

JEWISH DISAPPOINTMENT WITH YESHUA!

I recently asked a long-standing friend whether she believed Jesus (Jews call him Yeshua) was the Messiah the Jews were expecting. I had not seen this lady or her husband for years. I knew she was now learning Hebrew and enjoying the new insights this knowledge was opening up for them both as they read the Hebrew Scriptures. Both were quite animated as they related to me their joy in discovering the remarkable accuracy of the Hebrew text. So, I was now keen to hear how this was helping them in their walk with the Lord ... had the accuracy of the Hebrew Bible convinced them that Yeshua is the promised Jewish Messiah?

To my surprise both my friends said, "We are not sure. Yeshua has not fully proved himself."

Such uncertainty is typical amongst our Jewish friends. And the reason for their doubts about Yeshua's identity as the Messianic Lord is that we still do not see the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Hebrew Scriptures predict that the real messiah will

subdue all enemies of Israel, will rebuild their Temple, reign as God's king from their capital of Jerusalem, all nations will pay homage to Israel, and all nature will be renewed in an age of universal righteousness and peace. Given that this has not yet happened, how can Jesus possibly be the promised Messiah? If he is the Messiah, surely he still has more to prove!

I recognize there has been great debate amongst the Jews for centuries as to whether Messiah is one man or two: Will Messiah be one who is the son of Joseph, that is, a suffering servant, and another one who is a conquering king, that is, the son of David? Or is it possible that Messiah will be just the one individual who combines both roles? Uncertainty grips the Jewish communities to this day. Indeed, this discussion is found all the way back to the Essenes at Qumran at the time of Yeshua, and even long before.

Certainly, it is the conviction of the New Testament witnesses that Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ). He came first in fulfillment of prophecies that spoke of him as the Suffering

Servant. He is coming again in glory as God's all-conquering King of Righteousness. Both roles are combined and wonderfully fulfilled in Yeshua of Nazareth. Let's take a little look at just a few of the hundreds of remarkable predictions from the Hebrew Bible about the "coming one" that occurred at his first appearance (John 4:25).

1. The Time of Messiah's Birth.

The time of the Messiah's birth was predicted by Jacob on his deathbed. He said to his son Judah:

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah... until Shiloh comes, and to Him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Gen. 49:10).

"Shiloh" was recognized by the Jewish rabbis as a descriptive Messianic title. The "scepter" refers to the judicial authority of the nation of Israel. Therefore, Jacob's prophecy stated the Messiah will come at a time when the nation's judicial power has been removed.

Although Judah was deprived of its national

sovereignty during the 70 year period of Babylonian captivity, it never lost its "scepter", for the Jews were allowed to have their own judges even while in captivity.

Josh McDowell, in his book, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, points out:

"The first visible sign of the beginning of the removal of the scepter from Judah came about when Herod the Great, who had no Jewish blood, succeeded the Maccabean princes who belonged to the tribe of Levi and who were the last Jewish kings to reign in Jerusalem."

The crucial turning point came soon after Herod's death when, in about 7 AD, the Romans removed the power of the Sanhedrin Council in Judah to pronounce the death penalty. Thus the scepter (the supreme judicial power) passed from Judah.

There is a notation about this in the Talmud (the Jewish oral tradition). The Talmud states that on this occasion the members of the Sanhedrin were

overtaken by "a general consternation." Incredibly, it is further recorded that they "covered their heads with ashes and their bodies with sackcloth, exclaiming: 'Woe unto us, for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come!'"

What they did not realize was that Yeshua the Messiah had been born around 4 BC during the last years of Herod (Matthew 2:1). So, **"Shiloh" had arrived shortly before the scepter departed — just as prophesied!**

2. The Place of Messiah's Birth.

The place of the Messiah's birth had also been prophesied five hundred years before by Micah:

"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel" (Micah 5:2).

Have you ever wondered what the term, "Ephrathah," means in this passage? It is a geographical designation to indicate precisely which Bethlehem is being identified. It's like

differentiating between Maryborough in Queensland and Maryborough in Victoria.

The point is that there was another Bethlehem in the land of Israel in the area to the north near the Sea of Galilee. It had been allotted to the tribe of Zebulun. In fulfillment of Micah's prophecy, Matthew specifies, "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea" (Matthew 2:1), that is, Bethlehem Ephrathah.

This prediction almost did not happen because Mary and Joseph did not live in Bethlehem of Ephrathah. So God moved Caesar Augustus --- none other than the Roman Emperor himself! --- to issue a "decree" for a "census to be taken of all the inhabited earth" (Luke 2:1). Of course Caesar had no idea he was playing a key part in God's unfolding drama of the ages. But he ordered that everybody living in the provinces of Syria and Judea had to go back to their city of birth. Jesus must be born in the city of David, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, to qualify as Messiah:

"This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Lk. 2:2).

