



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting *every man* perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XI
Issue 269

The Real Miracle of December 25

Identified by the Course of Abia

by – C. Richard Jordan

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth (Luke 1:5).

With the help of this verse we can identify on the calendar the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. The “course of Abia” is talking about the way David had divided up the priesthood. Any Old Testament Jew would have understood immediately what that referred to.

Now these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron; Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children: therefore Eleazar and Ithamar executed the priest's office. And David distributed them, both Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, according to their offices in their service. And there were more chief men found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar; and thus were they divided. Among the sons of Eleazar there were sixteen chief men of the house of their fathers, and eight among the sons of Ithamar according to the house of their fathers. Thus were they divided by lot, one sort with another; for the governors of the sanctuary, and governors of the house of God, were of the sons of Eleazar, and of the sons of Ithamar. And Shemaiah the son of Nethaneel the scribe, one of the Levites, wrote them before the king, and the princes, and Zadok the priest, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, and before the chief of

the fathers of the priests and Levites: one principal household being taken for Eleazar, and one taken for Ithamar (I Chronicles 24:1-6).

Now because Eleazar has 16 households and Ithamar has only 8, if they just let the 16 go, eventually they would root out the eight. So David, in his wisdom, said, “Here is what we will do. One week we will take one from this side; the next week it will become the job of the other side.” So they rotated between the families. Now each family had the responsibility to go up and be the governors of the sanctuary and the governors of the house of God. That is, they had to go up and do the priestly service. Now the people are scattered all over Israel. The 12 tribes have different locations all over Israel. The sons of Levi and the sons of Aaron lived all over Israel. They lived in many places and had ministry in those places. The Temple was in Jerusalem. They could not minister in Jerusalem all the time, so each household has a one

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Bible Student's Notebook™

Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume XI, No. 269 – November 30, 2010

This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

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From the Editor

Dear Siblings,

If any man thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know (I Corinthians 8:2).

My Attitude and Writings

I have always been a seeker of the truth. This means that I have embraced the need to be adjustable. I know people who are proud that they have held the exact same doctrinal understandings for 20, 30, 40, 50 years. This is not a badge of honor to me. I continue to learn and grow. My beliefs have continued to change drastically over the years.

Anyone wanting to see this in my own life only needs to leaf through the 20 years of *Bible Student's Notebook*. They clearly attest to the flexibleness of my heart toward truth.

My books are not written in stone. I have never viewed them that way. They are written on paper – and on-demand paper at that. I do not have a stockpile of them. The beauty of on-demand printing is that I have my books printed as they are needed.

For me, on-demand printing is perfect for my lack of money for stock, and also – and probably more importantly – it allows me to make changes, adjustments, corrections, additions and/or deletions between ordering individual copies. Believe you me, I have taken advantage of this freedom!

It seems that almost every time that I re-read something that I have written, there is a change that I would like to make. So, on-demand printing is perfect for me. My books go through many editions, even in a single year. I consider them “living” books, rather than “dead” set-in-stone books.

Norman Grubb (1895-1993) has written in this regard:

I don't know if every writer on the things of the Spirit has the same problem – no sooner have I completed one manuscript than I see this ... and this ... and this ... which could be put much more clearly, or whole areas of insights which should be added. I feel like the automobile dealers who *must* produce a new model each year! (*God Unlimited*)

So, do my current writings contain mistakes and errors?

Absolutely! Where? I don't know yet. Over the years as I see more and more truth, I correct my writings. Will you find “errors” in my writings that I do not see? Probably. Will I correct these “errors”? If you show them to me *from Scripture* and I can see them for myself *from Scripture*.

Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind (Romans 14:5).

What if you see something in my writing with which you disagree? Disregard them, *if* it is *by faith in the Scriptures* that you disagree with them; as I will do with your assertion that they are “error,” if I can't see that they are indeed “error” *by faith in the Scriptures*. What will be my response if we differ? I will receive you, as Christ has received me.

