

THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST – **THE UNTOLD STORY**

By Steven Collins

(The following is one chapter from Steve's book – "The Lost Ten Tribes of Israel...Found!"
Please visit http://www.israelite.info/books/Book_header_page.htm for information
about his new books on the Lost of Tribes of Israel)

PART ONE: THE CHILDHOOD YEARS (BIRTH TO AGE 12)

Much has been written about the life of Jesus Christ, the historical person whose name is attached to the many different denominations of Christianity which exist today. In fact, so much has been written that one might wonder whether anything truly new could be written about this one life. As the reader will see, new information about the life of Jesus Christ can be ascertained by combining biblical and secular historical accounts and traditions about the time in which he lived. This chapter is not intended to be a complete history of the life of Jesus Christ. It will cover those aspects of his life and times which have not been generally known.

The prior chapter dealing with the Parthian Empire discussed historical events which shaped the world into which Jesus Christ was born. When some surprising information about his life is added to the history contained in the previous chapter, it can be seen that Jesus Christ actually played a role in the great power politics which occurred between the empires of Parthia and Rome. If he had chosen to do so, he could have had a much larger role in the political affairs of that era, and the Bible hints at such a possibility.

This chapter will begin by offering firm evidence that Jesus Christ was a real, historical person. Josephus, a Jewish historian of the first century A.D., regarded the life of Jesus Christ as an established fact. In Antiquities of the Jews, Josephus wrote:

"there was about this time [Josephus here refers to matters concerning Pontius Pilate, Roman procurator of Judea], Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works - a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was Christ and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principle men among us, had condemned him to the cross...he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day."

In this account, written shortly after Christ died, Josephus not only gave us a powerful witness that Jesus Christ truly lived, but also provided an independent corroboration of many of the biblically discussed events of his life. Josephus refers to him as "a wise man," and wonders whether he was more than a mere man because of the "wonderful works" he did. Here a non-Christian, Jewish historian of the apostolic era writes of the miracles of Jesus as actual facts. Josephus agrees with the testamental writings that Jesus was indeed sentenced to be crucified by Pontius Pilate at the behest of the Jewish Sanhedrin ("the principle men among us"). Josephus acknowledges that Jesus Christ fulfilled the many

prophecies of the Hebrew prophets about the Messiah, and even refers to his resurrection as a historical fact!¹

Josephus' reference to Jesus as "the Christ" acknowledges that Jesus was the Messiah ("the anointed"). Since a non-Christian source so close to the actual time of Christ has confirmed these facts of his life, the musings of modern skeptics questioning Christ's existence are without merit. Josephus could speak with eye-witnesses of Jesus' life; modern skeptics are almost two millennia removed the events, and their writings are merely speculative.

Roman secular sources also agree with Josephus. Celsus, an anti-Christian writer of the Roman Empire in the second century A.D., wrote: "It was by magic that he [Jesus] was able to do the miracles which he appeared to have done."² In this statement, an antagonist of Christianity grudgingly acknowledges the reality of Christ's "miracles." However, Quadratus, writing in approximately 117-134 A.D. "urged people to believe in Jesus because the effect of his miracles continued up to the present - people had been cured and raised from the dead, and 'some of them...have survived even to our own day.'"³ Tacitus, the famous Roman historian, writing about the Christians several decades after the death of Christ, stated: "their originator, Christ, had been executed in Tiberius' reign by the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate."⁴

Clearly, Roman records confirm that Jesus Christ lived, and that he was executed in Judea during the administration of Pontius Pilate. Even his detractors and non-Christian writers acknowledged that he performed supernatural deeds, and one writer recorded that some previously dead persons were known to be alive as a result of being resurrected by Jesus Christ. Whatever one thinks about Jesus Christ, we begin with the fact that he indeed lived and died when the Bible states that he lived and died, that he performed marvelous deeds, and that he made a major impression on the civilisation of his day.

Let us now review the historical setting into which Jesus Christ was born. The Roman and Parthian Empires were both powerful, well-established "superpower" rivals at the time Jesus was born. Rome ruled the Mediterranean region, and Parthia ruled Asian lands from modern Syria to India. Palestine was located within the Roman Empire, but was close to the Parthian border (the Euphrates River).

In the decades previous to the birth of Jesus, Rome and Parthia fought several battles with one being fought near Antioch of Syria (very close to Palestine)⁵ in about 40 B.C., the Parthians launched a major assault which swept the Romans out of Asia for a short time. For three years (40-37 B.C.) Palestine was within the Parthian Empire and was ruled by a Jewish vassal king of the Parthians named Antigonus. At that time King Herod (the Roman king of Judea) fled from the Parthians in fear of his life.

