hippolytus of Thebes, Origen, Eusebius and Epiphanius.
  - 3 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Baronius and Paulus.
  - 4 BCE** - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Bengel, Wieseler & Greswell. **Supported by this Author.**
  - 5 BCE - Supported by **the Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, the Apostle J. Rueben Clark**, and Secular Biblical Scholars Usher and Petavius.
  - 6 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Strong, Luvin and Clark.
  - 7 BCE - Supported by Secular Biblical Scholars Ideler and Sanclemente.

**LOCATION:** **Jerusalem, specifically The Temple of Herod**

**COMMENTARY:** The story of the Nativity really begins here. Elisabeth, recorded as a cousin of Mary, is barren and aged. Her husband is a faithful priesthood holder, and the two of them have endured a life without children of their own. This would have been a circumstance of shame for a Jewish couple of the time. Many viewed barrenness as divine punishment. A barren couple must have done something to displease God. Zacharias, Elisabeth's husband, was serving in the Temple at the Golden Altar when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. He was told that his wife would conceive and bring forth a very special child. His name should be called "John". His son would prepare the way for the promised Messiah. John would be one of the greatest prophets to ever live on earth. As a sign to Zacharias, he was made deaf and dumb until the day of his sons circumcision, though Zacharias was not told how long the condition would last. This chapter outlines the details of this heavenly announcement. It is referred to as the Annunciation of John the Baptist.

## FOOTNOTES:

**1- in the days** - The "days" of Herod are thought to refer to the time period that Herod the Great reigned over Judea. Herod was officially made king of Judea in Rome in 40BCE. Even so, did not physically take possession of Judea until 37BCE. Herod the Great reigned as King of Judea for 37 years, either from 40BCE until his death in 4BCE. or from 37BCE until his death in 1BCE. The dates of Herod's reign will be discussed in further detail later on in this book. At any case, a 37 year reign was considered a relatively long reign. The exact date is somewhat ambiguous since it is only narrowed to a 37 year window by a few non specific references. Given other historical references made in the New Testament Gospels referred to hereafter, most biblical scholars place the year of this passage closer to the end of Herod's reign, approximately 5BCE. One point that complicates this theory is that the name "Herod" became a title used by Herod's successors. The title "Herod" was used in similar fashion to "King". Herod may have mimicked the Roman use of the word "Caesar" with his own name. There was Herod Antipas, Herod Phillip, Herod Agrippa etc. This could broaden the "days" of Herod to a much larger time period.

Luke uses the term, "in the days", to help set the stage for his narrative. James E. Talmage tried to establish the time period by recording in his book, "Jesus the Christ", that the time period spoken of in Luke chapter 2, verses 5-25 took place, **"about fifteen months prior to the Savior's birth, Zacharias, a priest of the Aaronic order, was officiating in the functions of his office in the temple at Jerusalem."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 75).

**2- Herod** - Herod the Great is arguably one of the most significant characters in Jewish History. His reign and ego helped create the circumstances necessary for the Son of God to fulfill his mission. A rare bust of Herod has been discovered by archeologist, allowing an artist to generate the picture to the right. The picture shows what a young Herod looked like.

Herod was born the son of Antipater in 72BCE or 73BCE. Antipater was an Idumæan (Jos., "Bel Jud.", I, VI, 2), who were descendants of Esau. The Idumæans were technically Jews, at least in a legal sense. Towards the end of the second century BCE, the great Jewish hero, John Hyrcanus, brought the Idumæans



Herod the Great

under Jewish rule. The Idumæans became a part of the Israelite Nation, and for the most part converted to the Jewish religion. It was due to this fact that Herod was considered a Jew, though that probably depended on who you asked.

His mother, according to Josephus, was named "Cypros". She is thought to have been Nabatean, though Josephus refers to her as an Arabian. The fact that his mother was not Jewish may be why many refer to Herod as a Half-Jew. Probably due to the fact that Herod lived much of his life in opposition to the Laws of God, many said that he was only a Jew by birth, being derogatory in nature.

Herod's Father, Antipater, is said to have been the son of a slave. Antipater's Father, according to Legend, was a slave of the Philistines, who worked him at the Temple of Apollo at Ashkelon. He and his family came from slavery, yet they rose to thrones. There is some question as to exactly how this transpired, but it has to do with Antipater, the Father of Herod, giving assistance to the Romans. The Romans were expanding into the Near East and Antipater saved a Roman army.

As far as we can gather, Antipater's rise started by what would appear to be insignificant acts. **"Antipater furnished him"** (the Roman governor Scourus) **"with corn out of Judea, and with whatever else he wanted, and this at the command of Hyrcanus"** (Hyrcanus II, the disputed High Priest of Judea. The dispute was with his brother Aristobulus who sided with the opposition in the Roman civil war)." (Josephus, Book XIV, Chapter V, verse 1, page 293). Though Antipater seemed to know what side he was on, Israel and most of the middle east was divided on the issue. The Roman civil war waged, **"when Gabinus (a Roman General) found Syria in such a state, he sent Antipater, who was a prudent man to those that were seditious, to try whether he could cure them of their madness, and persuade to return to a better mind; and when he came to them, he brought many of them to a sound mind, and induced them to do what they ought to do."** (Josephus, Book XIV, Chapter VI, verse 3, page 294). Eventually, the Roman civil war ended. Antipater had chosen the right side. That seems to be the strength of the Herod's, they had political insight and were able to see which side of the bread the butter should go on. **"Now after Pompey (Roman Opponent to Cæsar, Leader of the Opposition in the Roman Civil War) was dead, and after that victory Cæsar had gained over him, Antipater, who managed the Jewish affairs, became very useful to Cæsar, when he made war against Egypt...Antipater came to him, conducting three thousand of the Jews, armed men: he had also taken care the principal men of the Arabians should come to his assistance; and on his account it was that all the Syrians assisted him also, as not willing to appear behindhand in their alacrity for Cæsar."** (Josephus, Book XIV, Chapter VIII, verse 1, page 295). This was a turning factor for Rome's conquest of Egypt. These added troops, and alliances resulted in Rome's conquest of Egypt. And how did Antipater contribute with his Jewish troops? **"Now Antipater signalled himself here, and was the first who plucked down a part of the wall, and so opened a way to the rest, whereby they might enter the city, and by this means Pelusium was taken. But it happened that the Egyptian Jews, who dwelt in the country called Onion, would not let Antipater and Mithridates, with their soldiers pass to Cæsar; but Antipater persuaded them to come over to their party."** (Josephus, Book XIV, Chapter VIII, verse 1, page 296). He was of great benefit to Cæsar, providing arms, diplomacy, and victory. Antipater had saved the Roman conquest of Egypt and proven again to be a faithful servant of the Empire. **"When Cæsar, after some time, had furnished that war, and was sailed away for Syria, he honoured Antipater greatly, and confirmed Hyrcanus in the High Priesthood; and bestowed on Antipater the privilege of a citizen of Rome, and a freedom from taxes everywhere..."** (Josephus, Book XIV, Chapter VIII, verse 1, page 296). As a reward for his loyalty, the Herodian Family was given prominence and power from the Romans. Antipater was mentioned as Governor of Galilee, and his son was made a vassal king. Antipater was made governor at age 25. Antipater later died at nearly 70 years old.

Herod and his family definitely came from poor circumstances. John Hyrcanus is said to have acquired a young Herod as a slave or at the very least a servant. Herod was allegedly charged with Murder and consequently made a Hasmonean slave. Knowing that his Jewish credentials were suspect, Herod married "Miriamne" (also spelt "Miriamme" or "Miriam") the granddaughter of Hyrcanus II. She was a Hasmonean princess, and thus contained pure Jewish blood. She was said to have been very beautiful. He married her in 38BCE in what is thought to be an attempt to strengthen his title to the throne as the Hasmoneans were not only pure blood, but they were very popular among the Jews.

Herod was surnamed the Great. Grätz called him **"the Evil Genius of the Judean Nation"**. He was made governor of Galilee by his Father in approximately 47BCE. Shortly thereafter, Herod gained some favor with the Jewish people. A band of mafia style thugs were terrorizing Galilee, and starting what appeared to be a full blown revolt. Herod applied his military strengths to the task. He apprehended the band of outlaws and had them all sentenced to death. This feat allowed Herod the opportunity to further his political career with at least the temporary support of the Jews.

Herod cemented his ambitions by an alliance with the Roman Emperor. In 44BCE, Julius Caesar was murdered by Brutus and Cassius. Their plans for revolt ended in 42BCE when Anthony and Octavian defeated them. The turmoil in Rome didn't end there. Shortly after the defeat of Brutus and Cassius, Anthony and Octavian began a struggle between each other for control over Rome. This struggle continued until it ended in civil war. The final battle between these two "would be" emperors took place in Actium in 31BCE. Originally, Herod sided with Anthony, assuming that Anthony would become the victor. Somewhere along the way, Herod changed sides. He started supporting Octavian. The battle of Actium resulted in Anthony's defeat, and Octavian becoming the first Roman Emperor. Octavian changed his name to Augustus, "the revered one", and took the title Caesar. He was then known as Caesar Augustus. Herod's support of Octavian, as well as monetary bribes or tributes, earned him the royal confirmation of King of Judea. He is said to have taken position of Judea's throne in 37BCE. In 40BCE, Herod traveled to Rome in opposition to the existing King of Judea, Antigonus. He brought large tributes to Anthony and Octavian, and was given Senate approval for the crown of Judea. Afterwards, Herod accompanied Anthony and Octavian to the temple of Jupiter, where he worshipped a false god in thanks for his new position. **"Herod was given support by Mark Anthony and granted the title, 'king of Judea' by the Roman Senate in 40 B.C."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 321). Herod then traveled back to Judea with royal authority and power from Rome. After some struggle, Antigonus was captured and beheaded in 37BCE. Herod then officially became King of Judea in 37BCE. The Romans saw the appointment of Herod, a "Jewish" King, as a goodwill gesture to the Jews, as well as a reward to Herod for his loyalty and cooperation. Though he was actually hated by the Jews living in Judea, the distance made him seem less cruel.

Herod had a way with politics. He seemed to know how to be on the right side of things. After siding with Octavian during the Roman Civil war, he became a friend of the new Emperor. Octavian re-confirmed the kingship of Judea on Herod in 30BCE on the Isle of Rhodes. While away at his confirmation, a revolt was underway by the Parthians. Herod returned with Roman troops in overwhelming number. The revolt was promptly squashed.

Herod enjoyed great power under the ultimate rule of Rome. Rome had adopted a general attitude of tolerance in regards to its subjects. The Jews were granted many freedoms as long as they refrained from revolt and paid the required tribute to Rome. The Jews were granted exemptions from participating in the official Roman State religion, though they were required to pay a special exemption tax called "Fiscus Judaicus". It should be noted that this was not the norm in ancient civilizations. Generally, religion and state were one and the same. Rome's policy was an exception that allowed a peaceful rule in Judea. The Jews would have never conformed to Roman Idol worship; which included the worship of Caesar as a God. Such conditions allowed Herod to rule as King, and enjoy many years of relative peace.

The reign of Herod is naturally divided into three periods:

|          |               |   |
|----------|---------------|---|
| Period 1 | 37BCE – 25BCE | <b>Years of Development</b> – Herod secured the throne of Judea and removed potential rivals. He successfully terminated all the descendants of the Hasmonean line.   |
| Period 2 | 25BCE – 13BCE | <b>Royal Splendor</b> – Herod expanded trade, wealth, buildings, and Hellenistic lifestyles. He increase taxes, and expanded the temple that was later called the Temple of Herod.  |
| Period 3 | 13BCE – 04BCE | <b>Domestic Troubles &amp; Tragedies</b> – Herod's obsession with power took the lives of many of his children. He became more and more paranoid, leading one to believe that he was plagued with mental illness. He finally died a sad death, with few willing to mourn his passing. |

Herod maintained peace by maintaining strong political ties with Rome during his reign. He also maintained it by killing just about anyone that threatened him. Miriam, Herod's favorite wife, had a brother named Aristobulus. He was a Hasmonean prince and a rightful heir to the priesthood office of "cohen" or high priest. Herod made Aristobulus the High Priest of Israel at age 17, earlier than Jewish law allowed, but when he became popular with the people he drowned him in a pond during a social event. Herod was protecting his own position, but greatly offended his wife in the process. Many feel that Miriam hated Herod as much as she loved him. Her feeling for Herod resulted in further insecurities on his part. He suspected that she was having an affair. The historian records, "His passion also made him stark mad and leaping out of his bed he ran around the palace in a wild manner. His sister Salome took the opportunity also to slander Miriam and to confirm his suspicion about Joseph [Miriam's alleged lover]. Then out of his ungovernable jealousy and rage he commanded both of them to be killed immediately. But as soon as his passion was over he repented of what he had done and as soon as his anger was worn off his affections were kindled again...indeed, the flame of his desires for her was so hard that he could not think she was dead but he would appear under his disorders to speak to her as if she were still alive..." (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 15, Chapter 7, Verses 4-5). Miriam was killed in 29BCE, and her mother Alexandra was killed in 28BCE. Bava Batra said that Herod took the body of his dead wife and encased her in honey as a form of preservation. He is also said to of had relations with her after her death.

Of the five children which Herod had by Miriam, two of them were daughters and three were sons. The youngest of these sons were educated in Rome and died there, but the two eldest he treated as those of royal blood on account of the nobility of their mother and because they were not born until he was king, but what was stronger than all this was his love he bore for Miriam which inflamed him every day to a degree.

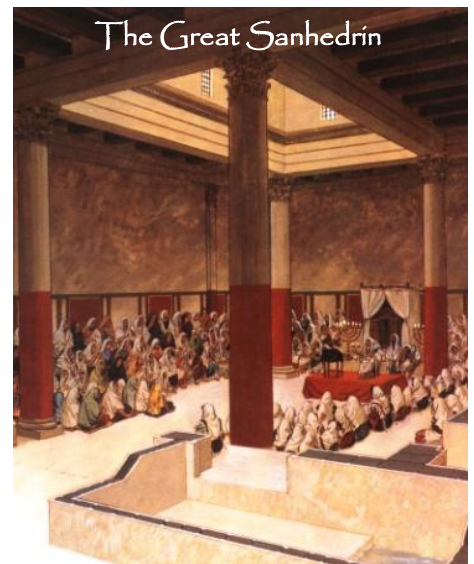
Herod eventually married a total of ten wives, by whom he had many children. His paranoia resulted in him putting to death his own sons, Aristobulus and Alexander, in 6BCE. Another son by a wife named Doris, whose name was Antipater, told Herod that Aristobulus and Alexander were plotting against their father's life. The result was swift and terminal. Antipater's motives were set on succession. Unfortunately for him, Antipater was later accused of having prepared a poison for Herod. He too was put to death. Herod had other sons as well as son-in-laws killed in the same paranoia. In his last days, Herod received permission to kill yet another son, but died himself before he could complete the task. His cruelty and willingness to execute even his closest friends and family cause Caesar Augustus to say of Herod, "It is better to be Herod's pig than one of his children".

