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“Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

The Case for the December 25th Birth of Christ

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The Wonder of Christmas

Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. The whole year seems to pivot upon this date in the calendar. In nature, it is the time of the winter solstice when the days begin to grow longer and the dark of winter begins to recede before the increasing light. In human affairs, it also occupies first place. No other day in the year approaches it for joy and “specialness” or is adorned with the festivity reserved for it. Around the whole world, Christmas sits atop the circle of seasons as king in the hearts of men and children. Be it art or music or works of charity, the Christmas theme touches us closest and has inspired all that is best. Family and friends, gifts and giving, decorations and special foods; even the legends and children’s stories that have grown up around Christmas evoke the most tender feelings and are nearest our hearts.

What other day in the calendar possesses the memories or can approach the place of Christmas? I know of none. Hearts are filled with goodwill. Man remembers his duty toward his fellow man and shares God’s wondrous provision with the less fortunate. Wars cease and armistices are declared; nations have respite from contention and strife. Carols about the Christ-child are heard across the land. A secular and profane world is temporarily clothed with a type of sanctity by humble acknowledgement of heaven’s reign. I would not want to live in a world without Christmas. How bleak the calendar would be without it; an endless cycle of temporal dates and remembrances, where the Eternal is ever excluded, shut out of the lives and men and nations and salvation is never realized. Truly, it behooves us to thank God in the most humble way we know for the miracle of Christmas and the Savior’s birth.

Christmas Shunned

During the Reformation when repudiating the errors of the medieval church caused men to react against even the symbol of the cross, it was not uncommon for Christmas to be rejected as an unauthorized innovation. Typical of the sentiments of the time are this statement by John Knox, the Scottish Presbyterian reformer:

*"By contrary Doctrine, we understand whatsoever men, by Laws, Councils, or Constitutions have imposed upon the consciences of men, without the expressed commandment of God's word: such as be vows of chastity, foreswearing of marriage, binding of men and women to several and disguised apparels, to the superstitious observation of fasting days, difference of meat for conscience sake, prayer for the dead; and keeping of holy days of certain Saints commanded by men, such as be all those that the Papists have invented, as the Feasts (as they term them) of Apostles, Martyrs, Virgins, of Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of our Lady. Which things, because in God's scriptures they neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge them utterly to be abolished from this Realm; affirming further, that the obstinate maintainers and teachers of such abominations ought not to escape the punishment of the Civil Magistrate."*¹

Here we see Christmas lumped in together with such things as prayer for the dead and vows of celibacy, as if these were somehow substantively similar. Yet one is merely a day of remembering an event in sacred history, the others doctrines and commandments of men. The Scottish Church reaffirmed its condemnation of Christmas in 1566. Theodore Beza wrote to Knox, requesting Scottish approval for the Second Helvetic Confession (1566). The General Assembly in Scotland replied with a letter of *general* approval, but took exception to the 24th chapter of the aforesaid Confession concerning the "festival of our Lord's nativity, circumcision, passion, resurrection, ascension, and sending the Holy Ghost upon his disciples," saying "*these festivals at the present time obtain no place among us; for we dare not religiously celebrate any other feast-day than what the divine oracles prescribed.*"²

¹ *Knox's History*, Vol. 2, p. 281. Cf. John Knox, *Works* (David Laing, ed.; Edinburgh: James Thin, 1895), Vol. ii, p. 190.

² In Knox, *Works*, Vol. vi, pp. 547-48. The same position is expressed in the Second Scotch Confession (1580), which rejects the "dedicating of kirks, altars, days."

Thus, while Beza, Luther and other reformers found no fault with Christmas, many Calvinist and Presbyterian reformers did, adopting a rule of worship that excluded all things not positively prescribed. The *regulatory rule* of worship, as it came to be known, is best described by Samuel Miller (1769-1850) in his book "The Worship of the Presbyterian Church":

*"The Scriptures being the only infallible rule of faith and practice, no rite or ceremony ought to have a place in the public worship of God, which is not warranted in Scripture, either by direct precept or example, or by good and sufficient inference."*³

The basic assumption of the regulatory rule is that the worship of the church is a type of "divine service" similar to the temple ritual and therefore subject to the same restrictive principles. To introduce anything, no matter how small, for which there is no "example, command, or necessary inference" is akin to Nadab and Abihu offering "strange fire" before the Lord and invites certain wrath (Lev. 10:1).

Although we do want to preserve the basic pattern and spirit of traditions set in the church by the Apostles, a wooden rule excluding all things that cannot be affirmatively shown to have been sanctioned by example, command, or inference may be easy to recite and rally around, but can never get to the inward substance of an issue. How many cups can be used in communion? Is Sunday school permissible? What about baptisteries in the building and located preachers? "Example, command, and necessary interference" cannot adequately address these questions. Beside, the rule itself is of purely human origination and merely replaces one set of man-made rules for another. If we would judge aright we must ask whether a particular practice violates a *principle, precedent, or precept* of scripture, not whether it can be shown to have prior approval by apostolic example. If it doesn't to violate a principle, precedent, or precept of scripture, then what can be the objection?

As time has moved on and men have come to see the worship of the church less in terms of a divine service whose minute rituals are all prescribed, and more in terms of a time of thanks and praise where a minister delivers a sermon appropriate to any number of occasions secular and religious, it has become increasingly difficult to convince men that it is somehow wrong for the minister to deliver a sermon about the birth of Christ at Christmas time. After all, how can it be acceptable to preach about motherhood on Mothers' Day, the duty of father's at Fathers' Day, the importance of choosing Christian

³ Miller, pp. 65. This same concept would later find its way into the Churches of Christ of the Stone/Campbell movement of the early 19th century through Campbell who was of Presbyterian background.

leaders at election time, but not permitted to proclaim the wonders of Christ's birth at Christmas? Moreover, as most families keep some form of celebration at December 25th, it is highly incongruous to banish Christmas from the church house when we keep it in our own homes. Thus, what objection to Christmas remains today has more to do with the validity of the *date* assigned for Christ's birth than the substance of its actual celebration. The balance of this article is thus directed to demonstrating the *scriptural* date of Jesus' birth. We feel that the evidence for the December 25th birth of Christ is as conclusive as the nature of the case will allow and invite those who are so disposed to attempt its successful contradiction.