While the Parthian sponsored rule of Antigonus was brief, it was apparently popular with the Jews. When the Parthians withdrew across the Euphrates, Antigonus, with Jewish support, attempted to maintain himself as king of the Jews, but was defeated by Herod. Mark Antony (the Roman leader famous for his dalliance with Cleopatra) ordered Antigonus beheaded, and Josephus records that this was done to compel the Jews to re-accept the hated Herod as their king.⁶ Mark Antony then led an massive invasion of Parthia in 37-36 B.C., but his army was utterly defeated by the Parthians.⁷

To help modern readers gain a frame of reference for these ancient events, these Roman-Parthian wars were more recent events for the people in the period when Jesus was born than World War II and the Korean War are to modern readers. Parthian rule over Palestine was, therefore, vividly remembered by many in Jewish society as being preferable to Roman

rule.

Mark Antony's defeat led to a long period of "detente" between the two empires, with the Euphrates River serving as the border between their two vast empires. This prolonged period of peaceful relations lasted from 36 B.C. until 58 A.D.,⁸ including not only all of Jesus Christ's life, but also the early period of the Apostolic church as well. Rawlinson records that it was an established Roman policy not to provoke a Parthian war during that period of time so long as both empires agreed to coexist on separate banks of the Euphrates River. Rawlinson comments on this peaceful interlude as follows:

"It is a well-known fact that Augustus left it as a principle of policy to his successors that the Roman Empire had reached its proper limits, and could not with advantage be extended further. This principle, followed with the utmost strictness by Tiberius, was accepted as a rule by all the earlier Caesars..."⁹

Obviously, as long as the Caesars wanted peace with Parthia, Roman officials along Parthia's border (such as King Herod and Pontius Pilate) knew they would risk their positions and lives if they entangled Rome in an unwanted war with Parthia.

Without this period of Parthian-Roman detente, it would have been well-nigh impossible for some of the events of Jesus Christ's life to have occurred, as we shall see. The first such event was the coming of the Magi, or "Wise Men" to pay homage to Jesus. We read of this event in Matthew 2:1-12, which becomes more important when considered in the overall context of Roman-Parthian relations.

The Magi were powerful members of one of the two assemblies which elected Parthian monarchs and wielded great influence within the empire. One assembly was composed of members of the royal family (the Arsacids), and the other consisted of the priests (the "Magi") and influential Parthians of non-royal blood (the "Wise Men"). The Magi and Wise Men were jointly known as the Megistanes.¹⁰ The King James Version of the Bible states in Matthew 2:1 that "wise men from the east" came to worship Jesus. The term "Wise Men," can be seen as the proper title of Parthian Megistanes. The Greek word translated "wise men" is "magian," literally meaning "Persian astronomer or priest."¹¹ Parthia had long governed all Persian territory at the time of Christ, and the "Wise Men" cited in the Bible were clearly members of the Megistanes, very high Parthian officials.

While traditional Christian accounts of this episode celebrate the coming of "the three wise men," the Bible does not limit the number of visiting Magi Wise Men to three men. Indeed, Biblical events and the realities of that time argue for a much larger contingent of Parthian Magi.

Since we saw in previous chapters that the Parthians were descended from the ten tribes of Israel and that their priests were likely descended from the tribe of Levi, this delegation of Magi consisted of leading members of the ten tribes of Israel. Since there were numerous members of the tribe of Judah in Parthia's empire, they may have been represented as well. Consequently, the delegation of Magi could easily have consisted of at least ten or twelve men representing the various tribes of Israel.

Also, the Bible shows that the Magi did not visit the young Jesus in the manger at Bethlehem (as most nativity scenes depict), but rather visited Jesus in a house somewhat after his birth. Matthew 2:11 states that this visit of the Magi took place in a house (not at the manger) when Jesus was old enough to be called "a young child" (no longer "an infant in swaddling clothes"). Luke's version of Christ's birth (Luke 2:8-40) mentions the shepherds' arrival at the manger, but makes no mention of any Magi visiting Christ at that time.

Matthew 2:8 adds that Herod sent the Magi "to Bethlehem" after conferring with the Jewish hierarchy about the prophesied location of the Messiah's birth. They cited Micah 5:2 that the Messiah would originate in Bethlehem, and they were likely familiar with Daniel 9:25-26 which predicted that the arrival of the Messiah was due at that time. Armed with this information, Herod then privately met with the Parthian delegation, and enquired when "the star" which they followed had first appeared. He apparently learned that this period of time was almost two years because he killed all male children in Bethlehem under two years of age in an attempt to kill the Messiah (whom he regarded as a competitor for his position as king of the Jews).

