

The REAL Advent

7 Extraordinary Preparations God Made for Jesus' Birth

from

Yvon Prehn, Bible805.com

NOTES

Comments, questions,
application ideas

Traditional Advent

- The word “advent” means arrival or coming, referring to the coming of Jesus to be born as a baby, and traditionally, we celebrate it by lighting candles, reading devotions, and preparing our hearts for Christmas.
- These are all beneficial activities and a welcome alternative to the constant commercialism of the holidays as people prepare for Christ’s birth.
- But as meaningful as they are, I want to share with you God’s true advent, the SEVEN preparations for Jesus’ Birth that took, not 5 weeks, but thousands of years and that all came together in the birth of Jesus that happened, as the ***Bible says in “the fullness of time” (Gal. 4:4).***
- Obviously, timing was important so, what does that mean for Advent? What made the time right for God to send His son?
- It’s a fascinating coming together of circumstances told over centuries—and now let’s look at 7 Historical Events that prepared the world for the birth of Jesus—

One more preliminary truth Christmas Advent teaches

- This lesson demonstrates two key foundational truths about the Christian faith, and they are:
- ***1—The Christian faith is rooted in real events that happened in verifiable history and***
- ***2—God works in and through history***
- It’s fitting to review this material in preparation for Christmas, because Jesus’ birth is a real, historical event, not some fantasy birth of a mythical savior.
- Jesus’ birth, as all the accounts in the Bible is true because God as Author of the Bible is the source of all truth.
- True history is an illustration of it.....so let’s get started.....

Foundational facts

- **Location:** the Mediterranean Basin
- **Primary Peoples:** the Children of Israel, God’s chosen to be His light to the world and from whom He would send the Messiah and those who interacted with them.
- All the events and locations I’ll be sharing can be extensively verified in secular history, no faith required—you can confirm any of them on Wikipedia or anywhere online.

The story starts

- From their origins in Israel the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob became a nation when God redeemed them from slavery in Egypt.
- After He delivered them, God made a covenant, a contract with them at Mt. Sinai.
- *We'll all familiar with the 10 Commandments part of this, but the bigger picture of the covenant with God was that if they obeyed and worshiped Him, they would be blessed, kept safe, and in their land and if not, they would be punished by captivity outside the land.*
- Covenants are not to be taken lightly.

More about the Covenant

- Not just for their sake.
- They were God's chosen people, not just for private blessings and protection.
- Were supposed to be a light and a witness to the nations around them.
- They were to do that by only worshipping the one true God and following his commands, which were very different from the idolatrous, immoral cultures around them.
- That was their covenant, you can read the details in Deut. 29.

Just as God keeps his word in blessings

- He also keeps his word in judgments.
- If they did not follow their part of the covenant, if they did worship other gods and live without following God's laws God said he would discipline them by sending prophets to remind them, by troubles, and ultimately, if they didn't repent, by removing them from the land (read the details in the OT historical books and prophets).
- They didn't obey and were judged. You may be thinking, what does this have to do with Advent?
- EVERYTHING!
- **Though removal from the land was the ultimate horror for them it also initiated a series of SEVEN PREPARATIONS would culminate in the birth of Jesus.**
- We'll now go through them—I'll identify each one and then I'll point out why each one was important and explain how it fit into God's plan.

PREPARATION #1 A series of deportations

- The first major deportation took place 722 BC when Assyria conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and scattered the exiles throughout the middle east. They did not return.
- The second major deportation (actually, a series of them) took place in 576 BC, under Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem was destroyed and was primarily to Babylon.
- An opportunity to return to Israel after 70 years was offered to the people, but many did not and stayed in the land they were taken to

NOTES

Comments, questions,
application ideas

as we see in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

- Other migrations during Old Testament times took place for various reasons (trade, political, etc.) to Egypt, Rome, throughout the Mediterranean basin.
- **Why this preparation was important:** *Groups of Jewish people who worshipped the one true God were scattered throughout the Mediterranean World and where many retained their faith.*
- *They were blessed to be a blessing and God couldn't do that with them all huddled in Jerusalem.*
- *Look at the maps.....*

PREPARATION #2 The development of the Synagogue system

- Though this was developing earlier, during the Babylonian captivity, the priestly leadership realized that they needed to develop a system to worship God that was not dependent upon the temple.
- Many Jewish people were scattered throughout the world, and they would never be able to return to Jerusalem.
- Out of this realization the synagogue system was developed, wherein if there were 10 Jewish men, they could form *minyan*, and from that a synagogue.
- **Why this preparation was important:** *Houses of worship, now a formal entity where people knew the one true God and studied the scriptures that pointed to the Messiah were spread throughout the entire known world.*

PREPARATION # 3 Formalization of the Hebrew scriptures

- During approximately the same time as the synagogue was formalized, after the Babylonian captivity, members of the same group, known as the Men of the Great Assembly or Men of the Great Synagogue formalized what we know of as our Old Testament today.
- Ezra was one of the leaders of this group, he led one of the groups of exiles back to Jerusalem in 459 BC.
- We don't know the exact process or the number of years until it was finalized, but from the Dead Sea Scrolls and other sources, we know that the books we have in our Old Testament are the same ones they had.
- More on this in the series of lessons on how we got our Bibles.