Luke's Chronology and the Baptism of Christ

More than five hundred years before Christ, Daniel prophesied that he would have a three-and-a-half-year ministry (Dan. 9:27; cf. Isa. 53:8). The length of Jesus' ministry is shown by Daniel's seventy prophetic weeks, in which it is said that Messiah would "confirm the covenant with many for a week" (seven years) and in the "midst of the week" (three and a half years) would cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease (Dan. 9:27). This latter clause is almost universally taken in reference to Jesus' death upon the cross, three and a half years after his baptism. "On the ordinary Christian interpretation, this applies to the crucifixion of our Lord, which took place, according to the received calculation, during the fourth year after his baptism by John, and the consequent opening of his ministry."⁴

Luke says that Jesus was baptized in the 15th year of Tiberius when he was not yet 30 years old (Lk. 1:1, 23). This means that Jesus was born in 2 BC. In 1 BC he turned one year old; in AD 1 he turned two, in AD 3 he turned four, etc. But a 2 BC birth would mean Jesus' 30th birthday would have to occur sometime before the close of AD 29. Thus, *Jesus turned 30 years old sometime between his baptism and December 31st AD 29.*⁵ Identifying the date of Jesus' baptism will therefore give us the range of months in which the Lord was born. Since Daniel 9:27 says Jesus' ministry would be three-a-half-years, simple math working backward from Jesus' death on the 15th day of Nisan AD 33 means that Jesus would have been baptized about *October 15th* (Tishri) AD 29. Moreover, since his forty-day fast following his baptism was in preparation for his ministry, it seems likely that Jesus' birthday was timed to occur at or near the end of his fast. Although this says nothing about the actual *date* of Christ's birth, it does indicate a late fall/early winter birth is a distinct possibility.

⁴ J. E. H. Thomson, *Daniel – The Pulpit Commentary* (Hendrickson, Peabody, MA), p. 275.

⁵ A 2 BC birth and AD 29 baptism of Christ obviate the possibility of a Jan. 6th birthday as held by the early Eastern church.

At this point issues of the Jewish calendar enter in. The Jews used a *luni-solar* calendar. Months were determined by the *new moon* and hence lunar, but the beginning of the year was determined by the *vernal equinox* (the point in the spring at which the length of the day and night are equal), and hence solar. The first month in the Jewish ceremonial calendar was Nisan, when Passover was celebrated. Passover occurs at evening of the 14th day of Nisan at the first full moon after the vernal equinox. However, a *luni-solar* calendar has this problem, that twelve lunar months are 11 days shorter than the solar year. In three years time the lunar calendar will lag behind the solar year by 33 days. Hence, it is necessary to periodically bring the two systems back into synchronization, or feasts nominally set to occur in spring will shortly occur in the dark of winter. To accomplish this, the Jews added an extra month seven times in 19 years, or about every third year. This thirteenth month was called "second Adar," and was so added as to bring Nisan (the first month) back into synchronization with the vernal equinox.

This means is that in the course of Jesus' three-and-half-year ministry, a leap year of thirteen months would have occurred. As it happens, scholars believe an intercalary month was added by the Jews in AD 32. The following chart, adapted from Finegan, contains the range of possible years for Jesus' crucifixion and their equivalent dates in our modern calendar. As we see, Jesus' crucifixion in AD 33 was in May.

Dates of Nisan 14 and 15 in AD 27-34⁶

- 1) As calculated by Frotheringham 2) Or, supposing the intercalation of a month in the preceding year, as shown by Parker and Dubberstein, so that Nisan came one month late; then

AD	Nisan 14 fell on	Nisan 15 fell on	AD	Nisan 14 fell on	Nisan 15 fell on
27	Apr 10	Apr 11	27		
28	Mar 30	Mar 31	28	Apr 28	Apr 29
30	Apr 7	Apr 8	30		
31	Mar 27	Apr 15	31	Apr 25	Apr 26
32	Apr 14	Apr 15	32		
33	Apr 3	Apr 4	33	May 2	May 3
34	Mar 24	Mar 25	34	Apr 22	Apr 23

⁶ Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Hendrickson, 1964, 1998), p. 363

The Jews took their calendar from the Babylonians, even adapting the names of months (Nisan for Nisanu, etc). To determine when the Jews intercalated a leap year, and thus corroborate the above chart, we add 747 the year *Anno Nabonassari* (era of the Babylonian monarch Nabonassar), to the Gregorian year of our modern era then divide by nineteen. The remainder tells us the year in the nineteen year cycle. Leap years occupied years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, 19 in the cycle. In this case, $747 + 32 = 779 \div 19 = 41$ with no remainder. Because the divisor is nineteen, a remainder of “zero” equals the nineteenth year of the cycle. Thus, AD 32 was the nineteenth year in the cycle and was indeed a leap year as affirmed by Parker and Dubberstein.⁷ The intercalation of a month in the year preceding Jesus’ death means that, rather than being baptized in Tishri (October) AD 29, the date that comes forward is Heshvan, or **November 15th AD 29.**⁸

Jesus’ Forty-Day Fast and Thirtieth Birthday

The final step in the equation is the forty-day fast Jesus undertook in preparation for his public ministry. Jewish men began their public ministry after their 30th birthday (Num. 4:3, 23). Jesus was 29 years old when baptized Heshvan/November 15th AD 29. He then undertook a forty-day fast (Lk. 4:2), after which Luke informs us that he began active, public preaching (Lk. 4:14). Thus, it seems plain that Jesus’ fast was timed to end at or near his 30th birthday. $November\ 15 + 40 = \text{December } 25^{\text{th}}$. What need we say more? The scriptures thus seem to confirm the traditional date of Jesus’ birth. Why else would Luke include the particulars he did about Jesus not yet being 30 years old if he did not intend us to understand that his birthday followed fast upon his baptism? And if by simple arithmetic the date that emerges is December 25th, what is to prevent us from receiving it as the date of Christ’s birth? Given that this is also the traditional date handed down from antiquity (see below) it is surely a coincidence too great to be mere chance. But, let every