The Talmud records the following story, "Herod went and killed [most of] the rabbis. However, he left Bava Ben Buta alive in order to use him as an advisor. Herod put a crown of sharpened porcupine skin around his eyes, [and the sharp spines] blinded him. One day Herod, pretending to be an ordinary citizen, sat down before Bava Ben Buta, and said,

Herod: "Rabbi, do realize the terrible things this no-good slave Herod is doing?"  
 Rabbi Bava Ben Buta: "What should I do to him?"  
 Herod: "I want you to curse him?" (trying to trap him)  
 Rabbi Bava Ben Buta: "How can I curse him, it says, 'even in your thought do not curse a king' (Ecclesiastes 12:20)."  
 Herod: "But he is no King; he does not meet the criteria of a Jewish King"  
 Rabbi Bava Ben Buta: "He certainly is no less than a rich man and the same verse continues, 'and in your bedchamber do not curse the rich'. He certainly is no different than a leader, and it says, 'Do not curse the leader of your people'. (Exodus 22:27)."  
 Herod: "I am Herod. If I had known that the rabbis were so careful [with their words], I would not have killed them. Now please tell what I can do to rectify what I have done?"  
 Rabbi Bava Ben Buta: "Since you snuffed out the light of the world, [that is what the rabbis are called]...you should involve yourself in [increasing] the light of the world [i.e. the temple]."

Someone who has not seen the new temple that Herod built has never seen a magnificent building." (Talmud, Bava Basra 3B-4A).

A significant series of events that impact the circumstances contained in the gospels were brought about at the hand of Herod. Herod first began reducing the power of the Great Sanhedrin, to the point that they were basically powerless. This insulted the Jewish leaders who complained to Anthony. Unfortunately, Anthony had already been adequately paid off by Herod and ignored their complaints. Herod then began killing members of the Sanhedrin, as they offered any opposition. Many feel that the entire Sanhedrin was killed off, including the High Priest, though another account states that he killed only 46 of its 70 members. By the time Herod was through with the Great Sanhedrin, there were no Hasmoneans on the council. In fact, there were no threats to his authority. Herod made himself the sole appointer of positions on the Great Sanhedrin. The appointees owed Herod "a debt of gratitude" for their post. They either purchased their way onto the council, or vowed to repay Herod in the way they served. This is the caliber of men that served on the Great Sanhedrin during the time of the Gospels. They were self serving, prone to bribes, and willing to sacrifice morals for self advancement. They fit the same moral character of Herod himself.



From the very start of Herod's reign as king, he showed the many sides of his personality. In order to reduce the power of the High Priesthood, he appointed and dismissed many High Priests, ignoring the hereditary nature of the post. From then on, the High Priest was nothing more than a Roman underling, owing allegiance to Herod and the Roman Government.

Herod understood how important peace in the region was to the Romans. Several major trade routes passed through Judea. A good portion of the empire's wealth passed through Judea. Judea was also one of the most productive agricultural areas in the empire. Not only was it important to Rome, Herod understood that peace in the area also made him wealthy. Herod the Great made huge profits from trade and the taxes he was able to levy from the business created by the trade.

Herod is known best as a builder. His ego drove him not only for power, but for the appearance of power. He spent most of his life building magnificent structures of beauty and grandeur. He built cities, palaces, and fortresses, some of which still stand:



- The Fortress at Masada
- Antonia
- Herodium
- The port city of Caesarea
- The huge edifice at the top of the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron
- The massive fortifications around Jerusalem
- The three towers at the entrance to the city of Jerusalem
- The expansion and beautification of the Temple and Temple Mount in Jerusalem



Most feel that Herod's expansion of the Temple in Jerusalem, which took his name, was done solely to please the Jews. Herod seems to have walked a fine line his whole life. He appeased the Jews, but managed to play to the Romans at the same time. As the Temple work approached completion, he hung a huge Roman eagle over its entrance. The pious Jews saw this as a great sacrilege. A group of Torah students rebelled and smashed the Roman emblem of Idolatry and oppression. Herod responded in typical fashion. He hunted them down, caught them, and dragged them in chains to his residence in Jericho where he burned them alive.

Herod not only killed the Jews that opposed his will. He also tried to kill Judaism itself. Hellenism was introduced into Judea and was threatening the principles of the religion. The land was being increasingly settled by Hellenists. The Jewish upper-classes were quickly subscribing to this "new" and "higher" culture. Herod himself was actually an avowed Hellenist. Many feel that Herod saw himself as an enlightened leader who would bring his backwards people into the modern world. Herod did what he saw was necessary to accomplish his "idealistic" end. This included the persecution and murder of his family, friends, rabbis, the Sanhedrin, and anyone else who challenged his authority.

As a result of Herod's interference and the ever-spreading Hellenistic influences among the Jewish upper-class, the Temple Hierarchy became very corrupt. The Sadducees, a Jewish religious group of the wealthy, who collaborated with the Romans in order to keep their power base, now controlled the temple. They accepted the Hellenistic view points, and even though they were not the majority, they were given control.

Herod tempted the less than righteous Jews with power and wealth, in exchange for their beliefs and moral code. Those who refused to swear loyalty to him, and thousands of Pharisees did, were heavily fined or killed. The Soncino edition of Talmud Bavli: Tractate Kiddushin records that Herod destroyed the Jewish Book of Genealogies in a further attempt to destroy the Jewish religion and remove any and all references to the royal bloodlines. It also removed any evidence of his own non-Jewish bloodlines. He violated the Torah on a regular basis, and demanded that the Jews accepted his actions and rewrite their religion.

Herod's tyrannical reign is probably most infamous Biblically for his order of all of Judea's children under 2 years old to be put to death. Herod was so paranoid that when he heard the prophecy that the Messiah was to be born, he felt his throne threatened. The Messiah had to die so that Herod could maintain power, or so his corrupted mind thought. The reality is, the Messiah's birth didn't affect Herod's power at all. Interestingly, the Bible records Herod's infant death order, but history ignores it. **"Cruel as the slaughter may appear to us, it disappears among the cruelties of Herod. It cannot, then surprise us that history does not speak of it"** (Life of Christ, Maas, 1897, page 38). Many speculate that the number of children actually killed may not have been very great.



Herod died a death fitting to the way he dealt with those he was close to. He contracted a disease that caused him to have a great appetite. Josephus states his "entrails were exulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly. Nay, farther, his privy member was putrefied, and produced worms, and when he sat upright, he had a difficulty of breathing, which was loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath, and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree..." (Antiquities of the Jews, Flavius Josephus, Book 17, Chapter 6, verse 5). He had tried to be cured, even going over to Jordan to bath at some special hot springs called Calirroe or Callirrhoe, which is east of the dead sea. Drinking water from the water of Calirroe was supposed to have healing properties. Many speculate that Herod contracted a sexually transmitted disease. He had 10 wives and sexual purity was not common in the Hellenistic lifestyle.

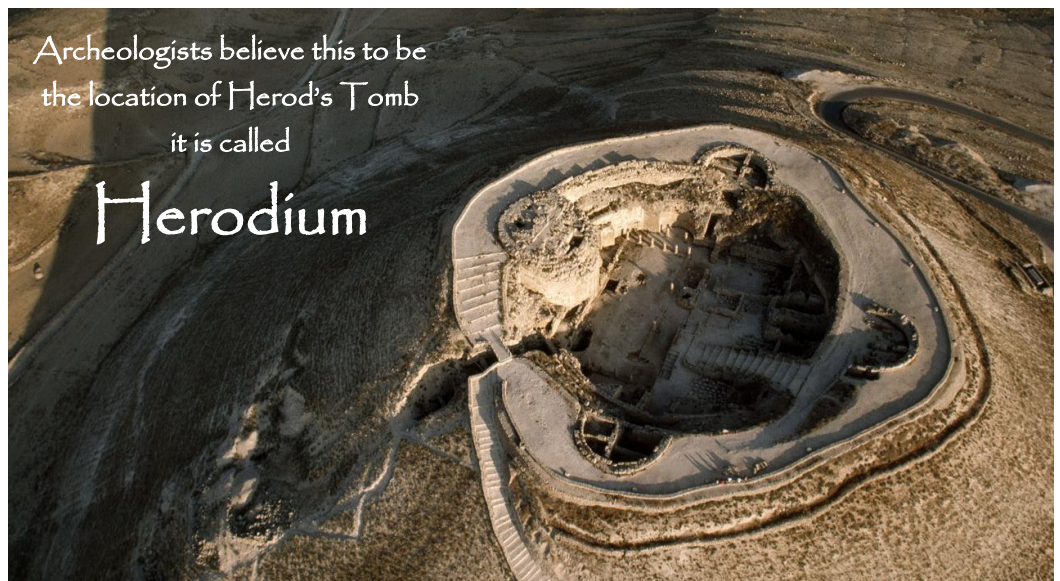
When death was close, Herod realized that there would be few mourners at his passing. In fact, he knew that there would be celebrations in many parts of the country. Herod wanted people to mourn his death, so he devised a way to obtain mourners. He gave orders to his guards to arrest and contain in the Hippodrome at Jericho what is supposed to be 200 predominate Jews from Jerusalem. At his passing, they were to be executed to assure that the entire nation mourned his death. Herod finally died, but his sister Salome stayed the death order to the Jews and freed them. The Jews celebrated, as a festival, Herod's death. His son Archelaus did bury Herod at the Herodium with great pomp. He was buried in the tomb he prepared, and in a fashion he would have wanted. He died in either 4BCE or 1BCE depending on where you place the start of his reign as King of Judea.

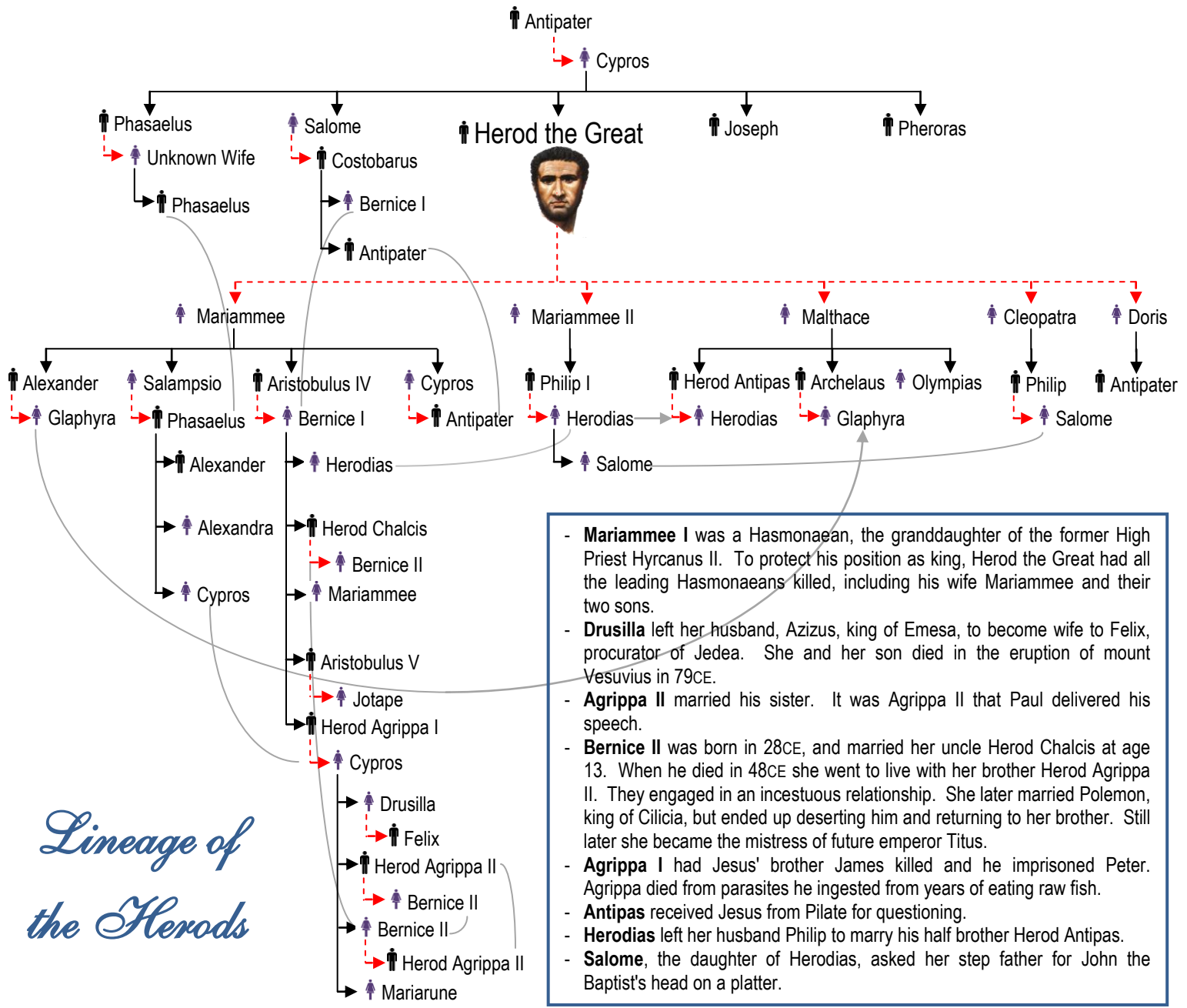
The Jews were so happy at the parting of Herod that his death would be celebrated for years. "...In Talmudical writings, as there is evidence that all the genealogical registers in the Temple were destroyed by order of Herod. This is a most remarkable fact. The Jews retaliated by an intensity of hatred which went so far as to elevate the day of Herod's birth (2 Shebet) into an annual feast day, on which all mourning was prohibited." (Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Alfred Edersheim, page 51).

Herod marked the fulfillment of prophecy. "At the time that Herod was King, who was the first foreigner that reigned over the Jewish people, the prophesy recorded by Moses received its fulfillment, viz. 'That a prince should not fail of Judah, nor a ruler from his loins, until He should come for whom it is reserved, the expectation of nations.'" (The quoted passage is found on the Septuagint rendering of Genesis 49:10). The King James version of Genesis 49:10 reads, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." **Herein is the prophecy fulfilled.**



Archeologists believe this to be the podium of Herod's Tomb @ Herodium





*Lineage of the Herods*

- **Mariamnee I** was a Hasmonaeen, the granddaughter of the former High Priest Hyrcanus II. To protect his position as king, Herod the Great had all the leading Hasmonaeans killed, including his wife Mariamnee and their two sons.
- **Drusilla** left her husband, Azizus, king of Emesa, to become wife to Felix, procurator of Judea. She and her son died in the eruption of mount Vesuvius in 79CE.
- **Agrippa II** married his sister. It was Agrippa II that Paul delivered his speech.
- **Bernice II** was born in 28CE, and married her uncle Herod Chalcis at age 13. When he died in 48CE she went to live with her brother Herod Agrippa II. They engaged in an incestuous relationship. She later married Polemon, king of Cilicia, but ended up deserting him and returning to her brother. Still later she became the mistress of future emperor Titus.
- **Agrippa I** had Jesus' brother James killed and he imprisoned Peter. Agrippa died from parasites he ingested from years of eating raw fish.
- **Antipas** received Jesus from Pilate for questioning.
- **Herodias** left her husband Philip to marry his half brother Herod Antipas.
- **Salome**, the daughter of Herodias, asked her step father for John the Baptist's head on a platter.

3- **king** - The word "king" is derived from the Greek word "βασιλεύς" or "basileus". The word is pronounced "ba-see-lyu's". The word literally means "leader of people", "prince", "commander", "lord of the land", or "king". Herod held the title of "King"; however, it was not the title of absolute monarch like the kings of other nations. Caesar was the highest title in the Roman Empire. Even kings were subject to Caesar. A king acted more like a governor or localized ruler. Many would call him a vassal king. He was approved by Mark Anthony and the Roman senate as king of Judea in 40BCE. Most place his reign from 40BCE until his death in 4BCE. Others argue that his reign did not begin until 37BCE and that he consequently died in 1BCE.