Receive each other, as Christ has received us to the glory of God (Romans 15:7).

Martin Luther (1483-1546), on trial before the *Diet of Worms*, was asked by the Inquisitor:

Doest thou admit that these books are written by thee?

Wilt thou retract these books and their contents, or doest thou persist in the things thou hast advanced?

To which Luther replied:

Unless I can be convicted of error by the Holy Scripture, I neither can nor dare retract anything, for my conscience is held captive by God's Word. Here I stand, I can do not otherwise; so God help me. Amen.

One day I must stand before the Lord to give an account. I can't stand before Him and tell Him that I simply did what somebody else wanted me to do. I must stand before Him, having lived in the truth that I have seen.

So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God (Romans 14:12).

My love to each of you,



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

MIRACLE (continued from front page)

week course of service, twice a year in Jerusalem. They would go up on a Sabbath and minister all of the week through to the next Sabbath, and then go home. It is important to understand how the courses work.

Notice in II Kings 11:9 that the courses were changed each week:

And the captains over the hundreds did according to all things that Jehoiada the priest commanded: and they took every man his men that were to come in on the sabbath, with them that should go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest (II Kings 11:9).

You can see that we are talking about the courses and about the priests ministering in the Temple, and that there are priests that come in on the Sabbath and those that go out on the Sabbath. So they work from one Sabbath to the next and the course lasts for that week. They change priests each Sabbath. Now when would they start?

On the religious calendar of Israel everything started with the Passover.

And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus 12:1-2).

What month is that?

This day came ye out in the month Abib (Exodus 13:4).

The month Abib corresponds to our month, April. When was the Passover?

Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house (Exodus 12:3).

And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening (Exodus 12:6).

That is the Passover lamb.

Other things you need to remember about the courses:

1. They run for one week.
2. The cycle begins at the Passover every year.
3. Three times a year every Levite, every son of Aaron, every one of the priests of Israel went to Jerusalem along with all of the other men in Israel to worship.

So, not only do they go up on their regular course, there are also three times per year that every male in Israel goes to Jerusalem. When everybody is in Jerusalem you have all of the priests working. In Samuel on one occasion alone there were 20,000 sheep brought to be slaughtered. That's a big job!

Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee (Deuteronomy 16:16-17).

So we have a developing story here.

- David set up courses for the priests to work.
- There are twenty-four of them.
- They last for a week each.
- They begin at Passover.
- Three times a year all of the people go up to Jerusalem.
- Three times a year all priests are there to minister.

Now back to I Chronicles and notice where Abia shows up:

Now the first lot came forth to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, The third to Harim, the fourth to Seorim, The fifth to Malchijah, the sixth to Mijamin, The seventh to Hakkoz, the eighth to Abijah (I Chronicles 24:7-10).

"Abijah" is the "Abia" in Luke 1:5. Therefore, "the course of Abia" is the eighth course. The number eight in the Bible is the number of "a new beginning." On a piano, on the eighth note you start over again. That is true of the number eight in Creation and also

when God is going to begin something new in Israel.

The Law and the Prophets are until John; but then the Kingdom of God is preached (Luke 16:16). God was beginning the sequence of events that was going to bring in the New Covenant with Israel. When He did that it is fascinating to note that God was thinking about it all along. This man, Zachariah, is of the course of Abia (the 8th course.) He is the course that is going to bring the new beginning (the meaning of the number eight in Scripture).

Go back to Luke 1 and think about how that helps you with the dating of the birth of Christ and John.

And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, according to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord (Luke 1:8-9).

Zachariah now has left home and gone to Jerusalem to minister during the course of Abia. This is going to be 8 weeks after the Passover. As he ministers in his course, the angel appears to him:

But the angel said unto him, "Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" (Luke 1:13).

Verse 7 said they were both "well stricken in years." They were like Abraham and Sarah. They were not able to have children because his wife was barren.