⁷ See the article *The Babylonian Calendar after R.A. Parker & W.H. Dubberstein*, *Babylonian Chronology* at <http://www.friesian.com/calendar.htm>

⁸ The Jewish calendar rarely coincides with our own. Nisan 15 of the former era sometime translates into May 3rd in our calendar and era. This brings up a point: when translating important dates from one system to another, it is traditional to *preserve the day* by merely transferring it to the nearest equivalent in the target calendar. For example, Judas Maccabaeus cleansed and rededicated the temple after its desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes on Casleu 25, 164 BC. This is commemorated by the feast of Dedication (Jn. 10:22), modernly “Hanukkah,” which is always celebrated on December 25th (the traditional date of Jesus’ birth) even though Casleu 25 actually may fall on some other day from year to year in the Gregorian calendar. Similarly, when reckoning backward from Christ’s death Nisan 15 to his baptism we figure from May 15th, not May 3rd, for it is Jewish dates we are dealing with and seek to identify, not Gregorian.

matter be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses.

AD 70 and the Course of Jehoiarib

The December birth of Christ can also be demonstrated by reckoning backward from the destruction of Jerusalem. Alfred Edersheim, a Jew who converted to Christianity and whose books are still in print after more than 100 years, states:

*"In Taan. 29 [i.e., the Talmudic Tractate Taanith, on Fasting and Fast-days] we have the notice, with which that of Josephus agrees (War 6:4, 1, 5), that at the time of the destruction of the Temple, 'the course of Jehoiarib, which was the first of the priestly courses, was on duty. That was on the 9-10 Ab of the year 823 A.U.C. [i.e., from the founding of Rome], or the 5th August of the year 70 of our era. If this calculation be correct (of which, however, we cannot feel quite sure), then counting 'the courses' of priests backwards, the course of Abia would, in the year 748 A.U.C. (the year before the birth of Christ) have been on duty from the 2nd to the 9th of October. This also would place the birth of Christ in the end of December of the following year (749), taking the expression 'sixth month' in St. Luke 1:26, 36, in the sense of the running month (from the 5th to the 6th month: comp. St. Luke 1:24). But we repeat that absolute reliance cannot be placed on such calculations, at least so far as regards month and day."*⁹

The Course of Abijah and Conception of John the Baptist

Edersheim’s conclusion can be corroborated. The late December birth of Christ can be shown by reconstructing the priestly cycles. There were twenty-four courses of priests (I Chrn. 24:7-18). Each course served one week twice each year, plus the three great feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Assuming each course advanced each year to the next station, the whole cycle of priestly ministration would be fulfilled in *twenty-four years*, at which point the cycle would begin anew.¹⁰ Of the twenty-four courses, only two concern us, the first, which was Jehoiarib, and the eighth, which was Abijah, to

⁹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (8th ed., London, 1900), Vol. II, p. 705.

¹⁰ Evidence that the courses advanced each year and did not maintain the same position in the calendar from year to year is preserved in the saying of Rabbi Abbahu (AD 300) in Jerusalem Talmud y. Sukka 5.7-8. Finegan, 133, §242.

Twenty-four Priestly Courses

which Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist belonged. The courses began the cycle each year at the Sabbath at or next before Tishri 1. Knowing from Jewish tradition that the course of Jehoiarib was serving when the temple was destroyed on the 9th of Ab, AD 70, we can identify the station in the twenty-four year cycle.¹¹ From there we can find when the cycle began. Then, by reckoning backward in twenty-four year increments to the course preceding the conception of John the Baptist in 3 BC, we can identify the *week and month* Zechariah was serving.

The number of steps from Adar 15-21, the first station of Jehoiarib's second course, to Ab 8-14 is *twenty-one* stations. Thus, AD 70 was the twenty-first year in the twenty-four year cycle. To return to the beginning of the cycle we subtract twenty years from AD 70, which brings us to AD 50. Subtracting twenty-four more years brings us to AD 26. Twenty-four more years brings us to AD 2. 24 years more bring us to 23 BC (there was no year zero). Counting forward from this date to 3 BC shows that the course of Abijah would have been serving at its *twenty-first station* when Gabriel appeared to Zechariah (23 BC to 3 BC = 21). Assuming Zechariah's course was in its *second* ministration, this would mean he was on duty the week of Elul 24-Tishri 1 (Jyar 9-15 to Elul 24-Tishri 1 is twenty-one stations).

Based on statements in Luke, John was six months older than our Lord (Lk. 1:36). Normal human gestation is 38 weeks. If Elizabeth conceived the week immediately following Zechariah's ministration, John would have been born the week of Sivan 25-Tammuz 1. The six months remaining to Jesus' birth come out between 25-26 weeks ($6 \times 30 = 180 \div 7 = 25 \text{ wks } 5 \text{ days}$). Twenty-five weeks from the week of Sivan 25-Tammuz 1 brings us to the week of Casleu 23-29, which answers to the week of December 25th. Twenty-six weeks brings us to Casleu 30-Tabeth 6, which answers to the week of January 6th. Thus, both dates traditionally assigned by the church fathers – in the East Jan. 6, in the West December 25th – find verification. We encourage the reader to study the following chart and check for themselves whether we and Edersheim are not correct.

