The Complete & Extraordinary Advent Story

7 Miraculous Preparations
God Made for Jesus' Birth & Beyond

Your Notes

It's almost the season of Advent

- The word "advent" means arrival or coming, referring to the coming of Jesus to be born as a baby.
- Traditionally, we celebrate it by lighting candles, reading devotions, and preparing our hearts for Christmas.
- The symbolism of the advent wreath is that it represents the eternal life possible through Jesus, the candles represent hope, peace, joy, and love and finally the center candle representing that Jesus is the Light of World,
- These give us a spiritual focus, something to think about rather than the overwhelming consumerism and goodie consumption of the holiday.
- That's all wonderful, but there's much more to the totality of Advent we're going to look at in this lesson.

When we look more closely

- We find that the coming of Jesus, to save and dwell with his people, expands out both backwards and forwards from the beginning of time until the end of time.
- It teaches us about the eternal sovereignty of God and is an incredible illustration of how all things truly do work out for good.
- That's what I'd like to talk about in this lesson—**Seven Miraculous Preparations for Jesus Birth and Beyond** that took, not just the 4 weeks of Advent, 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).***

Foundational Truth

- ***Our God is above and outside of time, and He has a good and perfect plan for His creation.***
- ***And it is a plan that He hasn't kept secret, but that He freely shares with us in His word.***

God works in and through history to carry out His plan

- ***And he does it through real, historical events before and after the birth of His Son took place in real places.***
- It's fitting to review this material in preparation for Christmas, because to emphasize, Jesus' birth is a real, historical event, not some fantasy birth of a mythical savior.
- And though they all took place in real places involving real people, we see God's supernatural hand behind them all.
- And it begins as all good stories do…long, long ago….

In a place called Eden

- God created a perfect world where He placed people created in His image in a perfect garden where He could walk and talk with them.
- But somehow that wasn't enough for them, and they disobeyed His one command that had consequences far more devastating than they could imagine (as sin usually does).
- And even though they were judged for their sin, at the same time God judged them, He promised a Savior who would heal the breach between people and their God.

The story continues

- From all humanity, God then focused his salvation story on one people beginning with the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who 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.***

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 worshipped other gods and lived without following God's laws, God said he would discipline them by first sending prophets to remind them, then by troubles, and ultimately, if they didn't repent, by removing them from the land (the details of this pattern are 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 God ultimately used it for good as He prepared the world for the Advent of Jesus.

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.
- Other Deportations followed, some returned after the Babylonian captivity, but many remained where they had been taken.
- **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 and the tiny nation of Israel.***
- ***Look at the maps……***

PREPARATION #2 The development of the Synagogue system

- For the many Jewish people who were scattered throughout the world, and they would never be able to return to Jerusalem or worship at the Temple there.
- 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: The Synagogues, these houses of worship, where people knew the one true God and studied the scriptures that pointed to the Messiah were now 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 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.
- 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.

- See more on this process in the series of lessons on how we got our Bibles.

Why this preparation was important:

- The Hebrew 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, the majority of the people 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 also they are two totally different languages and so more and more people couldn't read their scriptures or understand when they were read to them.
- While this was going on another universal language was growing in use……

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

- Kione Greek (one of many dialects of Greek at that time) was adapted and spread by Alexander the Great.
- In addition to being 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 decreed that Greek culture was important for them all and that meant….

Making Kione Greek the official language

- Kione 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 Kione 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 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, this was a problem

- Yet 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 that is 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?????**
- **That link was 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*. 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 and THEY DID.***

With all of this in place

- ***The fullness of time came, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem.***

- But of course, the Birth 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 to Jerusalem.

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 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 and go back home all over the known world to share the good news!
- ***As extraordinary as that day was the miracles of God's preparation don't stop with Pentecost.***

This 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 Septuagint) 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.
- ***ALL THINGS truly do work out for good.***
- Though that working out for good will probably take time, more time than we would like for God's plans to work out in our lives and our world, but work out for good, ***they will***.
- Because the Advent story isn't over.

There is a second Advent coming

- When Jesus comes again.
- And we can be just as certain of His Second Coming as people were of his first Advent.
- I suspect that will surprise many in the same way His first Advent did, which is why He doesn't tell us to be trying to figure out signs and dates because he told his disciples categorically that it wasn't what they were to be about.

But what he did want them to focus on

- ***He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*** Acts 1:7,8
- We are to be His witness, which He has always wanted His people to be, be the light (brighter than an Advent candle) in our dark world until Jesus comes and we once again live as we were created to—
- Walking with our God forever.

That's all for now

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