Although the Bible tells us that "the star" appeared to the Wise Men almost two years prior to his birth, this offers inexact information in determining how old Jesus was when the Wise Men came to him. Since the Wise Men were prominent people in Parthia at the time of the arrival of "the star," they had to make a very time-consuming journey to reach Judea. Also, it took time to prepare the costly gifts to present to the Messiah, set their affairs in order for a long absence, organize a caravan (and likely obtain an armed escort for protection) and make the lengthy journey to Judea, a journey which moved at the speed of the slowest pack animal in the caravan. Since the "star" may have appeared to the Wise Men prior to Jesus' birth, Jesus may have been a few months (or up to two years) old at the time of the Magi's arrival.

Consider also that Matthew 2:1-3 states:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem. Saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him."

This account does not indicate that three wise men from the east quietly visited Herod, then Jesus, and then just as quietly left Judea to return to Parthia. Their arrival in Jerusalem was a very public affair because "all Jerusalem" was "troubled" by their arrival. This indicates that the Magi (a delegation of a dozen or more high Parthian officials) came to Jerusalem in a caravan loaded with costly treasures and escorted by a strong force of armed Parthian soldiers" Since the Magi were high officials of the Parthian government, they would customarily travel with a substantial escort of Parthian soldiers to guarantee their protection. Since they were traveling with many costly treasures to present to the new-born Messiah, their escort may have been unusually large.

Also, these high officials would have traveled with a large entourage of servants, animal-handlers, cooks, etc. on such a long journey. The entourage in this Parthian caravan may have constituted many hundreds of people! Given the fact that many high Parthian officials and very expensive treasures were in the caravan, there may have been many thousands of Parthian soldiers escorting the caravan. This is not an overstatement. Josephus records that treasure caravans bringing expensive offerings to Jerusalem from Jews living in Parthian territory did so with "many ten thousand men" as escorts.¹² In ancient times, traveling with expensive items was dangerous. There was danger not only from brigands, but also from local satraps who might use their armies to conquer a treasure train passing through their territories. If Jewish commoners from Parthia were allowed to travel to Jerusalem with the equivalent of several infantry divisions as escorts, would an important delegation of Parthia's ruling class and a treasure train of gifts have been accompanied by fewer armed escorts?

The Wise Men who came to Jesus were not bringing just a few samples of gold and other precious things that they carried in their personal saddlebags. They were coming to worship

he who was born "king" of the Jews. This Parthian delegation was offering tribute money to a "king," and therefore would more likely have brought a whole train of pack-animals loaded with "gold, frankincense and myrrh."

Their caravan was so big that their arrival quickly became a "cause celebre" in Jerusalem. The whole city was in an uproar over their arrival, and that argues for a very visible and impressive Parthian caravan arriving in Jerusalem not long after Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. The sheer size of the caravan, its treasures and its escorts awed King Herod and the whole city to the point they were all "troubled." This indicates that the Parthian caravan had so many armed escorts that many feared it was an invasion force coming to besiege Jerusalem. However, their announced reason for coming to visit the Messiah stunned a city of Jews which intensely wanted the Messiah to come and free them from Roman rule! It is clear that the Jewish hierarchy understood the Parthians were looking for the Messiah as they quickly looked for Messianic prophecies to locate the city of his birth.

After their consultations with Herod and high Jewish officials, the Parthian delegation traveled to worship Jesus and present their gifts to him (by this time, Matthew 2:11 states Jesus and Mary were living in "a house," so they were no longer in the manger). Their journey would have been closely followed by Herod's spies.

Joseph was then warned by God in a dream to flee into Egypt (Matthew 2:13) to avoid Herod's impending slaughter of Bethlehem's young male children. Since Herod's edict applied only to Bethlehem, there would have been no need for Joseph, Mary and Jesus to flee unless they were still in Bethlehem. Going to Egypt took them completely out of Herod's area of jurisdiction.

Herod made the mistake of assuming the Messiah would be born to a family native to the Bethlehem area. However, Luke 2:4 shows that although the family into which Jesus was born resided in Galilee, they had to journey to Bethlehem at that time to comply with a taxing edict because they were direct descendants of King David. Since Luke 2:39 states that Joseph, Mary and Jesus returned to Galilee not long after Jesus was born, and doesn't even mention the Egyptian trip, it seems apparent that the stay of Joseph, Mary and Jesus in Egypt was brief. Indeed, since history records that Herod ("Herod the Great") died in 4 B.C.,¹³ and Matthew 2:14-19 states that Jesus and his parents returned from Egypt as soon as Herod was dead (4 B.C.), Herod must have died soon after he gave the order to slay the male children in Bethlehem.