	BC	BC	BC
1. Jehoiarib	1-7 Tishri	24-1 Tishri (Gabriel)	27-4 Tishri
2. Jedaiah	8-14	2-8 (John conceived)	5-11
3. Harim	15-21	9-15	12-18
4. Seorim	22-28	16-22	19-25
5. Malchijah	29-5 Heshvan	23-29	26-2 Heshvan
6. Jijamin	6-12	30-6 – Heshvan	3-9
7. Hakkoz	13-19	7-13	10-16
8. Abijah	20-26	14-20	17-23
9. Jeshua	27-4 Casleu	21-27	24-1 Casleu
10. Shecaniah	5-11	28-5 Casleu	2-8
11. Eliashib	12-18	6-12	9-15
12. Jakim	19-25	13-19	16-22
13. Huppah	26-2 Tabeth 3 BC	20-26	23-29 (wk of Dec. 25 th)
14. Jeshebeab	3-9	27-3 Tabeth 2 BC	30-6 Teb. (wk of Jan. 6 th)
15. Bilgah	10-16	4-10	
16. Immer	17-23	11-17	
17. Hezir	24-1 Shebat	18-24	
18. Happizzez	2-8	25-2 Shebat	
19. Pethahiah	9-15	3-9	
20. Jehezkel	16-22	10-16	
21. Jachin	23-29	17-23	
22. Gamul	30-6 Adar	24-30	
23. Delaiah	7-13	1-7 Adar	
24. Maaziah	14-20	8-14	
25. Jehoiarib	21-27	15-21	
26. Jedaiah	28-5 Nisan	22-28	
27. Harim	6-12	29-6 Nisan	
28. Seorim	13-19	7-13	
29. Malchijah	18-24	14-20	
30. Jijamin	25-1 Jyar	21-27	
31. Hakkoz	2-8	28-4 Jyar	
32. Abijah	9-15	5-11	
33. Jeshua	16-22	12-18	
34. Shecaniah	23-29	19-25	
35. Eliashib	1-7 Sivan	26-3 Sivan	
36. Jakim	8-14	4-10	
37. Huppah	15-21	11-17	
38. Jeshebeab	22-28	18-24	
39. Bilgah	29-5 Tammuz	25-1 Tam. (John born)	
40. Immer	6-12	2-8	
41. Hezir	13-19	9-15	
42. Happizzez	20-26	16-22	
43. Pethahiah	27-4 Ab	23-29	
44. Jehezkel	5-11	1-7 Ab	
45. Jachin	12-18	8-14	
46. Gamul	19-25	15-21	
47. Delaiah	26-2 Elul	22-28	
48. Maaziah	3-9	29-5 Elul	
1.	10-16	6-12	
2.	17-23	13-19	
3.		20-26	

Each course would advance annually to the next station to fulfill twenty-four years, then the cycle would begin anew. Zechariah was serving in the twenty-first year of his second course (the first week of Tishri) when Gabriel appeared to him. If John was conceived in the first week following Zechariah's ministration,

¹¹ "Rabbi Yose used to say: Propitiousness is assigned to a propitious day and calamity to a calamitous day. As it is found said: When the temple was destroyed, the first time, that day was immediately after the Sabbath, it was immediately after the Sabbatical year, it was (during the service of) the priestly division of Jehoiarib, and it was the ninth day of Ab, as the second time (the temple was destroyed)." Seder 'Olam Rabbah (30.86-97), as quoted in Finegan, p. 107, § 203. Rabbi Yose ben Halaftha was active in AD 150, eighty years after the event, and so is an important witness. He is confirmed by Josephus, *Wars* VI, iv, 1, 5.

Christ's birth fifteen months later would have been the week of December 25th (Casleu 23-29).¹²

Church Fathers

Hippolytus of Rome – AD 170-240

The testimony of the church fathers also weighs strongly in favor of December 25th. In the East, Jan. 6th was the traditional date assigned to the birth of Christ, but in the West, December 25th was the date handed down from “time out of mind.” (Dec. 25- Jan. 6 is twelve days; hence the twelve days of Christmas.) Hippolytus of Rome provides the earliest known reference to December 25 for the birth of Christ in his commentary on Daniel:

“The first coming of our Lord, that in the flesh, in which he was born at Bethlehem, took place eight days before the calends of January, a Wednesday, in the forty-second year of the reign of Augustus, 5500 years from Adam.”
(Commentary on Daniel 4:23)¹³

The eighth before the calends of January is the twenty-fifth day of December, and the forty-second year of Augustus was 3/2 BC.

Roman City Calendar AD 354

Further evidence for December 25th is found in the Roman city calendar for the year 354. This calendar lists burial places of the martyrs (*Depositio martyrum*) arranged in the order of the days of the year on which festivals were held in their honor. It is believed by some that the calendar first dates to 336, but was later revised and extended to the year 354. The sequence of festivals in the church year begins with the item:

“VIII Kal. Ian. Natus Christus in Betleem Judeae”

The eighth day before the calends of January is December 25th. Thus, in the year AD 336, the festival of the birth of Christ was held on Dec. 25.

St. John Chrysostom – AD 345-407

By far the most interesting and important evidence of Dec. 25th birthday for the Lord among the church fathers is from John Chrysostom. In Antioch in the year AD 386, Chrysostom gave two sermons about the birth of Christ. The first was given on Dec. 20th in memory of Philogonius, a former bishop of Antioch. In this sermon, Chrysostom says that a festival is approaching which commemorates the birth of Christ. This festival, he states, is basic to Christianity, for without the birth of Jesus none of the other important events of the Christian faith would be possible. This festival which was in five days he looked eagerly forward to and urges the congregation to do the same.

The second sermon was given on December 25th AD 386 and its substantive parts are preserved for us by Theodoret, bishop of Cyprus.¹⁴ In it, Chrysostom states that although in Antioch the Dec. 25th date of Christ's birth was only celebrated there within the last ten years, it had been transmitted to them as from *long ago* and from *many years* (ως ανωθεν και προ πολλων ημιν παρα δοθαισα ετων). From *long ago* it was know to those who dwell in the West (παρα μεν τοις την εσπεραν οικουσιν ανωθεν ηνωριζομενη). And from *long ago* it was a festival that was very well known and famous to those who dwell from Thrace to Gades (και ανωθεν τοις απο θρακης μεχρι Γαδειρων οικουσι καταδηλοη και επισημοσ γεγρονε).