4- **Judaea** - Judaea has meant different things at different point in history. Herod had the area of Judea assigned to him to rule as part of the Roman Empire. Judaea was the name of the Roman province. Herod's Judea can best be described by the following map:



- 5- **priest** - The Hebrew word for priest is "Kohen", and is used nearly 800 times in the Old Testament. A priest of the New Testament would not have differed greatly from one of the Old Testament. A priest would have been a Levite, as the Levites were specifically chosen to serve God. Other tribes were not allowed to serve as priests. Priests were specifically assigned duties surrounding sacrifices at the temple and rituals that mediated between God and man. Originally, the Levite priests descended from one of the four sons of Aaron; Nadar, Asihu, Eleazar, or Ithamar. Unfortunately, Nadar and Asihu died without posterity. The priestly succession then followed the remaining sons; Eleazar and Ithamar. The priesthood was hereditary only through priestly lines.

By the time of King David, the number of Levite priests were so large that the King divided them into 24 courses. According to the Old Testament, there were some 38,000 priests at that time.

**"So when David was old and full of days, he made Solomon his son king over Israel. And he gathered together all the princes of Israel, with the priests and the Levites. Now the Levites were numbered from the age of thirty years and upward: and their number by their polls, man by man, was thirty and eight thousand. Of which, twenty and four thousand were to set forward the work of the house of the LORD; and six thousand were officers and judges: Moreover four thousand were porters; and four thousand praised the LORD with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith. And David divided them into courses among the sons of Levi, namely, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari." (1st Chronicles 23:1-6)**

When the southern kingdom was taken captive into Babylon in 587 BCE, the priestly lines were threatened. Many of the Levite families didn't survive. In fact, only four courses of the original 24 returned from Exile.

**"The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen." (Ezra 2:36-39)**

The courses of priests began to expand again after the return from Babylon. The four families were divided/redistributed into 24 courses again, and Abia was the Eighth of twenty four. The new divisions did not follow genealogical lines. Each priest was assigned to serve in the temple twice each year, and only for one week at a time (from Sabbath to Sabbath). James E. Talmage wrote in his book, "Jesus the Christ", **"It will be remembered that on the return of the people from Babylon only four of the courses were represented; but of these four each averaged over fourteen hundred men."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, page 75).

Four courses multiplied by 1400 equals 5600 men. Divided by 24 weeks (since there were two service weeks per course per lunar year) results in approximately 233 men serving in the temple each week. Only 7 men would serve at the altar of incense each week. This puts the odds of serving at the altar at 3% during each service week. Of course, these numbers are based on the number of men that returned from Babylon over 500 years prior to Zacharias. It is suspected that the number of men in the courses had quadrupled by the meridian of time. This would further reduce the odds of serving in the prestigious altar position to approximately 0.75% per service week. Over a 25 year service period, a man would still only have a 38% chance of such an honor to serve just one week in the Temple. If Zacharias were indeed 80 years old, and started temple service at the earliest age of 25, he would have served 55 years. Even with this incredibly long tenure of service, he still only had an 83% chance that he would have served at the altar of incense 1 time in his life.

The duties of a priest can be classified into three categories;

1. **Service** – The priests ministered in the Temple, and it's courts. They performed ordinance and rituals that blessed the nation
2. **Teaching** – The priests were responsible for teaching the people the Law of God
3. **Prayer** - The priests offered prayers on behalf of the nation.

The Levite courses went up to the great city of Jerusalem twice a year, in rotation, to serve in the Temple of the Most High God. **"In Israel, a male descendant of the family of Aaron of the tribe of Levi was charged with responsibility to supervise Israel's worship center and to offer the sacrifices called for in the Law of Moses"** (The Revell Concise Bible Dictionary, page 448). It is evident that Zacharias was not just a Levite, but qualified by birthright, as a Levitical Priest. As he served in the temple, it is probable that he was perform supervisory roles, and performed rites reserved only for the Priest. It is also speculated that he would wear the robes of the High Priesthood. When Zacharias served in the temple he would serve for six days and two Sabbaths each time. During his service period, he would live in the temple. Traditionally, his family would remain at home. Scripturally, we do not know whether Elisabeth came with him to Jerusalem.

The footnote for verse 7 (footnote #17) indicates that the Jews viewed the term "stricken with age" as approximately 80 years old. This is somewhat contradictory to the fact that **"only males between the ages of 25 and 50 were allowed to serve God at the Tabernacle and later, at the Jerusalem temple"** (The Revell Concise Bible Dictionary, page 850).

#### [The Jewish High Priests from 200 BCE to the Reign of Herod the Great](#)

|     |                     |             |
|-----|---------------------|-------------|
| 1.  | Simon II the Just,  | 220-190 BCE |
| 2.  | Onias III,          | 190-174 BCE |
| 3.  | Jason/Jeshua,       | 175-172 BCE |
| 4.  | Menelaus,           | 172-162 BCE |
| 5.  | Alcimus,            | 162-156 BCE |
| 6.  | Jonathan,           | 153-142 BCE |
| 7.  | Simon,              | 142-135 BCE |
| 8.  | John Hyrcanus I,    | 134-104 BCE |
| 9.  | Aristobulus I,      | 104-103 BCE |
| 10. | Alexander Jannaeus, | 103-76 BCE  |
| 11. | Hyrcanus II,        | 76-67 BCE   |
| 12. | Aristobulus II,     | 67-63 BCE   |
| 13. | Hyrcanus II,        | 63-40 BCE   |
| 14. | Antigonus,          | 40-37 BCE   |





The Jewish High Priests from Herod the Great to the Destruction of Jerusalem

|     |                                  |          |                                 |
|-----|----------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|
| 15. | Ananel,                          | 37-36BCE | (Appointed by Herod the Great)  |
| 16. | Aristobulus III,                 | 35BCE    |                                 |
| 17. | Jesus, son of Phiabi, ?          | ?-22BCE  |                                 |
| 18. | Simon, son of Boethus,           | 22-5BCE  |                                 |
| 19. | Matthias, son of Theophilus,     | 5-4BCE   |                                 |
| 20. | Joseph, son of Elam,             | 5BCE     |                                 |
| 21. | Joezer, son of Boethus,          | 4BCE     |                                 |
| 22. | Eleazar, son of Boethus,         | 4-1BCE   | (Appointed by Herod Archelaus)  |
| 23. | Jesus, son of Sie,               | 1-6CE    |                                 |
| 24. | Annas,                           | 6-15CE   | (Appointed by Quirinius)        |
| 25. | Ishmael, son of Phiabi I,        | 15-16CE  | (Appointed by Valerius Gratus)  |
| 26. | Eleazar, son of Annas,           | 16-17CE  |                                 |
| 27. | Simon, son of Kamithos,          | 17-18CE  |                                 |
| 28. | Joseph Caiaphas,                 | 18-37CE  |                                 |
| 29. | Jonathan, son of Annas,          | 37CE     | (Appointed by Vitellius)        |
| 30. | Theophilus, son of Annas,        | 37-41CE  |                                 |
| 31. | Simon Kantheras, son of Boethus, | 41-43CE  | (Appointed by Herod Agrippa I)  |
| 32. | Matthias, son of Annas,          | 43-44CE  |                                 |
| 33. | Elionaius, son of Kantheras,     | 44-45CE  |                                 |
| 34. | Joseph, son of Kami,             | 45-47CE  | (Appointed by Herod of Chalcis) |
| 35. | Ananias, son of Nebedaius,       | 47-55CE  |                                 |
| 36. | Ishmael, son of Phiabi III,      | 55-61CE  | (Appointed by Herod Agrippa II) |
| 37. | Joseph Qabi, son of Simon,       | 61-62CE  |                                 |
| 38. | Ananus, son of Ananus,           | 62CE     |                                 |
| 39. | Jesus, son of Damnaius,          | 62-65CE  |                                 |
| 40. | Joshua, son of Gamaliel,         | 63-65CE  |                                 |
| 41. | Matthias, son of Theophilus,     | 65-67CE  |                                 |
| 42. | Phinnias, son of Samuel,         | 67-70CE  | (Appointed by The People)       |

The Office of Levite required spiritual purity and acceptable pedigree. Additionally, the Rabbis insisted that a good voice was absolutely necessary. The priest's office, on the other hand, required an interview process. The first inquiry instituted by the Sanhedrim, who sat daily in 'the Chamber of Hewn Stone,' was into the genealogy of a candidate. Certain genealogies were deemed authoritative. Thus, 'if his father's name were inscribed in the archives of "Jeshana" at Zipporim, no further inquiry was made.' If he failed to satisfy the court about his perfect legitimacy, the candidate was dressed and veiled in black, and permanently removed. If he passed that ordeal, inquiry was next made as to any physical defects, of which Maimonides enumerates a hundred and forty that permanently, and twenty-two which temporarily disqualified for the exercise of the priestly office. Persons so disqualified were, however, admitted to menial offices, such as in the wood-chamber, and entitled to Temple support. Those who had stood the twofold test were dressed in white raiment, and their names properly inscribed. To this pointed allusion is made in Revelation 3:5, "**He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.**"

**6 - Zacharias** - The name "Zacharias" is translated from the Greek word "Ζαχαρίας" or "Zacharias", meaning "remembered of Jehovah". Interesting, since God remembered him in his old age, and blessed him with a son. Zacharias was probably born somewhere around 87BCE, though this is somewhat speculative. The year of his birth is based on the fact that he was stricken with years when John was born. We know nothing of his childhood, youth, or adulthood.

Zacharias married Elisabeth at some point, and they lived a faithful life without offspring. Zacharias and Elizabeth dwelt in a village in the hill country of Judea - probably Hebron, though some speculate it was Bethlehem or even Ein Karem. If they lived in Hebron, this is the same locale where Abraham had lived with Sarah. There are some interesting similarities since Sarah too was barren, and they had their child when they were stricken with years. Additionally, an angel told Abraham that he would have a son.

We know that Zacharias' genealogy made him a descendant of Aaron or he would not have been able to serve in the priest capacity. He was from one of the four divisions of the priesthood that returned from Babylon. As stated previously, during the days of King David, there were established 24 divisions (families) of the priesthood (courses). We do not know which of the four divisions he descends from. The four divisions were redistributed into the original 24 divisions of the priesthood. Zacharias' family was placed into the division called Abia or Abijah. If ancient records are correct, Abia would have been responsible for administering in the temple twice each year. Once in April and then again in October, according to our calendar.

Zacharias, as a descendant of Aaron, would have had shared the following priestly duties with other priests in his course; such duties were apparently established by lot.

- Offering morning and evening incense at the temple
- Burning incense in the Holy Place, near the Holy of Holies (a duties favored above all others because of its proximity to the Holy of Holies)
- Trimming the lamps of the Golden Candlestick, and filling the branches with oil.
- Setting out the Shewbread
- Kept the fire burning on the Great Altar before the temple
- Remove the Ashes from the Great Altar
- Take part in the slaying and cutting up of the sacrificial animals, including the sprinkling of their blood.
- Assist with all the different kinds of offerings presented at the temple.

Zacharias most likely left Elizabeth in Hebron, or wherever home was, to attend to his priestly duties at the temple. According to Elder McConkie, the event occurred in October of 6BCE (Mortal Messiah, 1:306). There is disagreement among scholars and religious leaders about the exact year of these events. We know that it was at the end of Herod the Great reign; which ended in either 4BCE or 1BCE. I would place the events of this Chapter prior to January 7, 5BCE.

Though we do not have a specific story relating Zacharias' temple trip, we do know the general protocol for temple workers. While at the temple, Zacharias would have drawn lots with his fellow priests so that each might be assigned his duties for the week. He would have been separated from his wife, and the rest of his worldly duties. He would have lived

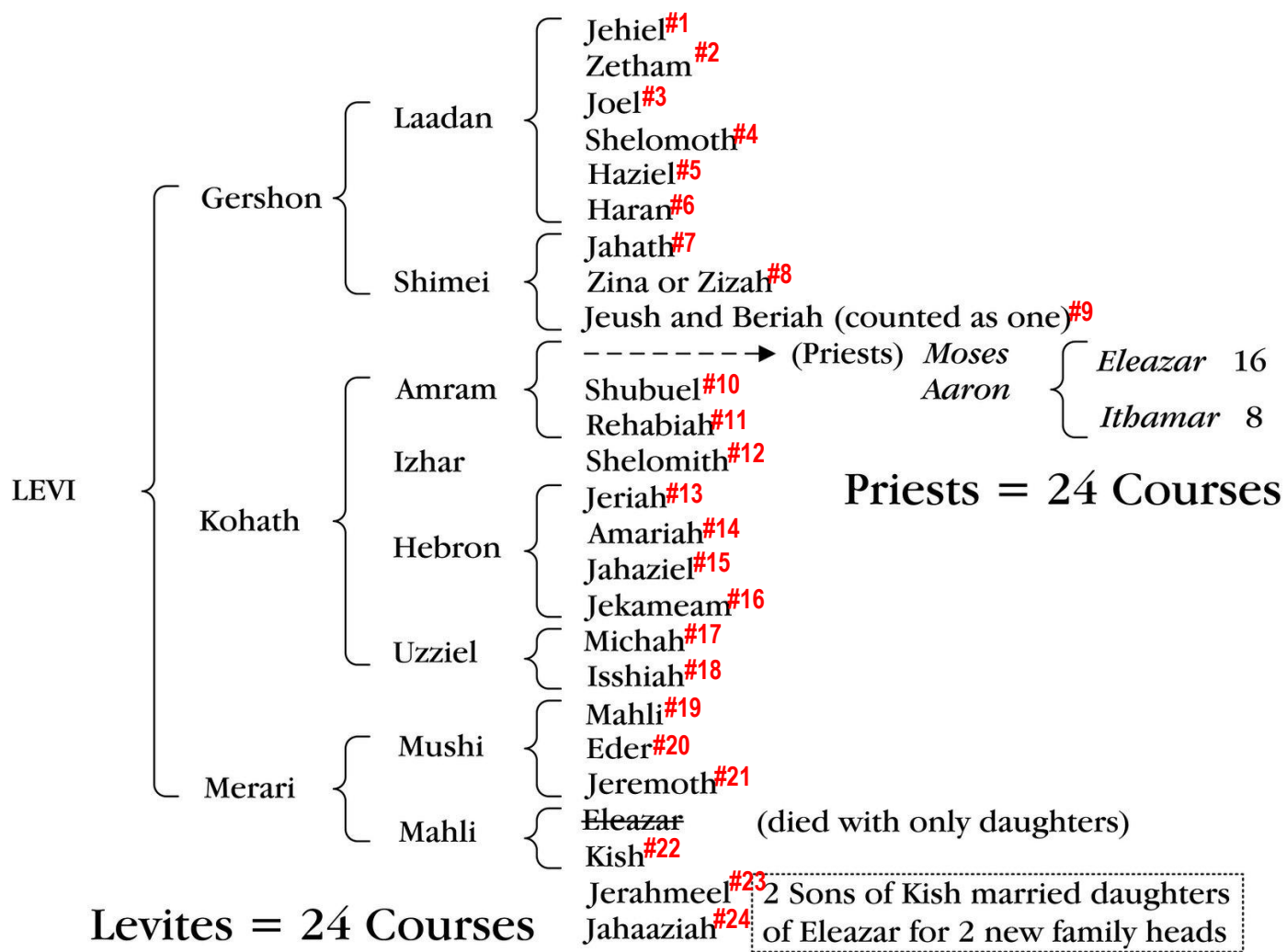
at the temple complex for the week, and he would have been totally devoted to temple service. We know from Luke's account that he drew the lot to do the burning of the incense in the Holy Place and to represent all of Israel in prayer.