Since Herod died in 4 B.C. and the date of Jesus' birth is accepted to be around 4 B.C. by many historians, the events of his birth, the arrival of the caravan of the Parthian Magi, the flight to Egypt, the death of Herod and the return of Jesus' family from Egypt occurred within a short time. Since Luke 2:39 indicates that Joseph, Mary and Jesus returned to Galilee soon after Jesus' birth, the above events had to occur in a short period of time.

It is significant that Jesus' parents were faithful to God's law requiring circumcision on the eighth day (Leviticus 12:2-3), and to Jewish custom by making an offering to God at the Temple in Jerusalem to consecrate their firstborn male child (Luke 2:21-24). This is an important observation as it shows Jesus was raised and shaped in a family environment literally obeyed God and devoutly observed Jewish customs.

History records that Roman-Parthian relations were peaceful at the time that Jesus was born. The Bible confirms this was the case as the Parthian Magi did not sneak into Roman territory to look for the Messiah, but rather came directly to King Herod, quite open about their reasons for being in Roman-occupied Palestine. They informed Herod that they had come to worship "he that is born king of the Jews."

It is a tribute to the power of Caesar's policy that the Roman-Parthian peace be maintained that war did not result from this statement, for Herod could easily have flown into a rage, and yelled "How dare you ask to see another 'king of the Jews' besides me; I am king of the Jews!" That Herod swallowed his pride, and meekly answered the Parthians is quite noteworthy. This is a tribute not only to Caesar's policy to maintain the peace, but also to Herod's memory that the Parthians had militarily controlled the throne of Judea a few decades earlier. Herod's very meek response to the highly provocative question of the Parthian officials may also indicate that he was intimidated by the many Parthian soldiers who accompanied the Magi. Indeed, since the whole city was "troubled" by the Parthians' arrival, the presence of many Parthian soldiers may have sparked rumors that a new Parthian-Roman war was imminent. Herod may even have suspected that the Parthians' question was designed to provoke an incident which would lead to an outbreak of hostilities and his removal from the throne.

A comment must be made concerning the "star" which led the Magi to Jesus. Some have proposed that this star was a comet or a celestial phenomenon although the context shows that this was not possible. The biblically-described star led the Magi over a long east-to-west route from Parthia to Judea, and Matthew 2:9 states that it finally "stood over where the young child was." No comet or celestial phenomenon could pinpoint a single city, much less an individual child within a particular house. The Bible periodically uses the word "star" to represent an angel (Job 38:7, Rev. 1:20), and there is every reason to believe that this "star" which led a delegation of Parthian nobles to a specific child in a specific house in Judea was an angel of God. Nothing else makes sense. Only an angel (a spirit being) could literally "stand over" the baby Jesus to designate one specific child to the Parthian nobles.

Also, there is nothing in the biblical account which indicates that this "star" was visible to anyone other than the Magi (Wise Men)! Matthew 2:2 states that the Magi saw "the star," but the context indicates no one else ever saw it. Verse 7 shows Herod asking the Magi when "the star" appeared to them, indicating no one in Judea was aware of any such "star." If there had been some unusual celestial object in the sky, Herod and his astrologers would already have known the exact date on which it had appeared.

After leading the Parthians to Judea, the angel ("star") disappeared, forcing the Parthians to ask Herod for directions.

After the Magi left Herod, the "star" again appeared to them, led them directly to Bethlehem (Matthew 2:9), and "stood over" the young child, Jesus to set him apart from all others. Verse 10 states the Magi rejoiced that the star was again showing them the way they should follow. Obviously, a "star" which appeared, disappeared and reappeared for the Magi (but which was apparently not seen by any other humans) was an angel. Supporting this fact is that Luke 2:8-15 records that the birth of Jesus was announced to shepherds by angels speaking to them out of a heavenly light which accompanied their appearance. Since God used angels to bring the shepherds to Jesus' manger, it follows he also used an angel to lead the Magi to Jesus.

Having found Jesus, the Magi worshipped him, offering rich gifts of gold, myrrh and frankincense. They then were warned by God in a dream (Matthew 2:12) not to return to Herod, resulting in the prompt exit of the Magi and their escorts from Judea. When Herod realized that he had been fooled, he wrathfully killed all the young male children of Bethlehem in a vain effort to kill the Messiah. However, there is no record that he made any attempt to overtake or punish the Magi. As high Parthian nobles, they had "diplomatic immunity," and Herod dared not anger Caesar by provoking the Parthians. Also, the size of the Magi's armed escort apparently dissuaded Herod from attempting to pursue them.