Chrysostom then provides the exegetical basis for the December 25th birth of Christ, which he derives from Luke 1. According to Chrysostom, Zechariah was serving in the temple on the Day of Atonement (Tishri 10). The feast of Tabernacles followed on the fifteenth day of Tishri and continued for seven days. Chrysostom notes that in AD 386, the new moon was on Sept. 10th. Since Tishri normally falls Sept/Oct, this new moon presumably marked the Tishri 1. The Day of Atonement therefore was approximately Sept. 20th in AD 386, and the feast of Tabernacles Sept 25-Oct 1. Chrysostom thus concludes that it was in Tishri (Gorpaios in the Syro-Macedonean calendar) that the conception of John the Baptist was announced to Zechariah. Counting forward from September, it was in the sixth month that the annunciation was made to Mary and the conception of Christ occurred. Chrysostom then counts the six months, naming Xanthikos (April) as the conception of Christ. Next, he counts nine months unto Christ's birth, naming the months Xanthikos, Artemisoios, Daisios, Panemos, Loos, Gorpaios, Hyperberetaios, Dios, and Apellaios. The last, Apellaios (December), was the month Christ was born and the celebration then ensuing was to be held.

By comparing Chrysostom's chronology with the table we have provided above, it will be seen that the basic

¹² This chart is merely demonstrative and is intended to show the possibility of a Dec. 25th birth of Christ. The actual range of dates within the priestly courses may have differed in 3 BC. To ascertain the actual dates would require working backward from the week of Ab 8-14, AD 70, to 3 BC. However, the result would not materially differ. The dates of a given week vary only by six days from year to year. Thus, while this could “pull” Casleu 25 back to the 24th week from John's birth, variation in human gestation, and the fact first children are statistically early, still allows for Christ's birth Dec. 25th.

¹³ Hippolyte, *Commentaire sur Daniel* (trans. Maurice Lefevre; SC 14; Paris: Cerf, 1947; trans Beckwith, RQ9 (1977): 74

¹⁴ Dialogue 1, Post Nicene Fathers 3.181

facts correlate closely: both place Zechariah's ministrations in Tishri and Jesus' birth fifteen months later in December (Casleu). Between the two there is scarcely more than a week's difference. However, where our table is based upon the testimony that the course of Jeoiarib was serving the ninth of Ab AD 70, Chrysostom precedes upon the assumption that Zechariah was serving the Day of Atonement. Either way, the late December birth of Christ results.

St. Augustine – AD 354-430

Augustine was bishop of Hippo and one of the most influential writers of the early church; his imprint remains even to this day. Concerning the birth of Christ Augustine states:

“For he is believed to have been conceived on the twenty-fifth of March, upon which also he suffered...but he was born, according to tradition, upon December the twenty-fifth.” (On the Trinity, 4.5, Post Nicene Fathers 3.74)

Regarding the Baptist's June birth, Augustine said:

“John came into this world at the season of the year when the length of the day decreases; Jesus was born in the season when the length of the day increases.” (Sermon In Natali Domini xi).

We note that in each of these cases the tradition that Jesus was born on December 25th stands upon scripture or the received testimony of earlier ages and nowhere upon

the “Christianization” of the pagan solstice or festival of the “unconquered sun” (*sol invictus*) as is so often suggested. The circumstance that Jesus was born at the time of the solstice should no more disturb than his resurrection at the vernal equinox when pagans celebrated the rebirth of the earth following the pall of winter death. To the contrary, we should glory at the appropriateness and poetic beauty of a winter birth when the dark of sin and death began to recede before the Sun of Righteousness (Mal. 4:2) and light of salvation.

Conclusion

The evidence for the December 25th birth of Christ is as conclusive as the nature of the case will allow: Luke's chronology, the testimony of Josephus and the priestly courses, and the voice of the church fathers combine to affirm that the traditional date for the Savior's birth is scripturally based and scripturally sound. May God bless you and your family this Christmas as you pause to remember the day when the Christ child was born in Bethlehem.

*Oh holy night, the stars were brightly shining;
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,
'Til he appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices!
O night divine, O night when Christ was born!*



“Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” Luke 2:12

Faces of International Preterism

We are collecting snap-shots of Preterists around the world for our web site. This handsome bunch of folk are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem living in South Africa. Please remember them in your prayers as they work for the kingdom there!



Revelation: A Tale of Two Cities.

An internal study of the Apocalypse

by
Morrison Lee.

Part II. Navigational Charts and Aids.

Following are some charts and aids for fellow voyagers to compare for logic, biblical fact and relevance. These aids do not claim to be dogmatic or even exhaustive, but they do claim to be definitive by pointing in one direction. I offer them to fellow voyagers for close scrutiny and comparison with the compass of biblical fact.

I. It may be observed in the positive that Jerusalem possesses the same properties As the harlot city of Revelation.

Matrix A. *Properties identifying positively the biblical harlot 'Babylon' as Jerusalem*

<u>Property of 'Babylon'</u>	<u>Babylon Sodom</u>	<u>Rome</u>	<u>Jerusalem</u>
'Holy city'			+ Mtt 4:5
Temple of God			+ 1 Kgs 8
Altar			+ Heb 9
Outer court			+ Heb 9:6
Tread underfoot			+ Lk 21:24
Lord crucified			+ Mtt 27:35
Killed prophets			+ Lk 13:33
Gave birth to Son			+ Gal 4:4
Harlot			+ 1:21
Sodom			+ Is 1:10
Gomorrah			+ Is 1:10
Bridegrooms voice			+ Jn 3:29
All the blood there			+ Mtt 23:36

Factual basis for Jerusalem as the harlot city of Revelation. Revelation's harlot city is denominated the 'holy' city. (Rev.11:2)

In scripture only Jerusalem is ever denominated by the term 'the holy city.'

Neh 11:1 Jerusalem the *holy city*
 Neh 1:18 Levites dwelt in the *holy city*
 Is 52:1 O Jerusalem the *holy city*
 Dan 7:24 Seventy weeks set on the *holy city*
 Matt 4:5 Jesus taken to Jerusalem temple in *holy city*
 Matt 27:53 In Jerusalem, the *holy city*, the dead appeared

Jerusalem was the holy city because:

Gen 12 it was the site of God's promise to Abraham
 1 Kgs 8:1 the temple of JHWH located there
 1 Kgs 8:1-9:9 the covenant of God existed there (8:21)
 1 Kgs 8:13 JHWH dwelt there

In reverse: Spiritual Jerusalem City of God: Earthly Jerusalem City of God.