And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house (Luke 1:23).

And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth (Luke 1:39-40).

Mary went to where Zacharias lived, which was not in Jerusalem. He lived up in the hill country in a city of Juda. In verse 23, when his ministry is over on the Sabbath he goes home from Jerusalem to Juda. Imagine the scene when Elisabeth tells him on his arrival at home, "Honey, we are going to have a baby!" Now, he had a problem, being that he couldn't talk, because when he did not believe the angel, the angel made him "dumb" (mute).

And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, "Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men" (Luke 1:24-25).

So she conceives John.

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary (Luke 1:26-27).

Six months after the conception of John the Baptist, the angel goes to Mary and tells her she will give birth to the Messiah.

And the angel answered and said unto her, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

So then, Christ is conceived six months after John is conceived. Therefore, if you figure out when John is conceived, you can figure out when Christ is conceived. Add 280 days to that (nine months) and you can figure out when He was born. So the information is in the text and it is not hard to get. Luke provided the details for you to do that.

If you start with the Passover, you count 8 weeks and that brings you to June (13-19). This is the time period when Zachariah would be in the Temple ministering. John the Baptist would be conceived. Give Zachariah a few days to get home and talk to Elisabeth about it. John is going to be conceived in late June. Six months later would put you in the middle of December. If John is conceived as shown, then the conception of Christ occurs between December 22nd -25th. That will put the birth of John in March and the birth of Christ somewhere between September 22nd and about the 3rd of October. So you have Christ born in late September or early October. You have him conceived in late December.

Now why is that interesting? What happens in late December? The shortest day of the year, which is when the sun is the farthest distance from the earth. It begins its trajectory back at that point. On the 25th

*(see **MIRACLE**, last page)*

The Course of Abia

by – E. W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

This was the *eighth* of the priestly courses of ministration in the Temple (I Chronicles 24:10), and occurred, as did the others, twice in the year.

The “Courses” were changed every week, beginning each with a Sabbath. The reckoning commenced on the 22nd day of *Tisri* or *Ethanim* (App. 51.5). This was the eighth and last day of the Feast of Tabernacles – the “*Great Day of the Feast*” (John 7:37), and was a Sabbath (Leviticus 23:39).

The first course fell by lot to Jehoiarib, and the eighth to Abia or Abijah (I Chronicles 24:10). Bearing in mind that *all* of the courses served together at the three Great Feasts, the dates for the two yearly “ministrations” of Abiah will be seen to fall as follows:

The first ministration was from 12-18 *Chisleu*:
December 6-12.

The second ministration was from 12-18 *Sivan*:
June 13-19.

The announcement therefore to Zacharias in the Temple as to the conception of John the Baptist took place between 12-18 *SIVAN* (June 13-19), in the year 5 B.C. After finishing his “*ministration*,” the aged priest “*departed to his own house*” (Luke 1:23) which was in a city in “*the hill country*” of Juda (:39). The day following the end of the “*Course of Abia*” being a Sabbath (*Sivan* 19), he would not be able to leave Jerusalem before the 20th. The thirty-miles journey would probably occupy, for an old man, a couple of days at least. He would therefore arrive at his house on the 21st or 22nd. This leaves ample time for the miraculous “conception” of Elizabeth to take place on or about the 23rd of *Sivan* – which would correspond to June 23-24 of that year. The fact of the conception and *its date* would necessarily be known at the time and afterwards, and hence the 23rd of *SIVAN* would henceforth be associated with the conception of John the Baptist as the 1st of *TEBETH* would be with that of our Lord. Yet the same influences that speedily obscured and presently obliterated the real dates of our Lord’s “Begetting” and Birth, were also at work

with regard to those of the Forerunner, and with the same results. As soon as the true *Birth* day of Christ had been shifted from its proper date, *viz.*, the 15th of *Tisri* (September 29), and a Festival Day from the Pagan Calendars substituted for it (*viz.*, December 25), then everything else had to be altered, too ...

