

# The Messiah

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now we'll look this evening then at the final episode, if we can call it that, in our little mini-series, looking at the town itself of Bethlehem and the ways in which it has been used of the Lord down through Scripture.

We saw at our opening little occasion how the time when Rachel, having died in childbirth with Benjamin, was buried there in Bethlehem, the first mention of Bethlehem in Scripture.

We then fast-forwarded, as it were, about a thousand years to the time of Ruth and Boaz, and the occasion of their being brought together, which then brought forth from that marriage the child Obed, who was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David.

And David, of course, being himself then born and brought up in Bethlehem, we fast-forward again about 200 years or so to the time when David then is anointed by Samuel to be king, although he doesn't actually enter into his kingdom yet, after a few more years after that.

And so we move forward again now, about 700 years or thereabouts, which is quite a big chunk again of time, about 700 years from the time of David on now to the time when Bethlehem enters into it.

[ 1 : 18 ] The most significant event, of course, in its entire history, not only biblical history, but all its history since then. For 2,000 years since then, of course, it has had that special place in the mind and thought of everyone who has ever known and loved the Lord Jesus Christ.

So we have this instance here of the wise men coming from the east. That is the land of Mesopotamia, Iran, Iraq, that sort of area now, the two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates, and Babylonia, that sort of rough area where they were almost certainly studying the stars.

We know that amongst the exiles that were there in the time of the Jewish exile, there were those who did rise to prominence in the studies of the ways of the Chaldeans and the ancient wisdom of the east.

And the study of the stars was part and parcel of that wisdom, that knowledge that was accumulated. And some of the Jewish exiles did it. Think of Daniel and his colleagues, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as well, who rose to great prominence there.

And these magi, as they were called, who studied the stars and the heavens and the movement of the constellations and the planets, these are the men who are now coming, or a portion of them, who are now coming to seek the King of the Jews.

[ 2 : 44 ] Why are they coming? Because they say, we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him. Now, again, the stars, as men studied them over the course of the centuries, and we've looked at this in the past and previous years, the stars came to be associated.

Different constellations, different planets, different particular movements in the sky came to be associated either with different countries or nations or types of people.

Jupiter, for example, being the biggest, the King of planets, came to be the star that was associated with a planet associated with kingship. The constellation of Pisces came to be associated with the people of the Jews.

And Saturn, the planet, came to be associated with the Messiahship. So what we almost certainly have at this time that these wise men have observed is that as the planets move in their orbits and the stars likewise, they will almost certainly have seen in the constellation of Pisces, which is associated with the Jewish people, the planets Jupiter and Saturn, coming to pass each other in their orbits, and the result would be that the light from these two planets would be effectively doubled.

It would become a far greater effulgence. It would seem like one big bright star. And then, of course, whilst they're overlapping like that, it would then pass, of course, in their orbits, but then

that would be repeated again.

[ 4 : 22 ] As they pass, or as the Earth moves in its orbit, it would be seen again from a different angle and again later on, probably occurring about three times in the same 12-month period.

So these wise men have almost certainly seen this. It doesn't say it's a new star, but it is a form of starlight coming together, which has not been seen before by these wise men, but yet could be perhaps predicted by the movement of the planets and the stars and so on.

So they see this coming together, so they think, okay, in the constellation associated with the Jewish people, you've got the star associated with kingship and the star associated with the Messiah, combining, as it were, into this bright new effulgence, which looks like one big bright star, but they would know that it wasn't.

They would know it was two planets, in fact, sort of appearing to pass each other and making this great brightness. And they think, okay, kingship and messiahship, combining in the constellation of Pisces, the people of the Jews, this means the king messiah of the Jews.

Let's go and see this. Let's go and see this happening. Let's go and see what comes of this. And they concluded, of course, that it was a birth, as opposed to simply somebody entering in upon kingship.

[ 5 : 49 ] They didn't associate it, think that it was somebody just completely from the outside being anointed as king, as David was. They have taken it to be a birth. So they appear, naturally, in the capital of Judea, and ask the king, assuming, probably, that his wife has had a baby.

That's probably what they assume. Certainly they come to the palace of the king and say, well, where is he that is born, king of the Jews? For we have seen his son in the east and are come to worship him.

They probably think it's one of Herod's children. Herod's the king of the Jews. So it's reasonable to assume that one of his sons, or a newborn baby, is going to be the Messiah king.