There is another important aspect of this remarkable episode. While it is not surprising that Jewish leaders during Herod's reign were sufficiently familiar with the prophetic writings to pinpoint for Herod where the Messiah would be born, it is surprising that God was working more closely with members of the Parthian ruling class than he was with the Jewish priests! This makes no biblical sense unless (A) the Parthians were descended from the exiled tribes of the House of Israel and (B) the Magi (Parthian priests) were Levites. During his ministry Jesus Christ Himself asserted that he was not sent to the gentiles, but only to the descendants of the Israelites. (Matthew 15:24-28 shows the reluctance of Jesus to assist a gentile.)

Throughout the Old Testament God worked almost exclusively with the House of Israel and the House of Judah; his involvement with other nations was incidental (i.e. using them to punish His people when they sinned). It was not until the death of Christ that gentiles were permitted equal access to the God of Israel. The fact that God was working intimately with the Parthian nobility confirms that the Parthians were the House of Israel in Asia and supports the conclusion that the Parthian Magi (their priests) were Levites.

The fact that some of the Parthian ruling classes were worshippers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is most revealing. That God himself sent an angel to lead them to Jesus, and gave instructions to the Magi via dreams is further revealing. God obviously considered these Parthians to be "righteous" men under the terms of his laws or He would not have been dealing with them so personally. That educated Parthians were ready to visit and worship the Messiah at the time of Christ's birth indicates they were also familiar with the prophecies of the Old Testament. Who but transplanted Israelites would have been looking for the Messiah at that time?

Although we are jumping ahead in the narrative, consider the events of Acts 2 which state Parthians (verse 9) were among those who made pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks (known to Christians as Pentecost Sunday). Verse 9 also mentions "Medes, Elamites, and dwellers in Mesopotamia" as being present at this feast and all these regions were provinces of the Parthian Empire. We know that portions of the ten tribes had been relocated to "the cities of the Medes," so the presence of devout visitors from Media could easily designate people from the ten tribes of Israel. Interestingly, verse 9 also mentions "dwellers...in Asia" were present. The word "Asia" has clouded origins, but the Encyclopaedia Britannica states that "It is probable that it ["Asia"] has an Assyrian or Hebrew root, and was used first... with a specific or restricted local application, a more extended signification having eventually been given it..."¹⁴

One of the Scythian tribes was called the "Asii" (or "Asians")¹⁵. Since the "Asian" were one of the Scythian tribes bearing the name of Isaac (the Sacae or Saka), the Bible's reference to "Asians" attending the Feast of Weeks could indicate that Scythians were also present in Jerusalem at that time. This further indicates that the Parthians and Scythians were the displaced members of the "lost ten tribes of Israel." The gentile populations of Asia had no cultural interest in the worship of the God of Israel; only the ten tribes of Israel would retain such a custom.

It was not unusual for large pilgrimages originating in Parthia to travel to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. We noted that Josephus wrote of caravans (of offerings to the God of Israel) from Parthian Mesopotamia arrived in Jerusalem under the protection of "many ten thousand men." These must have been magnificent treasure trains to have warranted the protection of a sizeable army. Huge "offerings" going to Jerusalem from Parthia indicates that many people within the Parthian Empire worshipped the God of Israel. This meant that, at the time of Jesus and Herod, there was a great deal of travel and trade between Judea and many regions of the Parthian Empire.

In an earlier chapter it was shown that the Magi were loyal to one dynasty (the Arsacids), whose members continuously ruled Parthia. It was shown that many rulers of Parthian (Saka) kingdoms had names incorporating the word "Phares" or the consonants of the 3 Hebrew root word for that name (PH-R-S). This indicates that the Arsacids were descended from the seed of David, who was the first king of the Phares family (Matthew 1:2-6). I Chronicles 3:17-24 reveals that the royal lineage continued to flourish after Judah's captivity. Indeed, this dynasty was given high status in the Babylonian Empire (II Kings 25:27-30). This post-exilic elevation of the Davidic dynasty in Asia likely led to their serving as vassal kings (over captive Israelites) under Babylonian and Persian masters. Their later elevation to the throne of Parthia fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah 33:17 that David's descendants would always rule over the descendants of the ten tribes of Israel. This may explain the unshakable loyalty of the Parthians to the Arsacids. With the Parthians being Israelites, and the Arsacids being descended from King David, the Arsacids were the only dynasty in Asia that was racially, historically and culturally related to the Parthian people.