Zacharias would have entered the holy sanctuary of the Temple accompanied by at least one other priest. One of the other priests bore burning coals taken from the altar of sacrifice. He spread them upon the altar of incense and we suppose that he withdrew. It was then Zacharias' duty to sprinkle incense on the burning coals. The ascending smoke and odor was to typify the ascending prayers of all Israel. He then prayed on behalf of all Israel. The prayer of Israel at this time was for redemption, for deliverance from the Gentile yoke, for the coming of the Messiah, and freedom from sin.

- 7 - **course** - The term "course" refers to "a division of the priesthood", like a quorum or group. Each division was given specific assignments and responsibilities, usually assigned by House or Family. The Joseph Smith translation changes the word "course" to "priesthood". Joseph Smith said, "The priesthood was first given to Adam; he obtained the First Presidency, and held the keys of it from generation to generation. He obtained it in the Creation, before the world was formed,.... He had dominion given him over every living creature. He is Michael the Archangel, spoken of in the Scriptures. Then to Noah, who is Gabriel: he stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood; he was called of God to this office, and was the father of all living in this day, and to him was given the dominion." (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, page 157).

The Lord's direction to organize the priesthood into different offices, and then quorums within those offices has provided strength and power to mortal men throughout the ages. Even Pharaoh, who was a descendant of Ham and denied the Priesthood, recognized the strength that comes through its organization. "Now the first government of Egypt was established by Pharaoh, the eldest son of Egyptus, the daughter of Ham, and it was after the manner of the government of Ham, which was patriarchal. Pharaoh, being a righteous man, established his kingdom and judged his people wisely and justly all his days, seeking earnestly to imitate that order established by the fathers in the first generations, in the days of the first patriarchal reign, even in the reign of Adam, and also of Noah, his father, who blessed him with the blessings of the earth, and with the blessings of wisdom, but cursed him as pertaining to the Priesthood. Now, Pharaoh being of that lineage by which he could not have the right of Priesthood, notwithstanding the Pharaohs would fain claim it from Noah, through Ham, therefore my father was led away by their idolatry;" (Abraham 1:25-27)

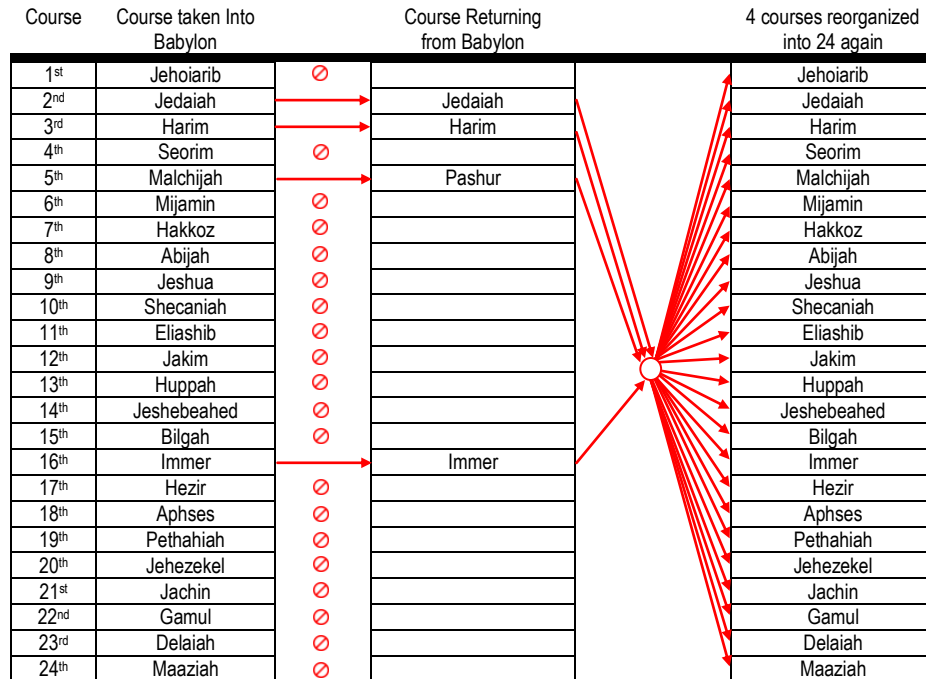
- 8 - **Abia** - The course of Abia is a somewhat confusing topic. The priesthood was originally organized into 24 quorums under a patriarchal order of priesthood families. The priesthood blessed the earth through these 24 families. The 24 families can be traced back to Levi, one of the sons of Israel.



In 587BCE, the Babylonians took Israel into captivity. All 24 families were taken captive, and for about 50 years had no opportunity for Temple service. Much transpired in those 50 years. When Israel was allowed to return home, and build a temple, only 4 families returned. "The institution of David and of Solomon continued till the Babylonish captivity. Thence, however, only four out of the twenty-four 'courses' returned: those of Jedaiah, Immer, Pashur, and Harim (Ezra 2:36-39), the course of 'Jedaiah' being placed first because it was of the high-priest's family, 'of the house of Jeshua,' 'the son of Jozadak' (Ezra 3:2; Hagg 1:1; 1 Chron 6:15). To restore the original number, each of these four families was directed to draw five lots for those which had not returned, so as to form once more twenty-four courses, which were to bear the ancient names. Thus, for example, Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, did not really belong to the family of Abijah (1 Chron 24:10), which had not returned from Babylon,

but to the 'course of Abia,' which had been formed out of some other family, and only bore the ancient name (Luke 1:5). Like the priests, the Levites had at the time of King David been arranged into twenty-four 'courses,' which were to act as 'priests' assistance' (1 Chron 23:4,28), as 'singers and musicians' (1 Chron 25:6), as 'gate-keepers and guards' (1 Chron 26:6 and following), and as 'officers and judges.' Of these various classes, that of the 'priests' assistants' was by far the most numerous (Apparently it numbered 24,000, out of a total of 38,000 Levites), and to them the charge of the Temple had been committed in subordination to the priests." (The Temple: Its Ministry and Services, Alfred Edersheim, Chapter 4, The Officiating Priesthood).

The Book of Ezra helps us understand the number of Priesthood holders that returned. "The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred seventy and three. The children of Immer, a thousand fifty and two. The children of Pashur, a thousand two hundred forty and seven. The children of Harim, a thousand and seventeen." (Ezra 2:36-39) Nehemiah helps us understand the priesthood leaders who returned and helped in the rebuilding of the temple. "Now these are the priests and the Levites that went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shechaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginneto, Abijah, Miamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah. These were the chief of the priests and of their brethren in the days of Jeshua." (Nehemiah 12:4) The original courses, returning courses from Babylon, and the redistribution into the original classes can best be summarized in the following chart.



- 9 - **wife** - The wife of Zacharias would have been significant. "Great care was taken in the selection of wives for the Jewish priests, so that the line of priests might be kept in every respect unsullied. It was lawful for a priest to marry a Levite, or, indeed, a daughter of Israel; but it was most commendable of all to marry one of the priests' line...Zacharias was specially honored in having for his wife one of the descendants of Aaron." (Manners and Customs of the Bible, James M. Freeman, page 403) It would have been important that Elisabeth was a descendant of Aaron. Zacharias would have had to obtain genealogical proof of her lineage prior to his betrothal. The word wife is derived from the Greek "γυνή" or "gynē" meaning "a woman of any age", whether a virgin, or married, or a widow.
- 10 - **daughters** - The term 'Daughter' is used figuratively to show that Elisabeth was a descendant. She obviously wasn't a literal daughter of Aaron as he was born centuries prior; however, she was a direct descendant making her a figurative daughter. This is significant because it validates her son, John's claim to the holy priesthood. Without this priesthood line of authority, the Jews would have rejected John's baptism. They would have rejected his claim to hold the priesthood. But John was qualified through his father and his mother.
- 11 - **Aaron** - In the Hebrew Bible and the Quran, Aaron was the older brother of Moses, and a prophet of God. He represented the priestly functions of his tribe, becoming the first High Priest of the Israelites. The name "Aaron" is derived from the Hebrew word "אֲהֲרֹן" meaning "enlightened", "wealthy", "fluent", or "lascivus". He is often referred to as the "light-bringer". If the priesthood represents light, knowledge, and power from on high, then it makes sense that the holder of the priesthood bear the name light bringer. For the Israelites, all priesthood authority was required to be traced to Aaron. It was the Line of Authority.
- 12 - **Elisabeth** - "Elisabeth" is derived from the Greek "Ελισάβετ", and the Hebrew origin "אֵלִישֶׁבֶת". It means "my God is my oath", i.e. "a worshipper of God". Tradition says that Elisabeth's mother was a woman named "Sobe". According to St. Hippolytus, Sobe and Mary's mother Anna were sisters. That makes Elisabeth and Mary Cousins. He further states that Sobe married a "son of Levi", making Elisabeth a daughter of Aaron.(Niceph. Call., Hist. Eccles., II, iii) The Bible refers to Mary and Elisabeth's relationship as "kinsman", which could mean everything from a family member to a close friend to someone from the same area.
- 13 - **ordinances** - The word "ordinances" is translated from the Greek word, "δικαιώμα" or "dikaiōma". The word means judgment, justification, ordinance, or righteousness. According to Webster's dictionary the word ordinance is defined as follows.

Word: or-di-nance  
Pronunciation: ɔrd-nən(t)s, ɔr-də-nən(t)s  
Function: noun  
Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French & Medieval Latin; Anglo-French ordenance order, disposition, from Medieval Latin ordinantia, from Latin ordinant-, ordinans, present participle of ordinare to put in order — more at ordain  
Date: 14th century

1. a: an authoritative decree or direction : order  
b: a law set forth by a governmental authority; specifically : a municipal regulation
2. something ordained or decreed by fate or a deity
3. a prescribed usage, practice, or ceremony

In the restored Church, an ordinance is a sacred, formal act performed by the authority of the priesthood. Some ordinances are essential to our exaltation. These ordinances are called saving ordinances. They include baptism, confirmation, ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood (for men), the temple endowment, and the marriage sealing. With each of these ordinances, we enter into solemn covenants with the Lord.

What ordinances would have been observed by the Jews at the time of Jesus? The Jews practiced baptism, ordination of the priesthood, washings, anointings, sacrifice under various forms and purposes, ordinances of the temple such as partaking of shewbread and wine, burning incense, prayer, clothing in the robes of the priesthood, blessings, etc.

**14 - barren** - The term "Barren" is translated from the Greek word "στειρα" or "steira". It is pronounced "staa-ra". It means a woman who does not or cannot conceive. **"For a couple to be childless in Judaism was a misfortune, even a disgrace, or a punishment for sin."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 323). In the culture of the time, women considered their main purpose in life to bear children. Elisabeth might well have felt a failure with her inability to conceive. At the very least, she felt embarrassment or as the Bible records reproach.

**15 - stricken** - The word "stricken" is translated from the Greek word "προβαίνω" or "probaino". The word means advanced, being of great age, to go farther on, or being well stricken. The question is, how old were Zacharias and Elizabeth? **"Among the Jews, "the commencement of old age" occurred when a person became sixty-five. At seventy, he was said to have reached "hoary-headed age". After eighty, he was said to be "well stricken in years"."** (Exploring the Gospel of Luke, John Phillips, page 61).

If Herod died in 4BCE, and Jesus was 2+ years old at his death (speculative), with John being 6 months older than Jesus, John would have been born about 7BCE. Notice all the ifs associated with this estimation. There is lots of room for error. If Herod died in 1BCE, (as some would suppose) John could have been born any time between 2BCE and 7BCE, being narrowed down by other factors we will discuss later in the book. John's Father and Mother were stricken with age, meaning that they were at least 80 years old at John's conception. Adding 80+ years to the date of John's birth would place the birth year of Zacharias and Elisabeth at an estimated 87BCE. Regardless of the year she was born, she was old and **"...she was beyond the age of childbearing"** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 323).

**16 - blameless** - The word "blameless" is translated from the Greek word "ἀμεμπτος" or "amemptos". It is pronounced "a-memp-tos". The Greek word means "to be blameless", "deserving no censure", or "free from fault or defect". This was significant for Zachariah on several accounts. First of all, those entering the temple were required to be clean, both spiritually and physically. Secondly, **"During his week of service each priest was required to maintain scrupulously a state of ceremonial cleanliness of person; he had to abstain from wine, and from food except that specifically prescribed; he had to bath frequently; he lived within the temple precincts and thus was cut off from family association; he was not allowed to come near the dead, nor to mourn in the formal manner if death should rob him of even his nearest kin."** (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, Page 76). Priests wore distinctive clothing whenever they were in attendance at the altar or entered the holy place. Their clothing had to be clean and pure before they could approach God. It symbolized that they were "blameless" before him. It was a symbol of their worthiness.

**17 - lot** - The practice of casting lots is mentioned 70 times in the Old Testament and 7 times in the New Testament. In spite of the many references to casting lots in the Old Testament, nothing is known about the actual lots themselves. They could have been sticks of various lengths, flat stones like coins, sheep knuckles as shown to the right or some kind of dice; but their exact nature is unknown. The closest modern practice to casting lots is likely flipping a coin.



We know from scripture that the performance of temple ordinances was reserved for the Levites, and the descendants of Aaron. In Leviticus we read, **"This is the portion of the anointing of Aaron, and of the anointing of his sons, out of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, in the day when he presented them to minister unto the Lord in the priest's office; Which the Lord commanded to be given them of the children of Israel, in the day that he anointed them, by a statute for ever throughout their generations."** (Leviticus 7:35-36). There is no Old Testament reference to Levites making temple assignments by casting lots; however, it would have been an acceptable and common way of making assignments. When dividing the promised land, we read of the tribes being assigned by the casting of lots.

Regardless of how assignments were made, Zachariah's time had come for this service. He would serve for an entire week. During this period his home would be one of the chambers set apart for the priests on the sides of the temple ground. The offering of incense was one of the most solemn parts of the daily worship of the temple, and lots were drawn each day to determine who should have this great honor, an honor which no priest presumably enjoyed more than once during his lifetime.

**18 - incense** - Incense is aromatic mixture of organic materials which release fragrant smoke when burned. The term refers to the material itself, rather than to the aroma that it produces. Incense is used for a variety of purposes, including the ceremonies of all the main religions, to overcome bad smells, repel insects, spirituality, aromatherapy, meditation, and for simple pleasure. Incense is composed of aromatic plant materials, often combined with essential oils, typically derived from plants.

Incense was an intricate part of the ancient tabernacle of Moses, and subsequent temples of Solomon, Zerubbabel, and Herod. In the days of Moses, the Lord reviewed the purpose and operation of His Holy House to Moses. He also revealed the type of incense to be used. **"And the Lord said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight: And thou shalt make it a perfume, a confection after the art of the apothecary, tempered together, pure and holy: And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord. Whosoever shall make like unto that, to smell thereto, shall even be cut off from his people."** (Exodus 30:34-38).