Why this preparation was important:

- *Their scriptures told one consistent story; one consistent set of prophecies, which meant.....*
- *The Jews all over the world studied the same scriptures including the many passages that predicted the coming of the Messiah.*
- *However, a problem was developing in that their scriptures were primarily in Hebrew when fewer and fewer people spoke Hebrew.*
- *From the time of the Assyrian captivity on, a majority of the people*

NOTES

Comments, questions,
application ideas

spoke Aramaic, which was the universal language of the world at that time.

- *Aramaic uses the same alphabet as Hebrew, like English and Spanish, use the same alphabet, but like them they are two totally different languages.*
- *While this was going on another universal language was growing in use.....*

PREPARATION # 4 Adoption of a new universal language—Koine Greek

- Koine Greek (one of many dialects at that time) was adapted and spread by Alexander the Great.
- In addition to a great military leader, he was a brilliant scholar and philosopher in many areas, as to be expected as Aristotle was his tutor.
- As he conquered the entire known world at the time, he absorbed into his army soldiers from many lands and decided that Greek culture was important for them all.

Key part of that –making Koine Greek the official language

- Koine Greek was not a hidden, scholarly language, but was a dialect of the Greek language that Alexander the Great 336–323 BC developed and enforced its use for his armies and the people he conquered.
- It was common and PRECISE.
- What thrills scholars today (tenses, etc.) was a language designed to keep an army functioning well with no confusion over the meaning of commands and administratively to keep a vast empire of divergent people united.
- Why this preparation was important: *what the conquering army spoke, everybody learned to speak. Everyone in the entire known world now spoke, read, and wrote in the same language—Koine Greek. It may not have been their home language, but everyone knew it. Similar to how English is to many today, though they may speak another language at home.*

Good news/bad news about Koine Greek as the universal language

- The good part is everyone in this part of the world could communicate and it remained that way for over 500 years.
- The bad news related to the Jews.
- Remember the three significant events previously mentioned
 - The dispersion of the Jews all over this area
 - The development of the synagogue system where they all worshiped
 - The formalization of their scriptures—what we know as the Old Testament
- The bad news is that the Jewish scriptures were in Hebrew, but

NOTES

Comments, questions,
application ideas

- most of them now spoke Aramaic and now Greek.
- They couldn't read or understand God's Word in Hebrew any more than a Hebrew Bible would make sense to us today.

Obviously, a problem

- God again uses Alexander and his influence to bring about the next step.
- Unlike many in the ancient world, Alexander held the Jews in high regard as did the one of generals who divided his empire after his death.
- This general was Ptolemy of Egypt and his son, Ptolemy Philadelphus was responsible for the next step in our progression.....

PREPARATION # 5 Translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek

- **Ptolemy II Philadelphus (son of Alexander's general Ptolemy) lived from 281 to 246 BC** decided to have the Hebrew Old Testament translated into Greek into what became known as the Septuagint.
- There is much more to the story of the Septuagint (many more, some quite fanciful) but the key thing not disputed is that the content of the Hebrew Bible was now available widely to the Greek-speaking world.
- **Why this preparation was important: *Everyone in the entire known world could now read the Old Testament in the same language. It was no longer the language of primarily the priests, but of secular people as well.***
- ***It was a popular, easy to understand translation and the one quoted by Jesus and the New Testament writers.***

So where are we? We have:

- **SO FAR:** God's chosen people representing the one true God,
- Were scattered all over the known world,
- They were all worshipping Jehovah and looking forward to a Messiah,
- While reading the same holy scriptures in the same language,
- **STILL NEEDED: how to tie all of this together**
- **Provided by.....**

PREPARATION # 6 Development of the Roman Roads

- This was the most incredible system for transportation in the ancient world. It linked all parts of the Roman (formerly Alexander's) empire. Many survive today.
- The importance of this preparation ***is linked to one more***, the final preparation needed before the birth of the Messiah and that was

PREPARATION #7 The Pax Romana

- *The term "Pax Romana," which literally means "Roman peace," refers to the time period from 27 B.C.E. to 180 C.E. in the Roman Empire. This 200-year period saw **unprecedented peace and economic prosperity throughout the Empire**, which spanned from England in the north to Morocco in the south and Iraq in the east.*

NOTES

Comments, questions,
application ideas

- <https://www.ushistory.org/civ/6c.asp>
- (If you've been paying attention, roughly the same area all the previous maps and events have been in).