Since Matthew 1:3-17 tells us that Jesus Christ was also a descendant of Phares and King David, Jesus was a blood relative of the Parthian ruling dynasty, which also descended from Phares. The relationship of Jesus to the Parthian Arsacids serves as a further explanation for the homage paid to Jesus by the Parthian nobility. It was customary for the Parthian Megistanes (the Magi and Wise Men) to keep track of Arsacid relatives in foreign nations. In some cases the Megistanes sent to foreign nations (Scythia and Rome) to summon various relatives of the Arsacids to come to Parthia to serve as their king. As mentioned in chapter eight, some Parthian rulers killed every male relative they could find in an effort to eliminate potential rivals to their throne. This compelled the Magi to look for distant individuals who had the bloodline of the Arsacids (the lineage of Phares and King David). At the time of the birth of Jesus, the recent Parthian emperor, Phraates IV (who reigned 37-2 B.C.), had killed many male relatives, including his own father and almost thirty brothers.¹⁶ Male Arsacids at the time of Jesus' birth were in short supply.

When the Magi were led by an angel of God to pay homage to the young Jesus, they doubtless asked Joseph and Mary everything they could think of concerning Jesus' background. They must have learned that Jesus was a blood descendant of Phares and King David. This relationship made Jesus an Arsacid, blood relative of Parthia's kings. In fact, since Parthia could offer the kingship to any Arsacid, not just the oldest son or closest relative of the previous king, Jesus Christ was technically eligible for the Parthian throne. While the Bible does mention Jesus' royal lineage (of the seed of David), it does not mention his relationship to Parthia's dynasty. However, as we shall see later in this chapter, the Bible twice implies that this relationship existed.

Since the Magi who worshipped Jesus were members of the body which selected the kings of Parthia and kept track of male Arsacids, they must have been ecstatic to learn that the young Jesus was an Arsacid. While the Bible is silent on their future contacts, Parthian Magi likely would have stayed in contact with Jesus in future years and monitored the events of his life.

We will now examine the possibility that the visit of influential Parthians to the young Jesus Christ almost led to a Parthian-Roman war. Recall that from 40-37 B.C., Parthia had ruled Palestine and Syria before the Romans drove them back across the Euphrates River. That war ushered in a long period of Parthian-Roman detente which included the entire lifetime of Jesus Christ. However, a great Parthian-Roman war was barely averted in 1 A.D. when (as discussed in chapter eight) a "summit conference" was held between the Parthian emperor, Phraataces, and Caius Caesar, the grandson of Augustus Caesar on an island in the Euphrates River (i.e. neutral territory). Roman sources record that:

"The armies of the two chiefs were drawn up on the opposite banks of the river [the Euphrates], facing one another; and the chiefs themselves, accompanied by an equal number of attendants, proceeded to deliberate in the sight of both hosts."¹⁷

This "summit conference" averted war, but how could the Magi's visit have had a role in this crisis? Scholarship has documented that Jesus Christ was apparently born in approximately 4 B.C. Bible accounts of the Magi visiting Jesus cease when the Magi left Judea and returned to Parthia, leaving the impression that the issue was concluded. However, if we consider the geopolitical realities of that time, there is no way that the Magi's exit from Judea ended the matter.

Matthew 2:3 records that Herod and "all Jerusalem" were troubled by the arrival of the Magi. Jerusalem was a commercial city at the nexus of major trade routes, and it commonly received caravans of many hundreds or thousands of people. Three tired Magi arriving from the east wouldn't have made a ripple in the city's calm. For that matter, caravans from Parthian territory (as discussed in chapter eight) could arrive in Jerusalem with many thousands of armed escorts, and such events did not trouble the city. What was singularly different about the caravan that brought the Magi? The Magi (perhaps ten, twelve, or more of them) were Parthian nobility who selected the rulers of Parthia's empire. Such a visit was unprecedented and unrepeatable in the history of the city of Jerusalem. Such prominent people did not "sneak into town," but came with many attendants and perhaps thousands of regular Parthian soldiers as escorts. This occurred at a time when Parthia and Rome had a peace treaty, and no major Roman or Parthian military forces had crossed the Euphrates River in decades. The arrival of a significant Parthian military force in Jerusalem escorting high Parthian officials was militarily provocative and could justifiably be seen by Herod and the Romans as a treaty violation.

When Parthia had occupied Palestine, it had crowned its own vassal king, Antigonus, as ruler of Judea. When the Magi (Parthia's official king-makers) came to Jerusalem looking for "a new king of the Jews," it must have sounded to Herod and the Romans that the Parthians were there to re-assert their claim to Judea and dethrone Herod. Their speaking directly to Herod (who was Rome's king of the Jews) about wanting to find a "new king of the Jews" could be seen by the Romans as close to a declaration of war, given the region's history. The fact that King Herod "bit his tongue" and made no rash statement to the Magi and treated them with deference argues that the Parthians must have had an intimidating number of troops at Jerusalem to compel Herod to be so uncharacteristically meek. Since a major Roman-Parthian treaty had been in effect for over three decades, Rome felt unthreatened in the region, and would, consequently, have had a small garrison in Jerusalem.