The Four “Quarter Days” may therefore be set forth thus: first in the chronological order of the events with which they are associated, *viz.*,

Four Quarter Days

The *Conception* of John Baptist on or about 23rd *SIVAN* (June 24) in the year 5 B.C.

The *Gennesis* (Begetting) of our Lord on or about 1st *TEBETH* (December 25) in the year 5 B.C.

The birth of John Baptist on or about 4th-7th *NISAN* (March 25-28) in the year 4 B.C.

The birth of our Lord on or about 15th *TISRI* (September 29) in the year 4 B.C.

Or, placing the two sets together naturally:

John the Baptist

The conception – 23rd *SIVAN* (June 23-24) in the year 5 B.C.

The birth – 7th *NISAN* (March 28-29) in the year 4 B.C.

The Lord Jesus Christ

The miraculous “Begetting” – 1st *TEBETH* (December 25) in the year 5 B.C.

The nativity – 15th *TISRI* (September 29) in the year 4 B.C.

The Companion Bible, App. 179

Jesus Christ

Conceived on December 25 – Born on September 29

by - E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

It thus appears without the shadow of a doubt that the day assigned to the Birth of the Lord, viz., December 25, was the day on which He was “begotten of the Holy Spirit,” i.e., by *pneuma hagian* – divine power (Matthew 1:18, 20, marg.), and His birth took place on the 15th of Ethanim, September 29, in the year following, thus making beautifully clear the meaning of John 1:14, “*The Word became flesh*” (Matthew 1:18, 20) on the 1st Tebeth or December 25, “*and tabernacled [Gr. eskeno-sen] with us,*” on the 15th of Ethanim or September 29.

The 15th of Ethanim (or Tisri) was the first day of the

Feast of Tabernacles. The circumcision therefore took place on the eighth day of the Feast – the 22nd of Ethanim – October 6-7 (Leviticus 23:33-34). So that these two momentous events fall into their proper place and order, and the real reason is made clear why the 25th of December is associated with our Lord and was set apart by the Apostolic Church to commemorate the stupendous event of the “*Word becoming flesh*” – and not, as we have for so long been led to suppose, the commemoration of a pagan festival.

The Companion Bible, App. 179

Why Jesus Was Not Born In December

by - E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

The main arguments *against* the Nativity having taken place in December may be set forth very simply:

1. The extreme improbability, amounting almost to impossibility, that Mary, under such circumstances, could have undertaken a journey of about 70 miles (as the crow flies), through a hill district averaging some 3,000 feet above sea level, in the depth of winter;
2. Shepherds and their flocks would not be found “*abiding*” (Gr. *agrauleō*) in the open fields at night in December (*Tebeth*), for the paramount reason that there would be no pasturage at that time. It was the custom then (as now) to withdraw the flocks during the month *Marchesvan* (Oct.-Nov.) from the open districts and house them for the winter;
3. The Roman authorities in imposing such a “census taking” for the hated and unpopular “foreign” tax would not have enforced the imperial decree (Luke 2:1) at the most inconvenient and inclement season of the year, by compelling the people to enroll themselves at their respective “cities” in December. In such a case they would naturally choose the “line of least resistance” and select a time of year that would cause least

friction and interference with the habits and pursuits of the Jewish people. This would be in the autumn, when the agricultural round of the year was complete, and the people generally more or less at liberty to take advantage, as we know many did, of the opportunity of “going up” to Jerusalem for the “*Feast of Tabernacles*” (c.f. John 7:8-10, etc.), the crowning Feast of the Jewish year.