For decades many skeptics said Luke got his facts wrong, for there were no records of Quirinius being governor of Syria during the reign of Augustus Caesar (though Josephus does mention this governor too, but dates him years later). Ah! Another case where the Bible can't be trusted they hooted. But guess what? Their laughter has ceased because once again the archaeologist's spade has unearthed the evidence that Luke is telling reliable history.

The first fact to note is that Luke does not say Quirinius was the governor of Syria when the census affecting Jesus' birth took place. The Greek text reads that he was *hegemoneuontos* of Syria, which means he was in a position of authority. If Quirinius was the governor the word would be *legatus*.

Now, it just so happens that Quirinius was in a position of authority in Syria on two separate occasions. The first time he led military action against the Homonadensians during the period between 12 and 2 BC. A Latin inscription discovered in 1764 adds weight to this idea that

Quirinius was only in a position of military authority, but was not the governor.

Justin Martyr's Apology supports this view, writing that Quirinius was a "procurator", not a governor of the area of Judea. As Gleason Archer writes, "In order to secure efficiency and dispatch, it may well have been that Augustus put Quirinius in charge of the census-enrollment in Syria between the close of Saturninus's administration and the beginning of Varus's term of service in 7 B.C. It was doubtless because of his competent handling of the 7 B.C. census that Augustus later put him in charge of the 7 A.D. census." Archer also says that Roman history records Quirinius leading the effort to quell rebels in that area at exactly that time, so such a political arrangement is not a stretch.

If Quirinius did hold such a position, then we have no contradiction. The first census was taken during the time of Yeshua's birth, but Josephus' census would have come later. This option seems to me to be entirely reasonable. It is noteworthy that Luke is aware of another

census taken in 6 AD (Acts 5:37), which is why some translators read the Greek text at Luke 2:2 as, "This census was the first of those which took place under Quirinius ..." (e.g. NASB). Other translators read it, "This was the census which took place before Quirinius was governor ..." My own opinion on this translation issue is that it is not necessary to read it that way to prove Luke's accuracy. Whether he is saying "the first census" or "before Quirinius ..." the fact is Luke does not call him the governor at the time of the nativity census.

We also know that Caesar Augustus ordered many censuses in his day. Records show that Roman-controlled Egypt had begun a census as early as 10 BC and it was repeated every 14 years. And Augustus himself notes in his Res Gestae (The Deeds of Augustus) that he ordered three wide-spread censuses of Roman citizens, one in 28 BC., one in 8 BC., and one in 14 AD. In between there are several other censuses that happened locally across Rome. Luke's account corroborates the idea of multiple censuses for Judea when he writes "This was the first census taken while Quirinius was

hegemoneuontos of Syria."

On another occasion, an enrolment of all the people of the empire happened to swear an oath of allegiance to Caesar. In Chapter 34 of *Res Gestae Augustus* also notes, "When I administered my thirteenth consulate (2 BCE.), the senate and Equestrian order and Roman people all called me father of the country, and voted that the same be inscribed in the vestibule of my temple". Josephus also mentions a time "When all good people gave assurance of their good will to Caesar". These types of tributes would also require an enrolment of individuals from across the empire.

Orosius, a fifth century Christian, links this registration with the birth of Jesus saying that "all of the peoples of the great nations were to take an oath". So, the fact that we have outside corroboration of the possibility of multiple censuses strengthens Luke's report of the events as he has written them.

Taking all of this together, we have at least three censuses in the area of Judea - one in 8 B.C., one

starting around 2 B.C. and one in 6 A.D. The only point that is really in question, then, is whether Luke was mistaken in ascribing this census to the time when Quirinius was in the role of Syrian Governor. Since Quirinius wasn't governor of the Syrian province until after Archelaus was deposed, critics claim Luke misidentified the census as the smaller one, which happened some 8-10 years after Herod died. But I have already pointed out that Luke does not say Quirinius was governor when the nativity census took place, rather he was in a position of military authority.

God's prophetic word did not fail. Yeshua was born exactly where the prophet had predicted hundreds of years earlier, and Dr Luke is a reliable historical witness.

By specifying the area of Ephrathah, the prophecy of **Micah made it clear that the Bethlehem that would host the birth of the Messiah would be the one in the south of Israel near Jerusalem ... "the city of David" just as prophesied!**

3. The Year of Messiah's Crucifixion.

Furthermore, the prophet Daniel announced hundreds of years before-hand the exact year Messiah would be crucified:

“So you are to know and discern that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, even in times of trouble. After the sixty-two weeks, the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing” (Dan. 9:25-26 NASB).