Results of the Roman Roads and Pax Romana

- **Historian Lionel Casson said, "THE FIRST TWO CENTURIES of the Christian era were great days for a traveler, . . .A planned network of good roads gave him access to all major centers, and the routes were policed well enough for him to ride them with relatively little fear of bandits. . . .Because of the Pax Romana (Roman Peace) of Emperor Augustus (27 B.C. – A.D. 14),The Stoic philosopher Epictetus (d. about 135) declared, "There are neither wars nor battles, nor great robberies nor piracies, but we may travel at all hours, and sail from east to west."**
- <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/on-the-road-with-paul>
- **Why these 2 preparations were important: Common people could use the roads and travel in relative safety.**

With all of this in place

- *The fullness of time came, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem.*
- But of course, the Advent of Jesus is only the beginning of his story.
- Because He didn't stay a baby, but grew to manhood, taught, died, and rose again.
- ***And after His Resurrection, is when the extraordinary meaning of the Advent preparations becomes fully apparent on the day of Pentecost because....***

Jews from all over the world were able to travel safely to Jerusalem for Pentecost.

- *Now when the day of Pentecost came. . . . there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—Acts 2:1, 5-11*
- Look at a map of the Roman Roads, trace the names.....

Thousands of years of history converged on that day

- Jews meeting in Jerusalem from all over the known world
- Because their Scriptures told them they should come at that time.
- All expecting a Messiah preached to them in their synagogues in far-off lands.
- All safely traveling on the Roman Roads under the Roman peace to get there.

Who could have imagined that day?

- Certainly not a captive who lived over a thousand years earlier shackled and starving who was force-marched away from Jerusalem into Mesopotamia would have had no idea that one day one of his

NOTES

Comments, questions,
application ideas

descendants would travel safely to Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost.

- Or a Jewish rabbi whose family stayed in Babylon over 500 years earlier but who could now travel in safety to Jerusalem for the Holy Days.
- Or the thousands of other faithful God-worshippers scattered throughout the ancient world for multitude of reasons who were now in Jerusalem.
- Who could have imagined that these men would hear a fisherman named Peter quote the OT fulfillment they had been taught about and prayed for and that through his sermon they would find Jesus.
- ***As extraordinary as that day was the miracles of God's preparation don't stop with Pentecost.***

These same preparations were used by the Apostle Paul to share the Gospel

- Into this world united by religion, language, culture and linked by safe and good roads, the Apostle Paul would go from place to place, as his pattern was.....
- First to Jewish people who were scattered all over the empire, many of them who arrived over a thousand years earlier...
- He goes into the Jewish synagogue, most likely organized in that place hundreds of years earlier...
- He reads the Old Testament scriptures to them in their common language (the Koine Greek) and shows them from their scriptures that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah and Savior.

I wonder if Paul thought about all that had to come together for this to be possible?

- To review our 7 Preparations:
- The Jewish Diaspora, development of the synagogue, formalization of the Hebrew Scriptures, Alexander conquering the world and commanding everyone speak Greek, the Scriptures translated into Greek, the building of the Roman Roads and the Pax Romana.
- I imagine Paul didn't think about the history of it all as he did his work, any more than we are aware of all the things God brings together in our lives to protect us and accomplish His will.

Our Application

- This lesson is a great reminder that nothing happens by accident—nothing is left to chance in the sovereign plan of God.
- It will probably take time, more time than we would like for God's plans to work out in our lives and our world, but they will.
- In closing I'm reminded of the words of Julian or Norwich who lived through the plague in her day and who said. . . .

The same God

- Who prepared for thousands of years for the birth of His son,
- Who got the people in Julian's day through their pandemic and many more of His people through trials, both horrific and painfully

NOTES

Comments, questions,
application ideas

- ordinary in past times,
- Is with us NOW and will work out all for our ultimate good and His glory.
 - We may not see answers or understand the part our lives play in His eternal plan on this earth.
 - But someday we will, and all truly and forever, will be well.

That's all for now

- For related materials and links to a podcast and videos suitable for a class or small group, go to www.bible805.com.
- Links to the website and other resources are below this video.
- And a little printable present of ***All Will Be Well!***
- Be sure to subscribe to this channel because there is lots more coming up to help you know, trust, and apply the Bible.
- In closing, I'm Yvon Prehn, your fellow pilgrim, writer and teacher for Jesus and until next time on Bible805 may God surround you with His grace, assure you of His love, and fill you with His peace as you walk with Him now and forever, amen.

That's all for now

- **Check out the notes from this lesson, related resources, and helpful links at www.bible805.com. I have a link and special downloadable gift for you of a free printable of "All will be well"**

NOTES

Comments, questions,
application ideas