In Revelation only New Jerusalem is denominated the '**City of God.**' (Rev.11:2)

In scripture only **Jerusalem on Mt Zion** is denominated the '*City of God.*'

Ps 48:1-2

City of our God Mount Zion

New Jerusalem is called the City of God and Zion. Old Jerusalem is called the City of God and Zion, therefore old Jerusalem and New Jerusalem are types of each other.

II. Sample of biblical correlation between *Babylon* the harlot city and Mosaic Jerusalem.

Four known biblical facts about Jerusalem and the harlot city.

A. It is known *Jesus was the bridegroom. His voice was heard in Jerusalem.* Jn 3:29, Mtt 21:12

He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegrooms' voice. Jn 3:29

B. It is known *Jesus entered the [streets of Jerusalem and the] temple...*Mtt 21:12

C. It is known in 70 AD Jerusalem was made an inhabitable ruin.

... it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug up its foundation, that there was nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end Jerusalem came to...a city of otherwise great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind. Josephus. Wars Book 7 Ch. 7:3-4

D. Known facts of *Babylon harlot* in Revelation 18:23-24

..and the sound of the mill will not be heard in you any longer, and the light of a lamp shall will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you any longer...and in her was found all the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on earth.
Revelation 18:23a-24

Comparison of known biblical facts: the harlot and Jerusalem.

What happens when we compare the known facts of the city Jerusalem with the harlot city of Revelation?

1. Correspondence of *Babylon* with Jerusalem: voice of bridegroom, bride and millstones silenced.

Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin. Jer. 7:34

2. Correspondence of *Babylon* with Jerusalem: voice of bridegroom and millstones silenced – light put out.

Moreover I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. Jer. 25:10-11

3. Correspondence of *Babylon* with Jerusalem: voice of bridegroom and bride silenced.

...in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, and the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride...

Jer. 33:10-11

4. Correspondence of *Babylon* with Jerusalem: *all the blood of righteous* to come upon Jerusalem in Jesus' generation.

..so that upon you shall fall the guilt of all the blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berechiah... Truly I say to you all these things shall come upon this generation. Mtt. 23:36

Comparing the facts between the properties of the harlot city and Jerusalem, the comparison overwhelmingly and exclusively supports *the holy city Jerusalem*, the city which was consumed by its own madness and destroyed by the Roman army in 70 AD.

That neither did any other city ever suffer such miseries, nor did any age ever breed a generation more fruitful in wickedness that this was from the beginning of the world. (Josephus Wars Book 5 Ch 10:442)

..had the Romans made any further delay in coming against these villains, the city would have either been swallowed up by the ground opening upon them...or else been destroyed by thunder as the country of Sodom perished by, for it had brought forth a generation of men much more atheistical than those that suffered such punishments: for by their madness it was that all the people came to be destroyed. (Josephus Wars Book 5 Ch.13:566)

III. Logical arguments falsifying literal *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon*.

The term Babylon cannot function as a geographic name (a proper noun). In simpler words Revelations' Babylon is not a literal Babylon, Sodom or Egypt.

Terms *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon* all refer to the *same* harlot city
There is only one harlot city in Revelation
These three terms cannot confirm a singular identity*.
Therefore *Sodom, Egypt and Babylon* cannot all be names -proper nouns- for the harlot city.

A proper noun identifies by naming an entity exclusively. Here *Sodom, Egypt* - and by extension *Babylon* - do not function as names but as *pejorative terms* ('*mystically called*' Rev 11:8) The terms *Sodom, Egypt and Babylon* signify the properties of the harlot: *immorality, slavery and exile* respectively. The harlot city is *immoral, enslaves and exiles by its nature*. Contextually there is no biblical mandate to force them to become literal.

Argument #1. Jesus' voice argues Jerusalem.

Bridegroom's [Jesus] voice heard in harlot city *Babylon*.
There is no evidence to prove Jesus traveled to geographic *Babylon*
Therefore there is no evidence to prove geographic *Babylon* heard Jesus' voice.

Argument #2. The Holy city argues Jerusalem.

The harlot city of Revelation is called *the holy city*.
The geographic cities of *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon* are never referred to as *the holy city* in scripture.
Therefore the geographic cities of *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon* cannot qualify to be the harlot city of scripture nor Revelation.

Argument #3. The Temple of God argues Jerusalem.

The temple of [the Hebrew] God is located in the harlot. Rev 11:1
The geographic cities of *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon* cannot claim to have the temple of the Hebrew God.
Therefore the geographic cities of *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon* cannot qualify to be the harlot city of Revelation.

Argument #5. All righteous blood in harlot argues Jerusalem.

All the blood of the righteous is found in the harlot. Rev 18:24; 19:1-2.
All the blood of the righteous was to be found in Jerusalem. Mtt 23:36
Therefore no righteous blood was to be found in geographical *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon*.

Argument #6. The Killer of prophets argues Jerusalem

The harlot city of Revelation killed the prophets. Rev 18:24
Jerusalem killed all the prophets. Lk13:33
Therefore geographical *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon* are excluded as the harlot city of Revelation.

*Argument #7. Where their Lord was crucified excludes literal *Sodom/Egypt/Babylon*.*

The harlot city '*Sodom and Egypt*' was where their Lord was crucified. Rev 11:8
It is historically false to say Jesus was crucified in geographical *Sodom and Egypt*

and Babylon

Therefore literal Sodom and Egypt and Babylon are not the harlot city of Revelation.

No facts exist to prove the hypothesis *Sodom and Egypt and Babylon* as literal and geographical locations for three reasons:

(1) A *literal* notion is absent in facts and stands in the face of the divine writer's '*mystical*' use (Rev 11:8) of these terms. If it is argued he meant they were '*literally called Sodom and Egypt and Babylon*', why then did he say they were *mystically called*?

(2) Further, there is no evidence to affirm that *Sodom, Egypt or Babylon* qualifies by possessing *all* the identifying marks of the harlot.

(3) Lastly and more decisively, these three geographic locations are excluded from being identified as the harlot *by states of affairs that are biblically or historically untrue of them or irrelevant to them*. Eg. It is historically untrue the savior was crucified in literal Sodom, Egypt or Babylon. None contain 'the [biblical] temple of God,' none is called the *holy city* in scripture. What is clearly the case however is that Jerusalem was called the holy city, contained the temple of God, and crucified its Savior.