The Hebrew word for week means 'seven'. So, 'the Messiah' appears and will be "cut off" after sixty-nine weeks (or sevens), i.e. 483 years from the time the decree is issued.

So, when did the period of 483 years begin? Daniel explains it begins "from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem."

Although Cyrus authorized the return of the Jewish exiles to their own country and permitted

them to start rebuilding their Temple this cannot be when Daniel's time-line begins (Ezra 1). The reason is that these exiles did not start to "restore and rebuild Jerusalem" after this first decree went forth... no work was done on the city, just the Temple.

The enemies of the Jews complained to Cyrus their horror that the Temple was being rebuilt (Ezra 4:21). All work on the Temple was then temporarily stopped. The next king of Medo-Persia was Artaxerxes. Under his reign rebuilding the Temple started again, but once more their enemies complained, "Who gave you a decree to build this house (i.e. Temple)?" The governor of Syria complained to king Artaxerxes, "Make a decree that these men be made to cease, and that this city be not rebuilt, until a decree is made by me" (Ezra 4:21).

Ezra is careful to note it was the rebuilding of the Temple that was the problem. And to clear things up, the governor later wrote to the new King Darius, who found the original authorization in the archives and upheld it in his response. He told the governor of Syria to quit

meddling in the work of the Temple, and to add insult to his injury he was to help with the cost of the reconstruction from the royal revenue! So, the Temple rebuilding was continued in earnest and was eventually completed (Ezra 6).

However, the city of Jerusalem was still in ruins. When Nehemiah who served in the Medo-Persian court as king Artaxerxes cup-bearer --- a position of high responsibility concerned with the king's security --- heard that "the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire" (Neh. 1: 3), he asked God to intervene.

Finally, trembling before the king, Nehemiah made his daring request that Jerusalem be rebuilt (Neh. 2: 4-5). The king now issued a decree allowing Jerusalem to be rebuilt. This decree was issued "in the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes", i.e. March 444 BC (Neh. 2:1).

At this exact time Daniel's prophetic calendar of 70 weeks of 'sevens' started ticking. This means, that the period of 69 weeks of sevens,

or 483 years till the time of Messiah's crucifixion, now began.

If you are following the maths we are now down to the first half of the first century AD. In fact, we are now in the decade of the 30's AD! This calculation is based on our Gregorian calendar, the one we still use. But our Gregorian calendar is solar based, or 365 days a year, allowing for a leap year every four years. Sir Isaac Newton comments that:

"All nations, before the just length of the solar year was known, reckoned months by the course of the moon and years by the return of winter and summer, spring and autumn; and in making calendars for their festivals they reckoned thirty days to a lunar month and twelve lunar months to a year, taken to the nearest round numbers, whence came the division of the ecliptic into 360 degrees." (1728, page 71).

So the Gregorian calendar is not the calendar Daniel's prophecy is based on. We know Babylonian and Jewish reckoning was based

on a lunar year of 360 days.

Mathematician and Christian apologist John Lennox explains:

- “On this basis then:
- * the 69 sevens – or 483 years – years of 360 days, each amount to 173,880 days;
 - * 1 solar year = 365.2419879 days;
 - * so 173,880 days = 476.067663 solar years = 476 years + 24.7 days.

“Using the Gregorian calendar, if we start from the beginning of the month Nisan in 444 BC and add 476 years plus 25 days, then we get to the month Nisan in AD 33.

“The two dates for the crucifixion of Jesus that appear most often in scholarly writings are AD 30 and 33. One reason for this is that in those two years 14 Nisan, on which the Passover lamb was killed, fell on a Friday. Recently Cambridge scientist Sir Colin Humphreys, working with astrophysicist Graeme Waddington of

Oxford, calculated that Jesus died on 3 April 33 AD (Humphreys, 2011). Humphreys' work involves the idea that Jesus would have used the lunar calendar, invented in the time of the captivity as mentioned above. These findings have been widely accepted and they show that Daniel's sixth-century BC prophecy turns out to be a phenomenally accurate prediction of the time when "Messiah the Prince" would be *cut off* (Daniel 9:26)" (1)

Although there has been much debate over the interpretation of Daniel's 70th week, the encouraging thing to grasp is the precise accuracy contained in Daniel chapter 9 concerning the very year Messiah would be killed! So ... there are dozens of prophecies the NT claims were fulfilled in Yeshua. These 3 we have briefly considered are a scratch on the surface but indicate ...

Yeshua was born and killed at the time, the place, and in the very year the prophets had predicted! Surely this is the Messiah, Son of God, the King of Israel?

Our Jewish friends will say, "Not so fast!" (TBC).

Footnotes

1. Lennox, John C. *Against the Flow: The Inspiration of Daniel in an Age of Relativism*. Monarch Books, Oxford UK. 2015. p. 299-300, italics original.