Incense is an interesting component in the ancient temples. The smoke represents the prayers of the saints ascending to the Lord. A portion of the glowing ambers from the sacrifices being offered outside the "Temple" or "Tabernacle" would be brought in and placed on the "Altar of Incense" or the "Golden Altar" which was placed before the veil of the "Temple" or "Tabernacle". The priest would then place the incense on the red hot coals. He would then offer a prayer on behalf of the people. The symbolism is very important here. It teaches a connection between repentance and prayer, as the sacrifices represented an atonement for sin. It teaches the importance of making an offering in relation to approaching the Lord. The priesthood applies the incense, and it gives a sweet smell. There is obvious symbolism associated with the role of the priesthood. The incense teaches us a lot about the order of prayer.



The Old Testament gives limited information on the incense used in the Temple or Tabernacle. It does identify stacte (flowing myrrh), onycha, galbanum and frankincense. It also mentions spices twice, which indicates more spices which remain unidentified. Josephus (37-100CE), a Jewish general and historian, said the incense was made from thirteen sweet-smelling spices. According to the Spanish-born Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1135 - 1204CE), some of these extra items included amber, cassia, cinnamon, costus, myrrh, saffron, spikenard, sweet bark and an herb called, 'the smoke-raiser' known only to a few, a secret passed down by the priesthood. There is much speculation about the thirteenth ingredient. There is also speculation about the actual number of ingredients. Exodus 30:34 mentions only the four main spices in the Qetoret (the temple incense recipe). The Talmud lists the same 4 ingredients as the Bible, and adds an additional seven, making a total of eleven (Talmud, Keritot, 6a). This passage is known, after its opening words, as pittum ha-ketoret ("compound of incense").

The Talmud, an ancient rabbinical record that interprets the Law, records, **"The compound of incense consisted of balm, onycha, galbanum and frankincense, each in the quantity of seventy manehs; of myrrh, cassia, spikenard and saffron, each sixteen manehs by weight; of costus twelve, of aromatic rind three, and of cinnamon nine manehs; of lye obtained from leek nine kabs; though, if Cyprus wine is not available, old white wine may be used instead; of salt the Sodom the fourth of a kab, and of the smoke raiser [a herb that makes the smoke of the incense rise] a minute quantity. Rabbi Nathan says: Also of Jordan resin a minute quantity. If, however, honey is added, the incense is rendered unfit; while if one omits one of the ingredients he is liable to the death penalty [not by human court but by the "Court of Heaven"]**. Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel said: **Balm is nothing but a resin which exudes from the wood of the balsam-tree, the lye obtained from leek was rubbed over the onycha in order to render it beautiful, and in the Cyprus wine the onycha was steeped that its odor might be intensified. In fact urine might well serve this purpose, but urine may not be brought within the precincts of the Temple.**" (Talmud, Keritot, 6a). This translates into 14 ingredients in the temple incense.

The information from the Talmud can be summarized as follows;

|  |                              |   |
|--|------------------------------|---|
|  | 1. Balm -                    | 70 manehs   |
|  | 2. Onycha -                  | 70 manehs ( <i>Processed using Cyprus Wine</i> )    |
|  | 3. Galbanum -                | 70 manehs   |
|  | 4. Frankincense -            | 70 manehs   |
|  | 5. Myrrh -                   | 16 manehs   |
|  | 6. Cassia -                  | 16 manehs   |
|  | 7. Spikenard -               | 16 manehs   |
|  | 8. Saffron -                 | 16 manehs   |
|  | 9. Costus -                  | 12 manehs   |
|  | 10. Aromatic rind tree -     | 3 manehs  |
|  | 11. Cinnamon -               | 9 manehs  |
|  | 12. Lye obtained from leek - | 9 kabs  |
|  | 13. Salt of Sodom -          | 1/4 kab   |
|  | 14. The smoke riser -        | a minute quantity ( <i>leptadenia pyrotechnia</i> ) |



The smoke riser is suspected to be a substance derived from a plant called *leptadenia pyrotechnia*, which is known to contain nitric acid. Nitric acid would cause the smoke to rise in a distinct and straight fashion. According to the Mishnah (Mishnah, Yoma 3:11), the incense in the Second Temple period was manufactured by the House of Abtinah or Avitinas who zealously kept their method secret. The Mishnah states that the sages objected to the House of Abtinah or Avitinas having a monopoly on the preparation of the incense but the Talmud comments that the reason for keeping it a secret was that it should not be manufactured by unscrupulous persons for profane purposes. The womenfolk of the House of Abtinah or Avitinas never used any perfume in case people would imagine that they were using the incense compound. The house of Abtinah or Avitinas was given a room above the water gate off the courtyard of the temple itself. This room was used to secretly make the temple incense or Qetoret. Almost two pounds of incense were burned every day in the temple!

This continual fragrant cloud which permeated the air and lingered over the Holy City day by day reflected the fragrance of the Messiah. Symbolically, the Jews saw the Messiah as the Groom. The groom prepared the bridal chamber, the Temple, with a sweet fragrance for His bride. The Bride is His Church, or all those who are willing to enter the covenant with Him. A Rabbinic comment on the temple incense states that galbanum, one of the ingredients, has an unpleasant smell and yet is included in the ingredients of the incense, to teach that when the community assembles for prayer, it is for the righteous and the sinner.

**The protocol for burning incense:** According to the Law of Moses, incense was offered to God on the golden altar every morning and every evening (Exodus 30:7-8). By this time, there was an established ritual for the practice.

- i. There were several lots cast to determine who did what at the morning sacrifice. The first lot determined who would cleanse the altar and prepare its fire; the second lot determined who would kill the morning sacrifice and sprinkle the altar, the golden candlestick, and the altar of incense. The third lot determined who would come and offer incense. This was the most privileged duty; those who received the first and second lots would repeat their duty at the evening sacrifice, but not with the third lot. To offer the incense would be a once in a lifetime opportunity.
- ii. Before dawn, hundreds of worshippers gathered at the temple. The morning sacrifice began when the incense priest walked toward the temple, through the outer courts, he struck a gong-like instrument known as the Magrephah. At this sound, the Levites assembled and got ready to lead the gathered people in songs of worship to God.
- iii. The other two priests chosen by lot that morning walked up to the temple on each side of the priest chosen to offer the incense. All three entered the holy place together. One priest set burning coals on the golden altar; the other priest arranged the incense so it was ready to go. Then those two priests left the temple, and the incense priest was left all alone in the holy place.
- iv. In front of him was the golden altar of incense; it was 18 inches square and 3 feet high. On that small table lay the burning coals, with little wisps of smoke rising up, ready for the incense. Behind the gold altar was a huge, thick curtain, and behind that curtain was the Holy of Holies, the Most Holy Place, where no man could enter, except the high priest, and that only on the Day of Atonement. As he faced the golden altar of incense, to his right would be the table of showbread, and to his left would be the golden lamp stand, which provided the only light for the holy place.

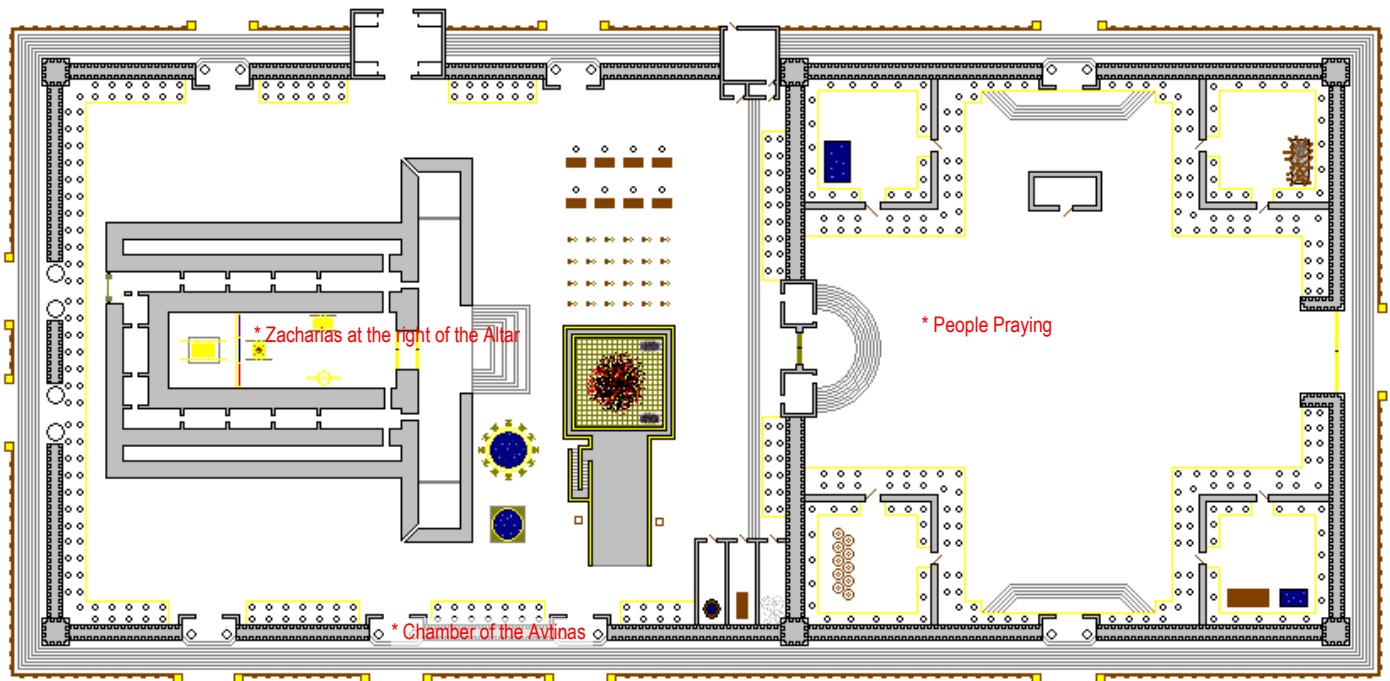


19 - **temple** - The word "temple" being referenced in this footnote is translated from the Greek word "ναός" or "naos". It is pronounced "na-o's". The word literally means to dwell, as in a place where God dwells. It signifies a Holy Place. It is not the typical word used for temple, but there is little doubt that the temple referred to here was indeed the Temple of Herod, better named the House of the Lord, or the Temple of the Most High God. One bible scholar records, ""the naos was distinct from the hieron, the term used by Luke to designate either the temple in general or the temple precincts." (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 324). Naos probably refers to the "Very Sacred" parts of the Temple, rather than the Temple and all its courts. The Greek word "hieron" or "ἱερόν", mean specifically a temple or a sacred place. It is pronounced "hee-e-ro'n".

The temple referred to in this footnote is without question, the Temple of God, often referred to as Herod's Temple. It was the Temple in Jerusalem on the top of Mount Moriah.

The temple is a symbol by itself. It represent the abode of God. It is a place where we can commune with Him. It is a place of covenants, and a place where we can receive further light and knowledge than is available from man. Hugh Nibley taught, "The **markas samê u erseti** of the Babylonians means the knot that ties heaven to earth, the knot that ties all horizontal distances together, and all up and down, the meeting point of the heavens and the earth. It is the middle point at which the worlds above and the worlds below join. This scale model of the universe is the temple." (Temple and the Cosmos, Hugh Nibley, page 19). The knot is a symbol for a covenant, a two way promise. Hugh Nibley further taught, "Of course, the word for temple in Latin, templum, means the same thing as template...that is what a templum is—a place where you take your bearings on things. More than that, it is a working model, a laboratory for demonstrating basic principles by use of figures and symbols, which convey to finite minds things beyond their immediate experience. There the man Adam first sought further light and knowledge. His zeal was rewarded by bestowal from above of principles and ordinances that he was to study and transmit to his children." (Temple and the Cosmos, Hugh Nibley, page 19). A temple is a place to be schooled from on High.

The temple was furnished so that it was not only Holy, but gave those who entered the symbolic impression that they entered a celestial or heavenly sphere. Speaking of one of the many ransacking of the Temple, the Book of Maccabeus relates some of the furniture that was in the Holy Places, "...the golden altar, and the candlestick of light, and all the vessels thereof, And the table of the shewbread, and the pouring vessels, and the vials. and the censers of gold, and the veil, and the crown, and the golden ornaments..." (1st Maccabeus 1:21-22). The walls of the temple of Solomon were plated with pure gold, and polished to a mirror finish. The veils were embroidered with angels and sown with pure gold thread. The Temple was a piece of Heaven on Earth. Whether or not Herod's temple was so lavish, the symbolism still existed. It was in this environment that Zacharias served for his week in the Temple, and more importantly it was here he received a heavenly messenger.

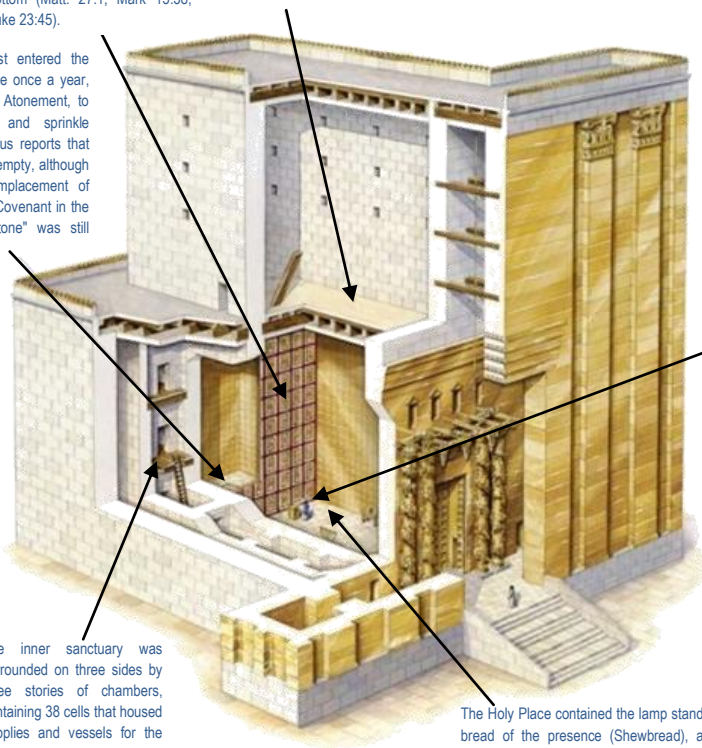


LAYOUT OF  
**HEROD'S TEMPLE**  
 & THE TEMPLE COMPLEX

A massive curtain separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. When Jesus died, this curtain was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).

There was an upper chamber above the sanctuary, which allowed access (through holes in the floor) for cleaning of the gold-covered walls below. A ladder (shown partly cut away in this section) gave access to the upper roof level.

The high priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to offer incense and sprinkle blood. Josephus reports that this room was empty, although the original emplacement of the Ark of the Covenant in the "Foundation Stone" was still visible.