Caesar's decree that no Parthian war be provoked also put Herod in an awkward position. While the Magi and Parthians were in Judea with no harmful intent, there is no way the Romans could be sure this "visit" was benign in nature. After the Parthians left, reports had to be filed with Caesar about this highly unusual event.

Herod was justifiably fearful of Parthian intentions in the area. Hadn't they come to anoint a replacement for him as "king of the Jews?" Hadn't they also deceived him by leaving the area without his knowledge or permission? Herod's murderous act in Bethlehem would also have inflamed Jewish opinion, and rumors of revolt against the hated Romans would have intensified. Faced with a possible Parthian invasion and/or a Jewish revolt, Herod needed more Roman soldiers in the region. In his reports to Caesar, Herod undoubtedly put himself in a favorable light, and warned Caesar that the Parthians had crossed the Euphrates, made a military reconnaissance to Jerusalem to spy out the city's weakness and were openly talking about crowning a "new king of the Jews." Because the Parthians' arrival in Jerusalem had scared the whole city, news of this extraordinary event would have spread quickly along

the trade routes connected to Jerusalem.

Also, in 2 B.C., Rome and Parthia were facing a possible conflict in Armenia over succession to the throne of Armenia. In both Armenia and Judea, the issue was whether Rome or Parthia would choose the kings of those nations. While Parthia had not forced the crisis in Armenia, Parthia's actions in Judea (the Magi's visit) were provocative. Rome's response was to send a large army "to the east" to prepare for a possible Parthian-Roman war. Rawlinson records that the Roman army arrived in 1 B.C., delayed by the retirement of Augustus Caesar's preferred commander, and that the situation was further muddled by the death of Phraates IV, Parthia's emperor during the visit of the Magi to Jerusalem.¹⁸ Herod the Great had also died by the time Roman reinforcements arrived, so all the major principals had a fresh viewpoint by the time Rome and Parthia had their "summit conference" at the Euphrates River.

Historical accounts do not mention the Parthian visit to Jerusalem as a factor in this near confrontation, but its occurrence can now be seen as adding to Roman fears of a Parthian invasion of its empire. Although the historical accounts mention only the Armenian dispute, it is worth noting that the Parthian and Roman armies did not confront each other in the mountains of Armenia but rather along the Euphrates River (the invasion route to Syria and Palestine). Since the Roman army arrived in 1 B.C., and the Roman-Parthian peace conference did not defuse the situation until 1 A.D., there was a two year period of "war fever" in the Mideast. Everyone in the region breathed a huge sigh of relief when war was averted. As we shall soon see, if a war had been fought (ending the Parthian-Roman detente), much of Jesus Christ's ministry in Judea could not have occurred.

Very little else is said in the Bible concerning the early years of Jesus Christ. Luke 2:40 states that Jesus grew up strong and healthy, and that he was filled with wisdom and favored by God. Luke 2:41-50 tells us that Jesus, at age twelve, amazed the teachers in the Temple with his wisdom. This passage shows that he was still being raised by his parents according to the Laws of God, as his family annually attended the Passover in Jerusalem (the location of the Temple). Jesus would have been seen by others as a devout, brilliant son of a traditional Jewish family.

Luke's account mentions that Jesus was absent from his family for a full day before they realized he was missing, and initiated a search which located him in the Temple. How could Jesus, a twelve year-old youth, be apart from his parents, and his parents not know about it for a full day? How did a mere twelve year old lad even come into the presence of the teachers of the Temple, the religious hierarchy of the Jewish religion? There is more here than meets the eye.

It would have been inappropriate for Joseph and Mary to have allowed Jesus to be wandering around Jerusalem unescorted by an adult. It seems apparent that Jesus was being escorted by an adult relative. That they were unconcerned about Jesus' absence for a full day before searching for him indicates that such absences were commonplace. It is recorded in the Jewish Talmud and in other sources that Joseph of Arimathea was the great-uncle of Jesus Christ.¹⁹ It is likely that Joseph of Arimathea was the adult relative who was serving as Jesus' mentor and escort.

Joseph of Arimathea was a powerful figure in Jewish society, and was apparently a member of the Sanhedrin itself. Years later, when the Sanhedrin plotted the death of Jesus, Luke 23:50-51 asserts that Joseph of Arimathea had not consented to the deed that was done to Jesus. That Joseph had not consented to the Sanhedrin's murderous plot indicates that Joseph was a member of the body with the inherent right to consent to (or dissent from) the actions of the Sanhedrin.