To take advantage of such a time would be to the Romans the simplest and most natural policy, whereas to attempt to enforce the Edict of Registration for the purpose of Imperial taxation in the depth of winter – when traveling for such a purpose would have been deeply resented, and perhaps have brought about a revolt – would never have been attempted by such an astute ruler as Augustus. With regard to the other two “Quarter Days,” June 24, March 25, these are both associated with the miraculous (Luke 1:7) “conception” and birth of the Forerunner, as December 25 and September 29 are with our Lord’s miraculous “Begetting” and Birth; and are therefore connected with “*the Course of Abiah.*”

The Companion Bible, App. 179

of December, all over the planet, people worship the birth of god. Pagans do it and they talk about the birth of the son of the Sun god. The S-O-N of the S-U-N god. This is where the yule log and the Christmas tree originate. That is all involved in bringing forth that S-U-N god.

You know that all of that pagan stuff is just nonsense; but if Satan was going to counterfeit something, you know he wouldn't counterfeit something that is not true. You don't take a phony three-dollar bill and try to counterfeit it. You try to counterfeit something that is real. Therefore the real miracle in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is not about when the shepherds are hiding in the fields, and the angels come to talk about the little baby born in a manger. The birth of Christ was completely normal and natural, just like any child you've had or your mother had. The miracle was at the conception! We say that He is the "virgin born Son of God," but we really mean by that that He is the virgin *conceived* Son of God.

There is a heresy in paganism called the immaculate conception, and is a reference to the conception of the Queen of Heaven. In the 21st Century she is called

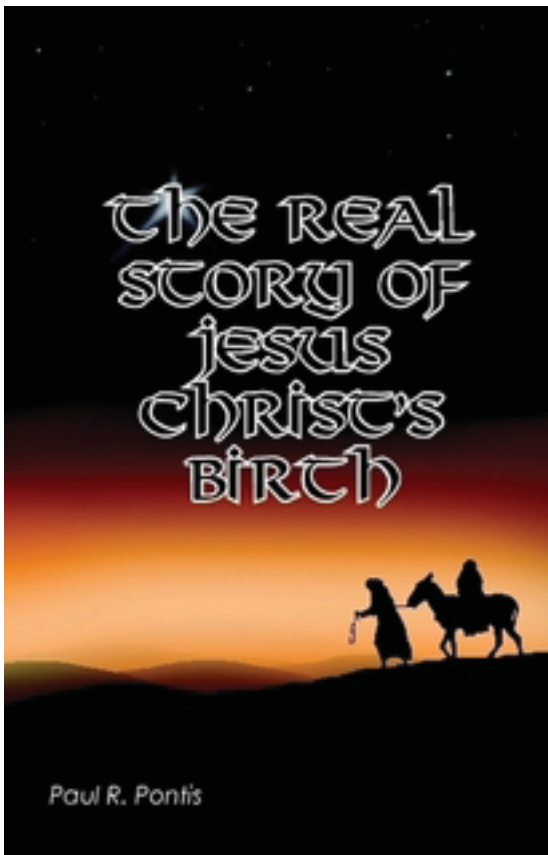
"the Virgin Mary"; but in pagan mythology, and in the Bible as far back as Judges 2, you will find her identified in Scripture. In Jeremiah 44:19 she is called the Queen of heaven. They say Mary had this "immaculate" conception, and that again is a counterfeit of the conception of the Lord Jesus Christ. I point this out so that you understand that the "Immaculate Conception" taught by "religion" is not a reference to the conception of Christ. Rather, it refers to the pagan idea of the conception of the Queen of Heaven.

John the Baptist was miraculously conceived by his mother and dad (Zacharias and Elisabeth) when they were physically unable to have children. God rejuvenated their bodies and gave them the capacity to conceive a child. Yet the Lord Jesus Christ was conceived of a virgin without a human father involved. That is why Mary asks this question in verse 34:

Then said Mary unto the angel, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34).

Again, the real miracle is the conception of Christ. The fascinating part is that the conception matches the December date.

The Real Story of Jesus Christ's Birth



An in-depth biblical and historical look into the truths surrounding the birth of Jesus

by – Paul R. Pontis

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