The inner sanctuary was surrounded on three sides by three stories of chambers, containing 38 cells that housed supplies and vessels for the ritual ceremonies

The Holy Place contained the lamp stand, the table for the bread of the presence (Shewbread), and the altar of incense. An angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias on the right side of the incense altar (Luke 1:11)



# HEROD'S TEMPLE

**20 - praying** - The word "praying" is translated from the Greek word "προσεύχουμαι" or "proseuchomai". It is pronounced pros-yu-ko-mii". It means to offer prayers, or to pray. The term prayer, in its broad sense, is to address God. More narrowly defined, **"meaningful prayer requires both holy communication and consecrated work"** (David A. Bednar, "Ask in Faith," April 2008 general conference). Let's look at where prayer fits in with temple service at the time of Zachariah. **"According to Tamid, some priests spent the night in the temple. Before dawn they rose, immersed and cast lots for some of the day's tasks. One was delegated to clear and tidy the altar. The previous evening, it had been left still burning, consuming the last burnt offering. The designated priest washed his hands and feet in the laver and cleared off the ashes. He pushed to one side the remaining pieces of meat. Other priests brought new wood, which caught fire from the embers, and they put the previous day's unburnt pieces on the fire. A second fire was started for the incense, to be offered on the altar in the first chamber of the sanctuary. The priests then withdrew to the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where they again cast lots to determine tasks. When daylight was announced, a lamb was brought; it was slaughtered, butchered, washed and salted. Meanwhile, other priests, chosen by lot, entered the first chamber of the sanctuary, cleared the altar of ashes and prepared the candelabrum. The priests returned to the Chamber of Hewn Stone to recite the Shema and prayers. Again lots were drawn. Some priests went to the inner altar and burned incense. They all then gathered at the front of the Court of the Priests and pronounced a blessing. Finally, the portions of the lamb were put on the fire. A libation of wine was poured out, and meal was also put on the fire. During this, the Levites clanged cymbals and sang a psalm...."** (Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE – 66CE, E.P. Sanders, page 117). It appears that most of the day's activities, sacrifices, and ordinances in the temple culminated in prayer, and was most directly associated with the burning of incense.



What was the "time" of incense and praying? The answer might come from a short scripture in the Books of Acts. **"Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour."** (Acts 3:1). That would place the hour of prayer at 3pm. Prayer would be the culmination of nearly an entire days worship service.

Why pray at the temple? What is the difference between praying at home, and having prayer at the temple?

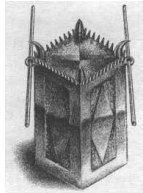
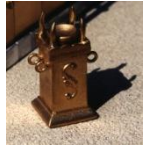
1. The temple is a house of learning. Hence, it would make sense that prayers in the temple would differ from the prayers one would say at home. Temple prayers were and are associated with symbols meant to teach the student how prayer works. In the ancient temple, prayer was associated with sacrifice, incense, washing, sacred clothing, and ceremonies all tied to symbols of heavenly consequence. Interesting, the fact that they are tied, makes reference to covenants.
2. There is correlation to the fact that one comes to the House of the Lord to commune with him. Prayer in the temple would be a display by someone that they are offering a physical effort to come to the Lord, with hopes that they might speak with him. It is an offering or sacrifice.
3. If the temple is a place of covenants, and consequently promised blessings to those that keep those covenants, then prayer would be vital. Those entering into covenants would desire to thank their Father for such a great opportunity, and request His divine help in keeping those covenants. One might also feel impressed to ask for understanding, that depth and nature of those covenants might be clearly understood.

**21 - angel of the Lord** - This term is used in many places in both the Old and New Testaments. The term "angel" can often be misunderstood. It can mean a heavenly being or a mortal messenger, though both are specifically on the Lord's errand. The word "angel" in the footnote is derived from the Greek word "ἄγγελος" or "aggelos". It is pronounced "an-ge-los", and literally means a messenger, envoy, one who is sent, an angel, or any messenger from God. Hence, angels can take many forms.

The "angel" referred to in this footnote is "an angel of the Lord". Again, we will look to the word's Greek origin. The word "Lord" was translated from the word "κύριος" or "kyrios". It is pronounced "ku-ree-ooos", and means "he who has the power of deciding", "to whom something belongs", "master", "lord", "owner", "the Messiah", "God", "king", "emperor". Hereafter we learn that the angel of the Lord is a heavenly being named Gabriel. He was sent from on high. Under the direction of the Father and the Son, Gabriel was sent as a messenger to Zachariah. He was to deliver a specific message meant to start a chain of events that would save all mankind from the beginning, to the end of days.

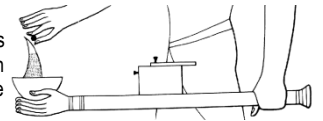
**22 - the right side** - Though this may be a simple description of where Zachariah stood in relation to the Altar of Incense, there is a possible symbolic message being conveyed. **"The 'right side', being usually considered the favored side."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 325). There may be an implied message that the Lord found favor with Zachariah. He recognized Zachariah's personal worthiness.

**23 - the altar of incense** - The Golden Altar, or altar of incense, was 2 cubits high (35 inches) and 1 cubit square (17.5 inches). It was hollow, made of shittim boards covered with gold and having at each corner a golden horn. On it rested a bowl in which coals of fire from the brazen altar were placed, on which incense was poured, thus filling the temple/tabernacle with a fragrant smoke, a sweet-smelling savor unto the Lord. The smoke of the incense represented the prayers of the saints ascending to heaven. **Symbolically, prayer that is not kindled at the sacrificial altar of Christ's atoning death is not acceptable before the throne of heaven.** Prayer must be made in Jesus' name; otherwise, it is not acceptable to God. This is interesting, since Jesus is the "Great Mediator".



The Golden Altar needed fire to burn the incense. Only the coals from the altar of burnt offering could be used at the Golden Altar. There is a special warning about using "strange fire." The two altars could not be separated. Prayers of the righteous were based on the sacrifice of Christ. When Korah, Dathan, and Abiram disowned Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16:1 ff.) they took brazen censers (which speak of judgment) and offered incense using strange fire. Such an act was met by God's wrath.

The usage of coal and incense censers in religious ceremonies was not uncommon in the day. The ancient Egyptians used long censers that resembled hands in cupping shape. They symbolized a personal offering to their gods. Though their religion was false, the symbolism is somewhat applicable. The bearer was symbolically offering righteous sacrifice



to the Lord.

According to the Bible, the incense burned on the golden altar consisted of 4 "sweet spices," in equal portions by weight, plus some other spices not mentioned by name. The first was called "Stacte" from the Greek word meaning "to drop or distill drops of gum that would exude from the tree". The second was called "Onycha". It too was a Greek word. It means literally "fingernail." It is the name of a shellfish that fed upon the "nard" or stems of fragrant plants by the water. The third spice was called "Galbanum", the Greek translation is literally as "fatness", the richest or choicest part. The last is called "Frankincense" which comes from a tree bearing flowers with 5 petals and 10 stamens. The fruit is five-sided and there are 5 species of the plant. The gum is obtained from incisions and is used for incense, medicine, and as an antidote to poison. Other ancient rabbinical works report that the holy incense was 11 ingredients, or 13 ingredients depending on the source. The rabbis record that the method, or recipe, for preparing the special incense from these ingredients was a closely-guarded secret, passed down from generation to generation within the ranks of one particular family known as "Abtinias" or "Avtinias". In addition, to the identity of the spices and the exact amounts and manner in which they are prepared, the clan protected another important secret of their trade. The final ingredient was never fully revealed. The identity of an herb known in Hebrew as



"ma'aleh ashan", literally "that which causes smoke to rise." This herb has a quality which enabled the smoke from the incense to rise up to heaven in a straight column. In our own time, some have speculated that this may be the plant "Leptadenia pyrotechnica", which contains nitric acid. The "Abtinias" or "Avtinias" family was appointed by the Sanhedrin to provide the incense, and they were exclusively responsible for its production, which was done in the chamber named for them, the Chamber of "Abtinias" or "Avtinias". We have learned that this chamber was located in the south side of the court, over the "water gate."

One final point on the altar of incense is the symbolism associated with the four horns. Horns anciently symbolized royalty. They were a symbol of power, rule, and strength. The number four is the number of perfection on earth, so the altar shows complete and perfect rule of mortality and earth. Here again another reference to the Savior, the King of kings.

The incense which was offered in the Holy Temple was made from eleven different ingredients, only four of which are mentioned by name in the verse above. The identity of the other seven spices has been passed down in the Oral Tradition. As is the case with regard to many other areas of Temple study, the exact classification of these ingredients is the subject of serious research and scholarship. Many of these are rare, and some can be obtained only in exotic and distant lands.

**24 - son** - A son was a significant blessing for a family. A son offered more hands to support the family. It also offered a mode to preserve the families possessions. Sons, not daughters, inherited property and wealth. A family without sons would feel deprived of blessings. Because of this, the firstborn son was very significant. The firstborn son was an important concept of the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic Judaism. In Hebrew, the first born son is called "bechor" or "בְּכוֹר". The role of the firstborn son carries a significant association with the redemption of the family. Without him, all possessions are lost. The first born, according to Jewish law, was entitled to a double portion or allocation of the inheritance. There is also a prophetic application of "firstborn" to the nation of Israel. Originally, firstborn sons were dedicated to temple service, and service to God. They redeemed the family spiritually through their sacrifice. It is easy to see the Messianic symbolism.

The Semitic root for the Hebrew word for the firstborn, "bechor" is B-K-R. It means "early" or "first" in Ancient Near East Semitic languages. Classical Hebrew contains various verbs from the B-K-R stem with this association. The plural noun bikkurim (vegetable firstfruits) also derives from this root. The masculine noun bechor, firstborn, is used of sons, as "Canaan begat Sidon his firstborn" (Genesis 10:15), whereas the feminine noun, and female equivalent, is bekirah (בְּכִירָה), first-born daughter, such as Leah (Genesis 29:26). Derived from bechor is the qualitative noun bekorah "birthright" (בְּכוֹרָה), related to primogeniture, such as that which Esau sold to Jacob. In the plural this qualitative noun "birthright" can also mean "firstlings", as when Abel brought out the "firstborn" (bekhorot feminine plural תְּבִכּוֹרוֹ) of his flock to sacrifice (Genesis 4:4).

According to the Jewish rite of redemption of the Son, if the father and mother are both Israelites, the firstborn is required to be redeemed from a Kohen. The firstborn of one's mother is referred to in the Bible (Exodus 13:2) as one who "opens the womb" of his mother. Therefore, the firstborn of the father exclusively, although considered as a firstborn regarding his father's inheritance, is not considered as a firstborn regarding the requirement to be redeemed, as the mother's womb has already been opened by his half-sibling, the firstborn of his mother. Thus, the Shulchan Aruch rules that only a first born of the mother is required to be redeemed. There is a matter of dispute among the poskim (early Rabbinic authorities) regarding whether a first-born son who is a Jewish convert (whose biological mother is not considered to be his mother) or from a caesarean section has the laws of a Bechor.

The law of inheritance can be found throughout the Bible. Each tribe followed the law of inheritance, with a double portion given to the birthright child. Joseph, who was not the eldest child, became the birthright. Joseph received a double portion. Additionally, we learn that Levi had a special inheritance. **"But the Levites have no part among you; for**



**the priesthood of the Lord is their inheritance: and Gad, and Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh, have received their inheritance beyond Jordan on the east, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave them.**" (Joshua 18:7).

- 25 - **John** - The name "John" is translated from the Greek word "Ἰωάννης" or "Ioannes". Probably a better translation into English would have been "Johannes". The Greek word is pronounced "ee-o-an-nace". Other forms of the name are "Joannes" or "Jochanan". The translators of our modern Bible choose to use the Latin form of the name which is "John". The name "Johannes" is a common Hebrew name, and finds usage in the Old Testament. The Hebrew form of the name is "יְהוֹנָתָן" or "Yowchanan". It is pronounced "yoo-kha-nan". It is a form of the name "Johanah". The name means "Jehovah has Grace or Mercy". Interesting that the Lord chose this name for His front runner, since he prepared the way for the Jesus, who is Jehovah, to come to this earth and provide the means for all mankind to obtain grace. It is by Jesus' mercy that we are saved.

John, who is known to us as John the Baptist, was prophesied of hundreds of years before his birth. Lehi prophesied **"And he spake also concerning a prophet who should come before the Messiah, to prepare the way of the Lord— Yea, even he should go forth and cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight; for there standeth one among you whom ye know not; and he is mightier than I, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. And much spake my father concerning this thing. And my father said he should baptize in Bethabara, beyond Jordan; and he also said he should baptize with water; even that he should baptize the Messiah with water. And after he had baptized the Messiah with water, he should behold and bear record that he had baptized the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world."** (1st Nephi 10:7-10).

John was the front runner for the Savior. He prepared the way. John bore the Aaronic Priesthood, by ordination and by birthright. Both his parents were Levites and descendants of Aaron. He used this preparatory priesthood to prepare the way for the Savior and the Priesthood of the Most High God after the order of the Son of God.

- 26 - **gladness** - The word "gladness" is translated from the Greek word "αγαλλίασις" or "agalliasis". It is translated as exultation, welcome, gladness or exceeding joy.
- 27 - **his birth** - There was nothing supernatural about John's birth, though the same cannot be said about his conception. We do not know any specifics about his birth, but we do know a little about the customs associated with ancient child birth in Israel. According to Jewish law (Kitzur Shulhan Aruch, Section 107), when a woman begins labor, she acquires a different ritual status (Ritual status in Judaism has nothing to do with cleanliness or being female--both men and women acquire different ritual statuses at various stages of life or in particular circumstances). Once the laboring woman enters this stage, all physical contact between husband and wife stops and he cannot look at her exposed body. In the days of Zacharias, husbands and wives were not allowed to have physical contact until 33 days after the circumcision of a boy (total of 40 days) and 66 days after 14 day waiting period the birth of a girl (80 days). Once the required time passes and the mother stops bleeding, she immerses in a mikveh, a ritual bath, after which the couple may resume physical contact.

In spite of all the advances in modern medicine, child birth has not changed much over the centuries except for the conveniences of pain medications. Of course, ancient societies did not have attending physicians. Even so, expecting mother were not always on their own. Wet nurses were not unusual in Biblical times. Miriam found a wet nurse for baby Moses when he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:7-10), and Rebecca had a wet nurse named Deborah (Genesis 35:8).

Jews in antiquity practiced many different childbirth customs. Dr. Michele Klein, in her extensive study of Jewish birthing customs, notes some of the following traditions. Medieval women wore a blood-red stone to prevent miscarriage. In the ninth month of pregnancy, the father had the honor of opening the ark in the synagogue, symbolically opening the gates of heavenly mercy for his wife. In North Africa, Jewish pregnant women wore a string that had been wound seven times around the grave of a holy person, while in Europe, they did not visit cemeteries. During labor, women kept a copy of Psalm 121 with them, which was later placed in the baby's crib. After the birth, the mother's first outing was to take the baby to the synagogue to hear the Kedusha prayer, the "Prayer of Angels."

We do not know what traditions or customs were actually followed by Elisabeth and Zachariah, but we do know that he entered into mortality through normal and natural means.

- 28 - **great in the sight of the Lord** - Though yet to be born into mortality, John was prophetically declared from the Angel of the Lord to be great in the sight of the Lord. How can this be, even prior to his birth? Speaking to the Young Women of the Church Elder Holland said, **"There could never be a greater authentication of your dignity, your worth, your privileges, and your promise. Your Father in Heaven knows your name and knows your circumstance. He hears your prayers. He knows your hopes and dreams, including your fears and frustrations. And He knows what you can become through faith in Him. Because of this divine heritage you, along with all of your spiritual sisters and brothers, have full equality in His sight and are empowered through obedience to become a rightful heir in His eternal kingdom, an [heir] of God, and joint-[heir] with Christ."** (General Conference, October 2005, "To Young Women", Jeffrey R. Holland). The Lord knew John, as a pre-mortal spirit. He knew his character, and he knew the mission he was being sent to perform. The Lord had full confidence in the choices John would make in mortality. This should not be interpreted as pre-destination, but rather a testimony of God's omnipotence. The fact is, God knows us better than we know ourselves. The words of the Book of Mormon ring true, **"O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it."** (2nd Nephi 9:20). John was great before he came to earth, and the Lord knew he would be great in His sight during his earthly probation.
- 29 - **wine nor strong drink** - The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is often known for its belief in an alcohol free life style. Church members believe in refraining from wine and strong drinks. Modern day revelation teaches that God wants His children to take proper care of the bodies He has blessed us with. It is interesting to find that such a belief is not new to the latter days. Anciently, the Israelites were given an opportunity from the Lord to enter into a special covenant of righteousness. The Lord said, **"Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the Lord: He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days that he separateth himself unto the Lord he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the Lord."** (Number 6:2-8). Part of the Nazarite vow sounds very familiar to the word of wisdom, **"That inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father, only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him. And, behold, this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make. And, again, strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies."** (Doctrine & Covenants 89:5-7).