In contrast to tortured literal alternatives the simple affirmative observation is that *the temple of God was located in the holy city Jerusalem, which heard the voice of its Savior and crucified Him*, the outcome of which was that *all the blood of the righteous would come upon it*. (This fact may be observed in Mtt 23:36)

IV. State of affairs. Does this conclusion combine with other clear facts?

States of Affairs The philosopher of language Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote: *In logic nothing is*

accidental: if a thing can occur in a state of affairs, the possibility of the state of affairs must be written into the thing itself. (Tractatus 2.012)

Facts not The principle here is that true facts are not accidental, they are woven – one

Accidents. might say *ploughed* – into a first century state of affairs systematizing the properties of; *identity, time, place, description, with an explanation of cause*. This interrelated combination of ideas goes beyond coincidence and fictitious theories to the fabric of scriptural facts. A first century view can even explain *why* this state of affairs existed and *why* the destruction of the holy city Jerusalem marks the end of the Mosaic age.

Q. Does this conclusion combine states of affairs that exists in other biblical facts?

A. Yes, in *identifying marks, time, place, description and cause*.

Identifying marks, time, place, description and cause.

Identity of harlot city: The holy city Jerusalem

Time: AD 70 at the end of the Mosaic temple age

Last days - Fullness of time – reigned 1000 years –
930 BC to 70 AD

Place: The nation of Israel

Cause: WHY? The end of the Mosaic temple and the OT
Mosaic age. Why? The Mosaic covenant was *in* the
Jerusalem temple.

Does a Preterist theory explain why? Yes.

Q. Why did the age end when the temple was destroyed? Mtt 24:1-3

A. Because the Mosaic covenant was in the temple. Ie. The Mosaic age finally ended when the temple was destroyed.

Preterist proof When the Jerusalem ended the Mosaic covenant disappeared. Why?

Because the covenantal blessings were removed. Why? Because the Mosaic covenant was located in, and with *the holy city Jerusalem, Babylon* of the Apocalypse. 1 Kings 8-9.

The Jerusalem The importance of understanding the Jerusalem covenant in 1 Kgs 8:1-

Covenant: 9:9 cannot be overstated. 1 Kgs 8 – 9 is essential to understanding the

930 BC. complete relations between the holy city Jerusalem and the harlot city of Revelation. Simply, the terms of the Mosaic covenant were located in and with Jerusalem. The status of the *holy city Jerusalem* in Jesus' generation was the seat of world power, inasmuch as the God of Nature dwelt there. Following are the properties of the *holy city*:

I Kgs 8:1 God's covenant in Jerusalem
 :9 God's law in Jerusalem
 :10 God's glory in a cloud in Jerusalem
 :12 God's presence in Jerusalem
 :13 God's settled place in Jerusalem
 :16 God's name in Jerusalem
 :21 God's covenant in Jerusalem
 :24 God's promises in Jerusalem
 :29 Prayer heard in Jerusalem
 :30 God's hears and forgives in Jerusalem
 :32 God's justification in Jerusalem
 :33 God's mercy in Jerusalem
 :35 God's favor in Jerusalem
 :39 Relationship with God in Jerusalem
 :41 Gentiles blessed in Jerusalem
 :44 God's protection in Jerusalem
 :52 God's regard for chosen in Jerusalem
 I Kgs 9:3 God's heart and eyes in Jerusalem

...but conditional on obedience. If Israel did not obey;
 9:7 Israel cut off, cast out of land, become a byword
 :8 Temple become a heap of ruins
 :9 Bring adversity on them.

The Jerusalem Covenant: It is necessary here to understand that in 70 AD all these covenantal blessings were removed. The book of Revelation is a foretelling of the historical removal of these covenantal blessings of Jerusalem exactly 1000 years later 70 AD. In 70AD:-

God's covenant in Jerusalem removed
 :9 *NO law in Jerusalem*
 :10 *NO glory in Jerusalem*
 :12 *NO presence in Jerusalem*
 :13 *NO settled place in Jerusalem*
 :16 *NO name in Jerusalem*
 :21 *NO covenant in Jerusalem*
 :24 *NO promises in Jerusalem*
 :29 *NO prayer heard in Jerusalem*
 :30 *NO forgiveness in Jerusalem*
 :32 *NO justification in Jerusalem*
 :33 *NO mercy in Jerusalem*
 :35 *NO favor in Jerusalem*
 :39 *NO relationship with God in Jerusalem*
 :44 *NO protection in Jerusalem*
 :52 *NO regard for chosen in Jerusalem*
 I Kgs 9:3 *NO eyes in Jerusalem*

And instead:
 9:7 *Israel cut off, cast out of land, become a byword*
 :8 *Jerusalem Temple become a heap of ruins*
 :9 *Bring adversity on them.*

JHWH's Wife - OT Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the model city of morality and justice, the bearer of the promises of the God's of nature. Jerusalem was:

. *YHWH's companion,*
 . *His wife in waiting,*
 . *set above and over nations,*
 . *the virgin to whom He was betrothed,*

- . the recipient of His blessings,
- . dressed in fine linen,
- . the woman who was to give birth to His children

All of the above terms will be familiar to the close reader of the Apocalypse. The removal of Divine favor after the wilful murder of His Son Jesus Christ, according to the parable of the vine-growers.

But when the vine growers saw the son they said to themselves; 'this is the heir. Let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' They took him and threw him out of their vineyard and killed him. 'Therefore what do you think the owner of the vineyard will do to those vine growers?' They said to him; 'He will bring those wicked wretches to a wretched end...'
Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and given to people producing the fruits of it.'
[and] they understood that He [Jesus] was speaking this parable about them.
 (Mtt 21:33-46)

V. Additional evidence. Historical corroboration: Josephus. Wars of the Jews.

History The first century (Preterist) explanation proposes that Jerusalem is suggested **Explains** by the facts of Revelation. What happens when a past hypothesis (in the **Prophecy.** context of the destruction of Jerusalem) is overlaid on Revelation? The result is that we find a *near* correspondence between biblical prophecy and historical description. Ie.