And it's a reasonable question. And it's a reasonable place to go. These men, of course, are those who study the stars and the heavens. They are not experts in the Jewish scriptures.

Not as Herod. But he is troubled by their saying, and so he summons to himself all those who are experts in the scriptures. Now the scribes and the chief priests do not know about the stars.

[ 6 : 59 ] And are not my hands, studying the heavens and so on. But they do know the scriptures. And so Herod demands of them where he was to be born, where the Messiah should be born, or the Christ should be born.

They said to him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah. For out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.

Now, if we turn back to the prophet Micah, this is where we find it. Micah chapter 5, from verse 2. It sounds a little bit different in the Old Testament, because what we're reading in the Old Testament is a direct translation from the Hebrew.

Almost certainly what we're getting in the New Testament, written in Greek, is the translation of the Old Testament version that had been translated into Greek.

So the Greek writers of the New Testament are using, not unnaturally, the Greek Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible, but translated into Greek, which is what most people spoke.

[ 8 : 09 ] It's almost like, it's not exactly the equivalent, but it's like if someone were to say, let's translate the Gaelic Bible into English, and they did it, and so you'd have the translation of Gaelic into English, which would sound not exactly the same as the authorised version, for example.

So you'd have English, but you'd have what the Gaelic translated into English would be, and it would sound a little bit different. There'd be words that would be different and they would be changed, because you're translating from one language into another before you take that quotation and apply it in the different language.

So there's going to be things that will sound different. So what you've got in the Prophet Micah is this, But thou Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, it is to the Lord, that shall be a woman in Israel whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

Now this would indicate, again, that the Messiah is going to be God in the flesh. God personified by his goings forth have been from of old, from of everlasting.

Also, it would tie in likewise with if his star is seen in the east, then likewise the constellations of the stars are created on, what is it, day four of creation, when God makes the stars.

[ 9 : 36 ] He makes them and their orbits and their planets and their movements in such a way that in due course, thousands of years later, this precise combination will be seen and observed by those who know these things and study these things.

All of creation combining for those who are able to discern it to see that even the going forth of the stars declares this reality, this coming, this Messiah from of old, from everlasting.

Now, it's not just this verse 2 which is, you could say, connected with the prophecy. Although the rest of it is a wee bit sort of confusing, thou will give them up until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth.

It implies a birth, right enough. Then the remnant and his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And, you know, when it says return unto, the sense in the original, it's a return on top of. And this would imply a gathering in of more than just the brethren of the children of Israel. There'll be more and greater abundance here. And obviously, that would reference and imply the gathering of more nations than just the children of Israel.

[ 10 : 49 ] And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord and in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall abide, for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

Again, prophesying the Messiah and what his work shall be. This man shall be the peace when the Assyrians shall come into our land. Well, the Assyrians were long gone by the time of Jesus.

But often what the Lord does in Scripture in the Old Testament is he'll take one of these ancient nations and use them as a sort of metaphor for other pagan enemies of the nation.

So the Assyrians are long gone, but if the Assyrians represent pagan enmity in general, that would apply like, for example, to the Egyptians in a former age to the Romans in a later age.

But when the pagans shall come into our land, when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds and eight principal men. We don't know exactly how this is applied.

[ 11 : 49 ] And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword and the land of Nimrod and the entrances thereof. Thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian when he cometh into our land and when he treadeth within our boards, there will be deliverance not only from the pagans, but from all the enemies of the Lord's people.

And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass that tannieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men.

Now the clear implication of that is that whatever the Lord has yet to do for the people of Israel in history, it is in such a way that they will be used of the Lord as a refreshing and outreaching and in-gathering for the rest of the nations of the world.

Now tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. It will be the Lord's work that they will be called forth to do. So all this prophecy is tied in not only with the coming of Jesus, but also with the reaching out with the gospel of grace to all the nations of the world, but also for the way in which ultimately the Lord will use his own people of the Jews as a means of gathering in all his elect as a missionary which you might say almost to the rest of the world.

So all of this would be known by the scribes and chief priests to be encapsulated within this prophecy which they tell Herod about.

[ 13 : 20 ] But he's only asking about the birth, so they only tell him about the birth. In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written, In thou, Bethlehem in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.