Though there are similarities between the Nazarite vow and the word of wisdom, there are also distinct differences. The Rabbis taught, **"The Torah permits a man or a woman to adopt voluntarily the status of a נזיר, Nazirite, which includes three restrictions: (a) A Nazirite is forbidden to eat or drink grapes or grape products; (b) A Nazirite's hair may not be cut; and (c) A Nazirite may not become contaminated by a human corpse. However, Nazirism should not be understood as merely a catalogue or prohibitions, as if the Nazirite's vow, "I am hereby a Nazirite," was a shorthand pledge to abstain from wine, haircutting, and contamination. Rather, Nazirism is a state of holiness, and the individual laws flow from this elevated status. Thus, the Nazirite adopts a state of holiness - and the Torah dictates that such holiness is incompatible with those forbidden activities."** (The Chumash, the stone edition, pages 758-759). Such a vow was not necessarily permanent. The Rabbi's explain, **"The minimum period of Nazirism is thirty days, but a Nazirite who so desires may adopt longer periods."** (The Chumash, the stone edition, page 759).

When Gabriel revealed John's future birth, it would appear that he was instructing Zachariah to commit John to a Nazarite vow. "The instruction of the angel Gabriel to Zacharias, that the promised son, John, was to "drink neither wine nor strong drink," and the adult life of John as a dweller in the desert, together with his habit of wearing rough garb, have led commentators and Biblical specialists to assume that he was a 'Nazarite for Life'. It is to be remembered, however, that nowhere in scriptures extant is John the Baptist definitely called a Nazarite. A Nazarite, the name signifying consecrated or separated, was one, who by personal vow or by that made for him by his parents, was set apart to some special labor or course of life involving special denial." (Jesus the Christ, James E. Talmage, pages 87-88). John may or may not have been a Nazarite; however, it is clear that his parents and then John himself committed John to a life of righteousness and purity. A Nazarite vow fits very nicely with who John would become in mortality.

One interesting note, "Sikera" is translated as "strong drink". The Hebrew Sekar is "commonly used of 'barley beer'" (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 326). Plain and simple, it makes reference to alcoholic beverages.

- 30 - **Holy Ghost** - "The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead; He is a personage of spirit and bears witness of all truth. In the scriptures the Holy Ghost is referred to as the Comforter (see John 14:16–27; Moroni 8:26), a teacher (see John 14:26; D&C 50:14), and a revelator (see 2 Nephi 32:5). Revelations from the Father and the Son are conveyed through the Holy Ghost. He is the messenger for and the witness of the Father and the Son. The Holy Ghost is manifested to men and women on the earth both as the power and as the gift of the Holy Ghost. The power can come upon a person before baptism; it is the convincing witness that Jesus Christ is our Savior and Redeemer. Through the power of the Holy Ghost, sincere investigators can acquire a conviction of the truthfulness of the Savior's gospel, of the Book of Mormon, of the reality of the Restoration, and of the prophetic calling of Joseph Smith. The gift of the Holy Ghost is bestowed only after proper and authorized baptism and by the laying on of hands by those holding the Melchizedek Priesthood." (General Conference, October 2010, "Receive the Holy Ghost", David A. Bednar).

The angel Gabriel tells Zachariah that John would be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. This prophecy is confirmed through modern revelation. The Lord revealed, "Which gospel is the gospel of repentance and of baptism, and the remission of sins, and the law of carnal commandments, which the Lord in his wrath caused to continue with the house of Aaron among the children of Israel until John, whom God raised up, being filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb. For he was baptized while he was yet in his childhood, and was ordained by the angel of God at the time he was eight days old unto this power, to overthrow the kingdom of the Jews, and to make straight the way of the Lord before the face of his people, to prepare them for the coming of the Lord, in whose hand is given all power." (Doctrine & Covenants 84:27-8).

This is an unusual blessing. Typically, the gift of the Holy Ghost is given later in life. Given the significance of John's mission, he was to be directed by the third member of the God Head from his birth. It was the Holy Ghost that prompted the unborn John to bear testimony of the Savior by leaping in his mother's womb when the pregnant Mary was in his presence. John would spend a part of his childhood fleeing Herod who wanted him dead. The Holy Ghost guided him in paths of safety to assure that he could complete his mission. It is no wonder that the Lord protected him by providing the guidance of the Holy Ghost.

- 31 - **his mother's womb** - This verse give reference to our pre-mortal existence. The Lord obviously knew John before his conception. Like John, the prophet Jeremiah was known before he was born. Jeremiah recorded, "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." (Jeremiah 1:4-5). It would appear that John's circumstances were no different than ours in this respect. Our Father in Heaven knows each one of his from before we were born into mortality.

- 32 - **to be turned to the Lord** - The phrase "to be turned to the Lord" has an interesting relationship with the word "repentance". The term "repentance" is translated from the Greek word "μετάνοια" or "metanoia". It is pronounced "me-ta-noi-a", and it means to have a "change of mind", "a change of heart", "a change or desire or purpose", "a desire to change ones thoughts or actions". Turning to the Lord implies a change. It implies repentance. President Hallstrom taught, "His most exemplary act, the Atonement, required Jesus to descend "below all things" (D&C 88:6) and suffer "the pains of all men" (2 Nephi 9:21). Thus we understand the Atonement has broader purpose than providing a means to overcome sin. This greatest of all earthly accomplishments gives the Savior the power to fulfill this promise: "If ye will turn to the Lord with full purpose of heart, and put your trust in him, and serve him with all diligence ... , if ye do this, he will ... deliver you out of bondage" (General Conference, April 2010, "Turn to the Lord", Donald L. Hallstrom, Presidency of the Seventy).

Those that "turn to the Lord", are entitled to His protection and comfort. Their confidence waxes strong in the process. "Over the ensuing years, Joseph Smith continued to righteously endure a life full of adversity. He offered this faith-filled perspective: "And as for the perils which I am called to pass through, they seem but a small thing to me. ... Deep water is what I am wont to swim in. ... I ... glory in tribulation; for ... God ... [has] delivered me out of them all, and will deliver me from henceforth" (D&C 127:2). Joseph's confidence in overcoming constant opposition was based on his ability to continually turn to the Lord." (General Conference, April 2010, "Turn to the Lord", Donald L. Hallstrom, Presidency of the Seventy).

- 33 - **in the spirit** - The term "in the spirit" doesn't necessarily make reference to the Holy Ghost, but rather referring to the purpose of something, i.e. the spirit of cooperation, or the spirit of friendship. The spirit of Elias is all about the covenants associated with the Priesthood. John was to embody those covenants. Elder Haight taught, "Elias restored the covenants and authority given to Abraham." (General Conference, October 1980, David B. Haight). John was known for the baptisms he performed. Baptism is the gateway ordinance to all the blessings of heaven. It is the first of many covenants that will be made to inherit the celestial kingdom.

- 34 - **power** - The word "power" in this footnote is translated from the Greek "δυναμις" or "dunamis". It is pronounced "doo-nam-ah-ee". It means miraculous "power", "ability", "abundance", "might", or "strength". The power of Elias is associated with the spirit of Elias. The spirit represents the desire and strength to honor and keep covenants. The powers of heaven are inseparably connected to obedience to the covenants and commandments which it is built upon. When one enters into the waters of baptism, and keeps that covenant, the Lord offering the blessing of confirmation, or a baptism by fire. The Power of the Holy Ghost is bestowed. The progression of covenants and the powers associated with those covenants continues as we faithfully serve the Lord.

- 35 - **Elias** - The name "Elias" is used in this form exclusively in the New Testament. The Greek "Ἠλιᾶς" or "Helias" (pronounced Hay-lee-as) is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Elijah. It is mentioned 30 times in the New Testament and can often be confusing to the reader. The word Elias is a name, but it can also be used as a title. John the Baptist became an Elias. Any priesthood holder with the keys and specific call to prepare the way of the Lord is an Elias. According to the Bible Dictionary, there lived an Elias at the time of Abraham. The identity of this Elias has not been revealed, but it could easily have been Father Noah or his son Shem. The doctrine of Elias is defined as a forerunner, a preparer, or a restorer. Noah, who is also Gabriel, saved the earth from utter destruction by preserving mankind in the Ark. He was a preparer and a restorer. He restored the Gospel through Shem to Father Abraham. Bruce R. McConkie said, "The man Elias brings back "the gospel of Abraham," the great Abrahamic covenant whereby the faithful receive promises of eternal increase, promises that through celestial marriage their eternal posterity shall be as numerous as the sands upon the seashore or as the stars in heaven for multitude. Elias gives the promise—received of old by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—that in modern men and in their seed all generations shall be blessed. And we are now offering the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to all who will receive them." (General Conference, April 1983, "The Keys of the Kingdom", Bruce R. McConkie).

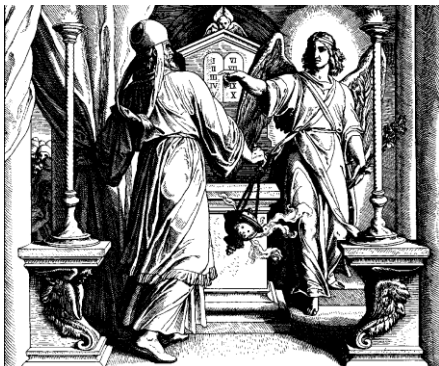
It stands to reason that the Elias of Abraham is Noah or Shem. Elias' held very specific keys. When keys were restored in the latter days three individual appeared in the Kirtland Temple. "Moses to empower us to gather Israel from the Egypt of the world into the Zion of God; and Elijah to confer upon us the power to bind on earth and have our

acts sealed everlastingly in the heavens. How grateful we are that Elias brought back the gospel of Abraham, so that we, as children of the covenant, might have a continuation of the family unit in eternity!" (General Conference, April 1984, "Patterns of Prayer", Bruce R. McConkie).

- 36 - **turn the hearts of the Fathers to the Children** - Most people hear the phrase "turn the hearts of the Fathers to the Children" and immediately think of Malachi's great promise. He wrote, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6). Elijah was promised to return with the great sealing powers, to bind in heaven that which has been bound on earth. It is this power that binds families for eternity. When one understands that Elias was to restore the Abrahamic covenant, and the covenants of the temple, one understands that both are required. The spirit of Elias restores the gospel of Abraham. The Good News of Abraham was the same "Good News" of the Latter Days; a savior was provided, an atonement was made, and eternal life is promised to those that keep their covenants.
- 37 - **wisdom to the just** - The gift that the Savior provided through His atonement allows the disobedient to turn to "the wisdom of the just". Those that are "just" keep the law without the heartache of disobedience. Without the Savior, we all, to some extent or another, fail in the wisdom of meeting the demands of justice. We all need redemption. Without His gift, there is none. This gift is called quite simply called "mercy" or "grace". Jesus Christ was to meet the demands of justice and allow mercy to be extended to the disobedient. John was to teach the "Good News" of repentance. He taught that baptism that would provide a rebirth, and an adoption that would make us sons and daughters of Jesus Christ.
- 38 - **people prepared for the Lord** - The definition of an Elias is "one who prepares", "restores", or "a frontrunner". John was called to prepare the people for the Messiah. He did it in his days, and he returned in the latter days to do the same. The Lord loves His people and seeks to provide a way for their return unto Him. "For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, Lord, art become their God." (2nd Samuel 7:24).
- 39 - **Whereby shall I know this?** - There are plenty of examples of individuals who have asked for signs. Many of them were seen as wicked requests and had dire consequences. Even so, there are examples of righteous men asking for a sign. Here are three examples;
  1. Abraham asked a similar question when he was promised the Holy Land. "And he said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, **whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?** ..." (Genesis 15:7-9)
  2. When the Lord called Gideon to deliver Israel he said, "...**Surely I will be with thee**, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." Gideon's response was, "... **If now I have found grace in thy sight, then shew me a sign that thou talkest with me.** Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee. And he said, I will tarry until thou come again." (Judges 6:16-18)
  3. The prophet Isaiah gave crucial counsel to King Hezekiah as he sought to be healed. Hezekiah's reply was "... **What shall be the sign that the Lord will heal me, and that I shall go up into the house of the Lord the third day?** And Isaiah said, This sign shalt thou have of the Lord, that the Lord will do the thing that he hath spoken: shall the shadow go forward ten degrees, or go back ten degrees? And Hezekiah answered, It is a light thing for the shadow to go down ten degrees: nay, but let the shadow return backward ten degrees." (2nd Kings 20:8-9)

How is it that this footnote and these three examples were not seen as wicked requests for signs? Later on in the Book of Luke, the Savior himself denounces those that seek for signs. "And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet." (Luke 11:29). The answer appears to lie in the faith of the individual asking for the sign. "And he that seeketh signs shall see signs, but not unto salvation. Verily, I say unto you, there are those among you who seek signs, and there have been such even from the beginning; But, behold, faith cometh not by signs, but signs follow those that believe. Yea, signs come by faith, not by the will of men, nor as they please, but by the will of God." (Doctrine & Covenants 63:7-10). Zachariah believed, and sought for a sign whereby His faith could be strengthened. So it was with Abraham and Gideon, whose faith was firm, but desired to see the workings of the Lord. Even Hezekiah exhibited faith in the Lord, as he asked to see a sign. Before asking for a sign, we need to seek for faith, that the sign will not be a request from the wicked.

- 40 - **Gabriel** - The name "Gabriel" is used only 4 times in the Bible; Daniel 8:16, Daniel 9:21, Luke 1:19, and Luke 1:26. The Hebrew equivalent of the name Gabriel is "גַּבְרִיאֵל", and is used in the Old Testament. It means "Elohim is my Hero/Warrior". The New Testament uses a Greek equivalent "Γαβριήλ" or "Gabriel". It is pronounced "gab-ree-ale". In latter-day revelation, we learn from the prophet Joseph Smith that the angel Gabriel is Noah (HC 3: 386). The name Gabriel means "one who stands in the presence of God". While speaking in 1839 to members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and some Seventies prior to their leaving for missionary service, the Prophet Joseph Smith said: "Noah, who is Gabriel, ... stands next in authority to Adam in the Priesthood; he was called of God to this office, and was the father of all living in his day, and to him was given the dominion. These men held keys first on earth, and then in heaven." (Ensign, Joseph B. Romney, February 1998). Elder Bruce R. McConkie said, "What could be more fitting, then, than for Michael, who presides over the angels and directs their labors, to send Gabriel, his next in command, to announce to the mortals involved those things they needed to know concerning the Promised Messiah and his Elias?" (The Mortal Messiah, Volume 1, Bruce R. McConkie page 312).