Josephus & A sample Preterist synthesis of prophecy and history informs us that

Revelation. Vespasian's Roman army under his son Titus surrounded a Jerusalem besieged by civil war, and a holy temple occupied by: *a generation of villains so mad, that had the Romans made a longer delay the city would have been swallowed up by the earth, or destroyed as Sodom...* (Is 1:10 Jerusalem Wars 5:13:566) a national event described by this eyewitness as the *greatest [national] misery since its' foundation,* (Mtt 24:21 Jerusalem Wars 6:8:408) *in which the number of those which perished [over 1,100,000] exceeded all the destructions ..ever brought on the world* (Jerusalem Wars 6:9:429), a time when *false prophets abounded,* (Mtt 24:24 Jerusalem Wars 6:5:285) *"the daily sacrifice" failed* (Dan 9:27 Jerusalem Wars 6:2:94) *when famine and pestilence* affected the estimated 3,000,000 people in the city, (Rev 18:8 Jerusalem Wars 5:12) a famine so bad *people searched the sewers for dung,* (Rev 18:8 Jerusalem Wars 5:13:571) and one *mother ate her own child for food* (Wars 6:3:207) when *a measure of wheat was sold for a talent of money* (Rev 6:6 Jerusalem Wars 5:13:571) *when men sought by death [by sword over death by starvation], but found it not,* (Rev 9:6 Jerusalem Wars 5:12:517) a context when *fire and blood mingled together, the blood in the lanes in such quantities that the whole city ran with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood* (Rev 8:7 Jerusalem Wars 6:8:406ff) *earthquakes* (Rev 6:12 Jerusalem Wars 1:19:370) and *signs in the heavens:* (Rev 8:12 Jerusalem Antiquities 17:6:167 Eclipse, comet) a time when *the sounds of trumpets* (Rev 8:13 Jerusalem Wars 6:1:68) and the *noise of horses* (Rev 9:16 Jerusalem Wars 3:2:33) were sounds to inspire dread and torment, (Rev 9:16 Jerusalem Wars 5:1:35) when the *great plain* in front of Jerusalem (Wars 5:2:67, 5:3:106ff) was leveled even wider by the four legions of the Roman army as *numerous as locusts* (Rev 9:3,7 Jerusalem Wars 4:9:536) to make a greater plain for battle. In 70 AD the entire city was shut up, the entire population of the nation *captured,* Josephus tells us, *in a kind of net.* (Matt 13:47 Jerusalem Wars 6:1:160) Our historian also tells us the time from the coming of the Roman Emperor Vespasian (in 66 AD) until the time *the daily sacrifices failed to be offered in the temple* was three and a half years, or forty two months, or times, times and half a time. (Rev 12:14, 13:5, Dan 9:27 Jerusalem Wars 6:2:94). This is complimentary correspondence between prophetic fate and actual fulfillment that doesn't need an hypothesis of 2000 years.

Conclusion.

- Four** The bases of a Rational Preterist view are four:
- Bases.**
1. *Things written & promised to people in the first century were performed to them*
 2. *The term 'this generation' refers to the generation to whom these promises were spoken and written*
 3. *Prophetic terms have prophetic meanings*
 4. *The natural meaning of the terms quickly, soon, near, at hand mean close in time to those to whom they were promised and written*

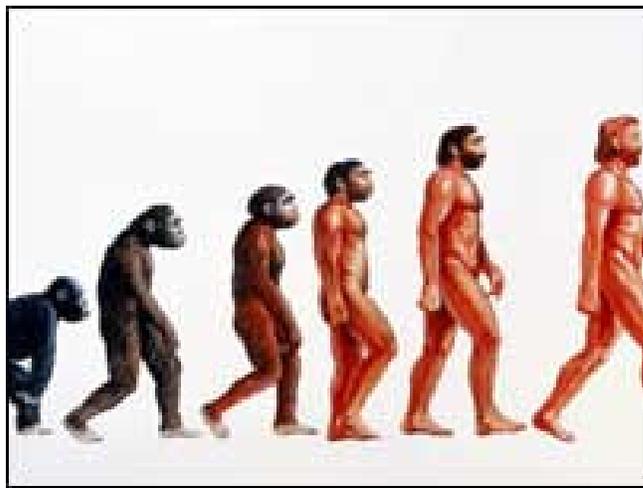
Ten conditions In the affirmative the statement *Jerusalem is the harlot city of* **for a positive** *Revelation* succeeds as an hypothesis because it meets the following **theory.** ten conditions for a satisfactory theory. A first century explanation:

1. begins from scriptural facts
2. answers the identifying marks of the harlot city
3. falsifies literal Sodom, Babylon and literal Egypt
4. supplies a context consistent with 'soon, quickly, shortly' to the time of writing
5. supplies corroborating historical evidence
6. elucidates the facts by adding additional information
7. gives factual reasons for the cause; the why?
8. conditions the facts and systematizes them at one time
9. provides a pathway for further research
0. provides a simpler basis for explanation

Ten conditions In contrast the statement *literal Sodom/Egypt/ Babylon is the harlot* **for a failing** *city of Revelation* fails as a satisfactory theory in the following ten **theory.** areas:

1. its basis is an unsubstantiated assumption of literalism
2. it fails to answer the identifying marks of the harlot city
3. it fails logically to falsify Jerusalem
4. it fails to supply a context consistent with 'soon, quickly, shortly' to writing
5. it merely describes the facts without elucidating them
6. it denies clear biblical marks indicating Jerusalem
7. it supplies no corroborating historical evidence
8. it is guess that fails to condition the facts into a system
9. it fails to provide a pathway for further research
0. it is not the simplest hypothesis and needs: *gaps, delays, comings and special rules.*

Preterism This is a summary of the reasons for preferring a Preterist view of a **most factual** first century book over a Future-to-us view of a first century book. While m **& critical.** Much is still to be learned about the context for a first century view, both the evidence and critical methodology recommend the hypothesis for further intensive investigation.



The True Evolution:
Sinners Converting to Christ and Standing upright like Sons of God