Then Herod, when you're privileged to all the wise men, inquired them diligently what time the star appeared. Now we don't know exactly, of course, in relation to this, when the star appeared. But it is likely, if we're talking about the orbiting of different planets and the combining of them as they overlap in the night sky, then it is likely that this overlap occurred perhaps maybe three times, as we say, in a 12-month period.

So, whilst it can be calculated from the stars that Jesus was definitely not born in the year that we now call the year dot. You know, for example, ten years before the birth of Jesus or the alleged birth of Jesus would be 10 BC.

So you get 10, but 9 BC, 8 BC, 7 BC, all the way through to 1 BC, which would be technically the year before Jesus was born. And then you'd have the year dot in which Jesus was theoretically

born.

And then, that would be, if you like, your year zero, the year dot. And then after that you've got 1 AD and then 2 AD and then 3 AD and so on. But in the Middle Ages when this was calculated it was miscalculated.

[ 14 : 46 ] But since then they've been calculated from the stars and they're orbiting and so on. And it's almost certain that Jesus was born sometime around maybe 6, 7 or 8 BC.

What we now call BC. The reason we know it would have to be that long before the year dot is that Herod, for example, died in the year 4 BC. So, he must have been dead before the year dot.

So, there's been miscalculations but men are not perfect. Calculations are not perfect. Only the Lord and His Word is perfect. So, if you were to go back in time you would find that around the year 7 BC this passing of the planets happened.

This combination in the night sky took place. Maybe it had been seen for the first passing or the first passing of these two planets in the constellation the previous year.

Maybe in 8 BC. And then, so the following year the wise men finally arrive there to inquire about it. Maybe that's why Herod, you know, kills the children who are 2 years old and under by the time they get to Bethlehem.

[ 15 : 59 ] But, we have to bear in mind that Herod is a bloodthirsty tyrant. And, you know, he could just as easily have killed the children 5 years old and under. You know, he doesn't limit the slaughter just to little boys even though he knows it's a king not a queen that is going to be born.

He just gets his men to kill all the children 2 years old and under. That probably means the child is less than a year old but he's not taking any chances. Remember, this is a tyrant who didn't balk at murdering his own sons or his own wives and he had multiple wives members of his own family.

It was a dangerous thing to belong to Herod's royal family. If he thought you were a threat he would just kill you. He would just get rid of you. You know, it is a matter of historical record that he gave orders that when he knew he was going to die and about to die he ordered his soldiers that when he actually died they should make a general massacre throughout the city and the kingdom.

so that people would associate his death with a time of mourning because he was afraid they would actually celebrate when he finally died. In fact, that order was not carried out.

But this is the kind of man that he was. So we shouldn't expect mathematical precision when he says he killed all the children from two years old and under.

[ 17 : 24 ] Oh, that means that the star definitely appeared first two years before that or Jesus was definitely two years old by this time. No, it doesn't. It just means that Herod didn't take chances.

And if the child was a baby or a year old he would kill them up to two years old. If the child was a boy he's not bothered. He'll kill the boys, the girls, everybody just to make sure that's the kind of person he was.

So he inquired with them privately and said, you know, what time the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, go and search diligently for the young child and when you have found him bring me word again that I may come and worship him also.

When they had heard they came they departed and lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them. This will be its final time of appearing and it's sort of directly above them as they head a few miles south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem and stood over where the young child was when they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy and when they were coming to the house they saw the young child with Mary his mother.

Now, we've got this reference young child because it's a different word in Greek from the term that is used to describe a baby. When a shepherd's coming and Jesus is just newborn it is the baby wrapped in swarming clothes.

[ 18 : 44 ] Different Greek word or baby as opposed to the word here for young child. In other words they're still in Bethlehem but Jesus is now a little bit older. He may be as much as a year old by this time.

We don't know exactly how long Joseph and Mary and the child had to stay in Bethlehem. But the fact of the matter is it's a different word, different term.

Young child here used to describe the baby Jesus. He's a little bit older. This means that this is the last occasion that Bethlehem actually features in the narrative of scripture.

It's not the last mention, we'll come to that in a minute, but it is the last occasion when it features in the narrative. That Jesus is now a little bit older, the wise men come, they present their treasures,

we looked at the significance of those treasures the other day, gold for kingship, frankincense, such as a priest would offer, the incense representing prayer and myrrh, the kind of spice and perfume that would be used, the bitter spice of burial associated with his death and burial.