Gabriel or Noah, like Adam, held the keys of dominion over the whole earth. Perhaps this is why the animals obeyed his voice as he filled the Ark. Those same keys made him an Elias—one who prepared the way before the Lord. As an Elias, he prepared the way for the Savior into mortality as he appeared to Zachariah, and then to Mary, and finally to Joseph. He then appeared to Joseph Smith as he prepared the way for the second coming of the Savior. How perfectly appropriate, then, for him to announce the birth of the earthly Elias—John the Baptist—who also would also prepare the way for the Messiah.

- 41 - **the presence of God** - As Gabriel introduces himself, he states that he stands in the presence of God. We can learn a lot about Gabriel from this statement. The term presence of God carries with it some significant information. Here is what we find in the scriptures;

**In His presence is a Fullness of Joy** - "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Psalms 16:11)

**Only perfect beings or those quickened by the spirit can abide in His presence** - "For no man has seen God at any time in the flesh, except quickened by the Spirit of God. Neither can any natural man abide the presence of God, neither after the carnal mind. Ye are not able to abide the presence of God now, neither the ministering of angels; wherefore, continue in patience until ye are perfected." (Doctrine & Covenant 67:11-13)

**Only those who forsake the Glory of man can be in His presence** - "Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God— Wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's. And they shall overcome all things. Wherefore, let no man glory in man, but rather let him glory in God, who shall subdue all enemies under his feet. These shall dwell in the presence of God and his Christ forever and ever." (Doctrine & Covenant 76:58-62)

**To be in his presence while in the flesh one must be full of the Spirit** - "That through the power and manifestation of the Spirit, while in the flesh, they may be able to bear his presence in the world of glory." (Doctrine & Covenant 76:118)

**Those in His presence are full of Charity and Virtue** - "Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven." (Doctrine & Covenant 121:45)

**No Unclean thing can dwell in His presence** - "Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God, for no unclean thing can dwell there, or dwell in his presence; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time." (Moses 6:57)

It is interesting that Moroni introduced himself to the young prophet Joseph Smith using similar language, "He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me, and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do; and that my name should be had for good and evil among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, or that it should be both good and evil spoken of among all people." (Joseph Smith History 1:33)

Gabriel, like Moroni, was an exalted being; Perfected through Christ, full of his love and grace. He was a servant and messenger of the most High God, about His will, and free from the passions of man. He was a man who was worthy to stand in the presence of Elohim.

**42 - glad tidings** - The Greek word for "glad tidings" is one word; "ευαγγελιζω" or "euaggelizo". It is pronounced "yoo-ang-ghel-id-zo". It means to announce good news, preach the gospel, declare. It is the same Greek word used for the translation of the word "Gospel". So, if the "Gospel" means "glad tidings" or "Good News", what is the good news? The good news is that a Savior was to be born. The Good News is that the Savior would save all mankind, regardless of how they lived their life, with salvation from physical death. The "Good News" is that the Savior will offer all those who chose to partake of salvation from spiritual death. If we choose, we can partake of the atonement and receive forgiveness from our sins through his atonement. Gabriel brought glad tidings to Zachariah. He would have a son. His son would be the frontrunner of the Savior.

It is not a coincidence that this message was delivered in the temple. Elder Nelson taught, "Through service in the temples, the concept of courtesy to companions can be nobly extended to those who have passed beyond the veil. The gospel brings glad tidings for the dead and a voice of gladness for the living and the dead—for all, glad tidings of great joy." (General Conference, October 1986, "Joy Cometh in the Morning", Russell M. Nelson).

**43 - dumb** - The word "dumb" is translated from the Greek word "σιωπαω" or "siopao". It is pronounced "see-o-pah-o" and is used only once in the New Testament. It is translated to mean silence, muteness, involuntary, stillness, inability to speak, to be dumb, but not deaf. Taking away basic human abilities are not uncommon as the Lord schools his children. Several places in scripture show the Lord's ability to make someone dumb.

1. As the Lord spoke to Daniel he said, "... I set my face toward the ground, and I became dumb." (Daniel 10:15) The Lord then touched his lips and his mouth was opened.
2. When Alma the young went about destroying the Church, and angel of the Lord appeared to him and chastised his behavior. "And now the astonishment of Alma was so great that he became dumb, that he could not open his mouth; yea, and he became weak, even that he could not move his hands; therefore he was taken by those that were with him, and carried helpless, even until he was laid before his father." (Mosiah 27:19)
3. Koriath, the infamous anti-Christ, boldly defied the prophet and requested a sign. "Now Alma said unto him: This will I give unto thee for a sign, that thou shalt be struck dumb, according to my words; and I say, that in the name of God, ye shall be struck dumb, that ye shall no more have utterance." (Alma 30:49)

"Deafness must also have been part of Zachariah's condition, because the people have to make signs to him in Luke 1:62" (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 328).

**44 - these things shall be performed** - The Book of Romans records, "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." (Romans 4:21). John was called, and with that call he was given all the power under heaven to bring to pass the Lord's desires. He was made mighty unto his call. In the Latter Days, the Lord said, "And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made and entered into and sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that too most holy, by revelation and commandment through the medium of mine anointed, whom I have appointed on the earth to hold this power (and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time on whom this power and the keys of this priesthood are conferred), are of no efficacy, virtue, or force in and after the resurrection from the dead; for all contracts that are not made unto this end have an end when men are dead." (Doctrine & Covenants 132:7).

**45 - because thou believest not my words** - Zachariah could not believe the words that were uttered. Before we judge too harshly, we must remember that "...my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord." (Isaiah 55:8). It is often difficult for us to comprehend the magnitude of His power and ability. He must have been overwhelmed. He was an old man, and he was being told that he would father a child that would become the forerunner for the Messiah. Even so, the Lord chastens those

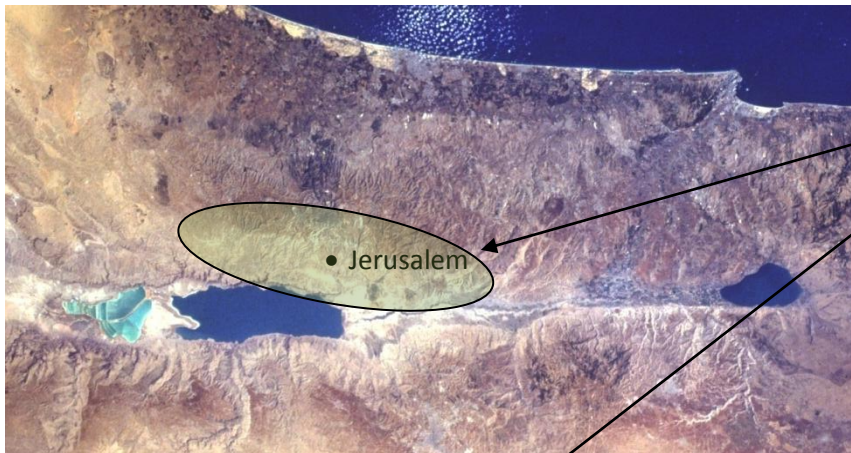
who are slow to believe. That sounds harsh, but another word for chastening is teaching. The Lord wants us to be believers. He taught, "And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind." (Luke 12:29). In another record, Jesus said, "...Be not afraid, only believe." (Mark 5:36).

Interesting that the begin of everything worthwhile seems to start with a belief. Christ taught, "...O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken:" (Luke 24:25). "For do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in him there is no variableness neither shadow of changing? And now, if ye have imagined up unto yourselves a god who doth vary, and in whom there is shadow of changing, then have ye imagined up unto yourselves a god who is not a God of miracles. But behold, I will show unto you a God of miracles, even the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; and it is that same God who created the heavens and the earth, and all things that in them are." (Mormon 9:9-11) "O then despise not, and wonder not, but hearken unto the words of the Lord, and ask the Father in the name of Jesus for what things soever ye shall stand in need. Doubt not, but be believing, and begin as in times of old, and come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling before him." (Mormon 9:27)

- 46 - **fulfilled in their season** - There is no prophecy, nor word uttered under the direction of Heaven which shall not be fulfilled. The Lord has a divine plan for His children. His plan is choreographed to bring about his righteous purposes. We need not question why He waits, or why things do not happen sooner or later. The Lord promises, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).
- 47 - **he tarried so long** - The rules of temple service were so structured that extra people were not allowed to enter into the holy places as their leisure. A priest who lingered too long would cause concern, and checking on him would be inappropriate. "In Luke's account Zachariah is portrayed alone in the holy place, expected to return from it without undue delay to prevent anxiety on the part of the people. Luke is unaware of the prescription in the Mishnah (Tamid 5:4-6, 6:1-3, 7:1-2) that several priests entered the holy place together. The Mishnah (Yoma 5:1) forbids the High Priest in the Day of Atonement to prolong his prayer before the curtain of the Holy of Holies lest 'he put Israel in Terror'. Whether this was applied also to the Tamid offering, we do not know." (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 328).
- 48 - **departed to his own house** - Service in the temple required one to depart from his home and sequester himself to the temple for his period of service, typically one week. The worries and labors of the world were set aside. It required absolute devotion to the Lord's work. It was an extreme honor. Due to the number of priests at the time of Zacharias, the opportunity to serve was most likely a once in a life time event. When it was over, the priest would return to his own home and way of life. We do not know where Zacharias' home was located. We are told that he lived in the hill country of Judea. The hill county of Judea is "a geographical term of frequent occurrence denoting the ridge of hills extending from Jezreel to Beersheba, attaining a maximum elevation of 5,000 feet near Hebron" (Bible Dictionary). The hill country extends approximately 30 miles north and 30 miles south of Jerusalem.

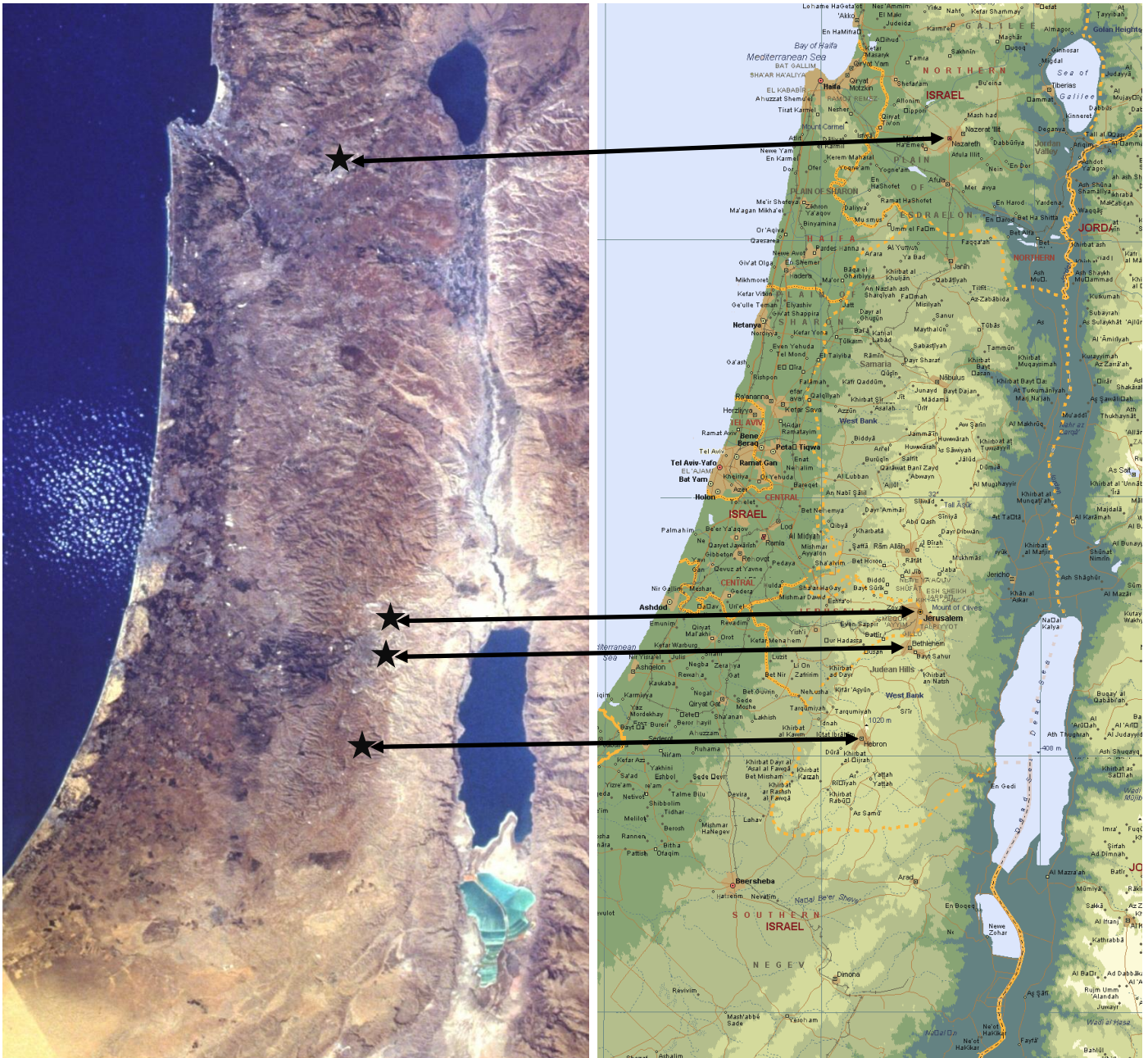
# The Land of Israel

There are three popular theories as to what Zachariah's home city was. They are Hebron, Ein Karen and Bethlehem.



The Bible Dictionary of the LDS standard works says that Zacharias' home was Bethlehem. The Smith's Bible Dictionary says that Zacharias' home was Hebron. Tradition says that a small town west of Jerusalem named Ein Karen was home to Zacharias.





**49 - after those days Elizabeth conceived** - The days after Zachariah's temple service would have allowed him to be intimate with his wife Elizabeth. During the days of his services, he was to have no contact with his wife. Those serving in the temple were to remain pure in thought and desire.

After the days of Zachariah's service, the angel Gabriel's word were fulfilled. Elizabeth conceived. The word "conceive" was translated from the Greek word "συλλαμβανω" or "sullambano". It is pronounced "sool-lam-ban-o". It means to clasp, seize, **conceive**, catch, help, or take. **Herein, the prophecy was fulfilled.**

**50 - hid herself five months** - Elizabeth hid her "conception" in January of 5BCE, for 5 months, until June of 5BCE. **"No Palestinian custom is known that would call for it."** (The Gospel According to Luke I-IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes, The Anchor Bible, Vol. 28, Hardcover – July 1, 1982, by Joseph A. Fitzmyer, page 329). We are left to speculate as to why. Elisabeth was obviously happy with her unexpected pregnancy; however, she might have feared the public's response to an old ladies pregnancy.

**51 - take away my reproach among men** - The culture of the time defined woman as producers of children. Their worth and value was placed on their ability to produce offspring. Failure to do so was a disgrace. The ancient society would have suspected that the couple was being punished by God, maybe for a sin that was committed. It would at the very least have been an embarrassment. Elizabeth was thankful for the news, because it did "take away my reproach among men." The Greek word "reproach" is translated from the word "ονειδος" or "oneidos". It is pronounced "on-i-dos". It means a taunt, disgrace, or reproach. The dictionary defines the word reproach as follows;

**Reproach** v. 1. To express disapproval of, criticism of or disappointment in someone 2. To bring shame upon; disgrace.