Being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. Now, if we just scroll down a wee bit, we see that in Herod when he saw that he was mocked, not deliberately so, it just means they had made a fool of him by not answering his sullen and not coming back then to report on the young child.

[ 20 : 16 ] He was angry, exceeding wrath, sent forth to all the children that were in Bethlehem and in all the coast they all from two years old and under. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and would not be comforted because they are not.

Now, this is a quotation from Jeremiah 31 at verse 15. Now, you'll notice something also here. Notice that in the New Testament, although yes, it's written in Greek, Old Testament, it's in Hebrew, the authorised version, for example, is translated at a time when people had extreme reverence for the accuracy of what they were dealing with.

They did not take it upon themselves to improve upon what was actually given. So, if, for example, the Greek for Elijah comes out as Elias, then that is what they will write down, Elias, because that's the Greek thing.

They know it's Elijah, but they're not going to write Elijah, the Hebrew version, if what they've got in front of them is the Greek that they have to translate. They will write, they will translate exactly word for word, letter for letter, exactly what they've got in front of them.

And this is one reason why, for example, you've got Jeremy, the prophet, because Jeremy will be the translation of what you've got in the Greek version of Jeremiah, which was the Hebrew.

[ 21 : 51 ] So, they know it's Jeremiah, but what it comes across as in the Greek, the translation is Jeremy. So, they literally do it letter for letter, word for word, as to what they have, because there was such deep reverence for the sanctity of what they were translating, that they did not take it upon themselves to just expand it, well, we know it's Jeremiah, let's just write Jeremiah, we know it's Elijah, let's just write Elijah, no.

They did not consider themselves to have the right to tamper, in that sense, with what they had in front of them. So, we go back over to Jeremiah 31, at verse 15, where we have another example of this, a slightly confusing example also, because we read a voice, verse 15 of Jeremiah 31, was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Rahel, why don't they just say Rachel there, weeping for her children, refused to be comforted, almost certainly same principle again, because the difference between Rachel, or in the Hebrew it would be Rachel, and Rachel, as we have here, is the difference between two different kinds of H in Hebrew, and the H in Hebrew, if you think of like, you know, your typical stonehenge sort of structure, where you've got a sort of pillar across the top, and two standing pillars upright, now in Hebrew it would be like black ink across the top, a thick bar, and then two kind of thinner ones that would be attached to it, and that makes the sound like we have in Loch, or Och or Maki, sort of thing, that kind of sound that they have for that H. If one on the left-hand side of those downward legs is not actually joined up to the top, if there's a tiny little gap, then it is the soft H sound.

So obviously what they had in the scripts that they were using, although now the printed version is simply Rachel, Rachel, in other words it's Rachel, what they had there obviously did not have the tiny little join up.

So although they knew it's Rachel, they just translated it as Rahel. This is the extent of the reverence they had for the work that they were doing. We know what it means, Rachel.

[ 24 : 16 ] Rachel, weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children because they were not. We'll come back to this prophecy in just a wee moment. But here we have Jesus being visited by these majestic, not kings, but majestic wise men from the east who are rich, who are well educated, whose gifts are really extravagant and they are wealthy gifts that they are giving, each of which would be costly in its own way.

Whether these were kept throughout Jesus' life or whether they were later utilized or sold or whatever, we don't know. History does not relate. But certainly Joseph and Mary would be much the richer for having these particular gifts given to them.

These are expensive gifts. It means that those visiting them were wealthy and they were well educated and they knew about the stars.

They have come to worship him that is born king of the Jews. Perhaps they also recognize that something wonderful is going to be achieved by this child.

And then they depart back to their own country. And Joseph is warned in a dream not to linger but to flee into Egypt. Now fleeing into Egypt you might think why doesn't Herod just send spies into after Egypt?

[ 25 : 40 ] You know going into Egypt where everybody went, lots of different cities in Egypt, lots of centres of population because there was always food in Egypt. It would be like somebody fleeing to New York or to the centre of London.

And it's not that you don't know where to find London or New York but how do you find somebody in this vast population that doesn't want to be found?

It's like a needle in a haystack. That's why going into Egypt was a safe bet. That's why everybody flees down into Egypt if they're in danger because they can just disappear.

And so this is what Jesus and Mary and Joseph are doing when they're under threat from herod. So Bethlehem passes out of the narrative until the final occasion when it is mentioned in scripture.

It's not revisited as far as we know. Jesus does not go back to his birthplace. But we read in John's account of the gospel once we mention that Matthew's account is the last appearance in the narrative of Bethlehem's life story in scripture.

[ 26 : 48 ] We have in John chapter 7 this reference. Many of the people therefore when they heard this saying from verse 40 onwards in John 7 said of a truth this is the prophet.

Others said this is the Christ. But some said shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not that scripture said that Christ cometh of the seed of David and out of the town of Bethlehem where David was?

So there was a division among the people because of him. Now they would have known of course that Jesus' earthly foster father was Joseph. They would have assumed that Jesus was the biological child of Joseph.

They might have deduced if they were Galileans and knew the local community that yes this Jesus is actually of the line of David but this is largely a Jerusalem based audience.

To whom Jesus is coming down from Galilee it's in a country bumpkin area. They think how can he possibly speak to us sophisticated metropolitans?

[ 27 : 52 ] We down here in Jerusalem we are the centre of everything. This guy's come from Galilee? From Nazareth? You know the Messiah's meant to come out of Bethlehem. They didn't know the biblical narrative.

They didn't know the biblical story because that was clearly not something that was trumpeted by Jesus in this earthly ministry. He wanted people to have the evidence of their eyes.

He wanted them to have what they themselves encountered and yet there is a sense in which Jesus' earthly ministry was deliberately if we can say it reverently deliberately screened in one sense curtained off so that only the disciples were told the actual meanings of everything he was teaching and everything he was revealing.

Other people saw him heal people and maybe saw him open the eyes of the blind and even raise the dead. They heard his teachings but they probably thought what's he actually saying there? What does he mean when he says that? Yes he's referencing the scriptures, he's going farther even than we always understood the Old Testament scriptures. He's got authority, not like the scribes, but they still didn't put all the pieces together.

[ 29 : 08 ] Even the disciples did not put all the pieces together till after Jesus rose from the dead and the Holy Spirit was given to them and then it all made sense. So up until that point everybody saw through a glass as it were dark bleak and the audience down in Judea and Jerusalem do not know the Bethlehem narrative.

But here we have this questioning of them, you know, doesn't it say Christ comes of the seed of David out of the town of Bethlehem where David was? And if they don't know, actually he was born there, but nobody is saying it yet.

One reason, no doubt, Jesus doesn't say it yet to his audience is that if you remember that after he feeds the 5,000, we see in John 6 verse 15, when Jesus therefore perceived that they were come and taken by force to make him again, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

This is not yet the time. This is not the way in which Jesus is going to be king. He wants people to receive him and his message by faith. And not to say, well, actually, yes, I am Bethlehem born, I am

of the line of David, I am the fulfillment of the scripture, because there would be plenty of people who would say, oh, well then, this is the Messiah, come on, let's go and throw the Romans out. Let's have a big revolution, let's have a good gold uprising, this is our Messiah now, now is our moment. This is not the kind of king or Messiah Jesus that come to be.

[ 30 : 39 ] Nevertheless, this in John chapter 7 verse 42 is the last referencing of Bethlehem at all in the scriptural narrative.

It departs thereafter from the story. Why, we might say? Well, why doesn't it stay important? Well, because in the same way as our own birthplace may be, yes, a source of nostalgia or affection to us, the really important thing is not where did you actually pop out and begin life?

where it's what have you done in and worth your life since then? And it is the same with Jesus. Bethlehem is important because of Calvary. Calvary is important because of the garden tomb and the resurrection.

It matters because of what Jesus went on to do and to achieve. But even if Bethlehem is unknown about, Calvary must be. And even if one never sees or goes in any of these kind of huge pilgrimages, Bethlehem now attracts thousands, hundreds of thousands of visitors every year for this single event, the fact that Jesus was born there, more important than ever having been there, more important than going to the birthplace, is laying hold upon the life that is in Christ, which is freely available for all sinners if they will have him regardless of where they dwell, regardless of where they were born, regardless of what has befallen them in the interval.

Now, just as we close, I'd like us to remember this reference here, this kind of sad, tear stained, if you like, conclusion or postscript to Jesus' flight into Egypt here, where all the children, the young children, two years old and under, are slaughtered.

[ 32 : 33 ] slaughtered. The more you begin to imagine just the carnage in the streets of that comparatively small city, every household almost where there's a child, there would be a corpse, there would be blood spatter on the walls, there would be the absolute broken hearted mourning and how many families devastated by this act of sheer atrocity, this blood thirsty atrocity, completely stone-hearted killing of all these young children.

And we might think, well, why does the Lord allow that? Why would the Lord permit all these comparatively innocent young children to be slaughtered? Yes, it is more important that Jesus gets safe and clean away.

Yes, it is more important that Messiah is preserved as this part of the necessary sacrifice.

remember, of course, that with the Lord nothing is for nothing and nothing is wasted.

Everything has purpose and God is no man's debtor. If we go back to the original prophecy, verse 15 of Jeremiah 31, a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, Raphael weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children because they were not.

Thus saith the Lord, refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears, for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.

[ 34 : 17 ] And there is hope in thy end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border. How do we understand this? The children are dead, they can't be coming back again to anybody's border, but perhaps, and it can only be a perhaps, because we don't know that the identity of the elector, who is saved or who isn't, but it is not unreasonable to suppose that those children who were required in God's providence to, as it were, lay down their lives so that his son might get clean away and free for now, because a gruesome death awaited him further down the line, but that those whose lives were required of them would by God's grace be delivered and be with him safe in glory at last.

It does not follow that automatically every single person under a certain age will automatically be saved. None of us are saved because of any supposed innocence in our lives.

we are all sinners born and conceived in sin, and so likewise were all these children in Bethlehem born and conceived in sin. They all had original sin. Nevertheless, in their bloody ends, if this original prophecy, which is not just one of us, but has the context of a wide of grief, refrain thy voice from weeping and thy eyes from tears.

Thy work shall be rewarded, said the Lord. They shall come again from the land of the enemy. Who's the ultimate enemy? The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death, the Lord says in Corinthians.

And there is hope in thine ends, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to thine own border. Not the border of the Holy Land, but the border of the ultimate Holy Lands.

[ 36 : 08 ] I would suggest to you that for these children slaughtered in Bethlehem, there was, if you like, a heavenly home, a heavenly redemption that they ironically would enter into years before the Lord Jesus actually offered up his life upon the cross and was himself glorified in his resurrection.

There was still thirty-odd years before Jesus himself would die and return again to his Father in glory. But these little children, if this prophecy is thus to be understood, would already that day be in glory awaiting his coming again back to his Father's throne.

And that is, if so, a prophecy of deep joy. Because these children, every last one of them, if they had been spared, would have grown up and grown old and eventually died, and perhaps died in their sins.

But if their blood is shed in the service of this ultimate cause of Christ, is it not reasonable to hope that this prophecy implies their salvation in that context?

I cannot say definitively that it does, but it certainly would mean a far more satisfactory fulfilment of this prophecy, a prophecy of tears, a prophecy of bloodshed, a prophecy that leaves us with a sense of incompleteness and sorrow and a question mark over it.

[ 37 : 45 ] But if you go back to the original of what the Lord actually prophesied through Jeremiah, it leaves us with a far fuller hope and with a greater knowledge that the Lord knows exactly what he is doing from start to finish.

He knows exactly the plans that he has for these children. He knows exactly the plans that he has for every single child of God, regardless of what age they may be in this world.

He knows his plans for you and for me. He knows his plans for that little town and all the ways in which he used it over the thousands of years of scriptural history and the witness that it continues to be in the thousands of years since then.

But the ultimate glory of Bethlehem is Christ. And the ultimate glory of our lives if we are trusting and believing in him is Christ.

And the ultimate glory of heaven itself is Christ. He is the alpha and the omega. He is the beginning and the end. The first, the last and the fulfillment of all in all.

[ 39 : 01 ] If your life is hid with Christ in God, then whether in Bethlehem or in Scalpia or in Glasgow or in London or New York or wherever we may be in all the world, there is our actual citizenship.

There is our actual glory. Not in a place, not in a town, not in a city, not in a country, not even in one as sacred as Bethlehem, but rather in the one who there was born.

The one who laid down his life upon the cross at Calvary. The one who has redeemed every last one of his children who would believe in him, always elected, every age.

Our fulfillment is not in Bethlehem, but in the Christ who was born there. Let us pray.