It is now clear how the young Jesus came to be involved in a discourse with the Temple hierarchy. Since Jesus' great-uncle, Joseph of Arimathea, had easy access to the highest echelons of Jewish society, it is likely that Jesus simply accompanied Joseph of Arimathea to the Temple, and eventually participated in a discussion between his great-uncle and the Temple teachers. Apparently, Jesus was with his great-uncle often enough that Jesus' prolonged absence from Joseph and Mary at that time was not a unique experience.

The remainder of Jesus' life until age thirty is a mystery. While the Bible is silent on the subject, it does give us a clue. The fact that Jesus was, by the age of twelve, spending more time in the care of Joseph of Arimathea and less time in the care of Joseph and Mary is significant. It appears that a major transition was occurring in Jesus' life. When Joseph and Mary found Jesus in the Temple after a three day search, (Luke 2:46) Mary reproved him with the words: "Why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously."(RSV) Jesus replied: "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Jesus, at the age of twelve, essentially told them: "Why were you even bothering to look for me?" The phrase "I must be in my Father's house" indicates that the Spirit of God was now leading him away from the household of his human family and into the work of his heavenly Father. The Bible adds that Jesus went back to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary, so Jesus did not yet make a "clean break" from his childhood home. However, the event at the Temple and Jesus' own words indicated his departure was imminent.

PART TWO: THE "MISSING EIGHTEEN YEARS"
(AGE 12-30)

Is it not incongruous that while Jesus Christ is the central character of the New Testament, nothing is written concerning the majority of his life? The Bible tells us a little about his first twelve years, a lot about his last three and one-half years, but nothing about an eighteen year span between ages twelve and thirty.

Luke 3:23 observes that Jesus was "about 30" when he became a public figure in Judea due to the advent of his ministry, but where had he been and what had he done in the intervening eighteen years? Since the Bible makes no direct comment about this period of time, we must rely on non-Biblical sources for information about these missing years.

The New Testament's silence about these eighteen years of Jesus' life is significant. Since Luke 1:2 states that the gospel narratives of Jesus' life were eye-witness accounts, it implies that the gospel writers had not witnessed any of the events of Jesus' adult life before age thirty. This further implies that Jesus was not even present in Palestine during the "missing" eighteen years. If he had been living in Judea or Galilee, it would have been impossible to hide such a precocious youth who had been worshipped by foreign nobility as a child, and who had awed the Temple's rulers with his brilliance at age twelve. Did the spiritual power that was manifesting itself in Jesus at age twelve go dormant for eighteen years? Did Jesus "quench the spirit" at age twelve so he could live as an obscure Galilean carpenter for eighteen years? That is highly unlikely. Indeed, the event at the Temple indicates that Jesus was in the process of separating from his parents to pursue the divine mission that He had been born to fulfill. It is the contention of this book that soon after the Temple incident, Jesus left Palestine altogether for eighteen years. There is biblical evidence supporting such a conclusion.

The account of Matthew 13:54-56 indicates that after this eighteen year period, Jesus was scarcely remembered in his own home town. Whereas, at age twelve, Jesus is amazing the teachers in the Jerusalem Temple with His wisdom, the common folk in his home town synagogue are asking themselves eighteen years later (after hearing Jesus speak): "Where did this man (Jesus) get this wisdom?" If the uncommon wisdom of Jesus had been present in Nazareth for those eighteen years, such a question would have been ludicrous. Note also verses 55-56 where the listeners ask: "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" This indicates that the members of his home town synagogue were struggling to identify or remember who Jesus was. The fact that they easily named all his immediate family members, and said "are they not all with us?" indicates that Jesus had not been "with them" as were his other family members. Their quizzical response to Jesus indicates that while Jesus had been gone from Nazareth for a long time, his immediate family members had remained there in the community. Obviously, if Jesus had been a hard-working carpenter in Nazareth all his life, the local citizenry would have easily recognised him. Yet they spoke as having never previously witnessed either his wisdom or power!

Jesus' wisdom had awed the most learned Jewish leaders in the nation at age twelve! To believe that Jesus lived the next eighteen years in Nazareth as a "humble carpenter" while showing no wisdom at all until age thirty, one has to believe that for eighteen years Jesus "quenched" the Holy Spirit that was burning brightly in him at age twelve! Christians are forbidden in I Thessalonians 5:19 to "quench the spirit." Did Jesus do what Christians are forbidden to do? Hardly! Yet traditional dogma (that Jesus lived inconspicuously in Nazareth until age thirty) advocates just such a view.

The logical conclusion is that Jesus did not work as a carpenter in Nazareth during the

"missing eighteen years." In fact, the Bible offers no statement that Jesus was ever employed as a carpenter during his adult life. Matthew 13:55 refers to Jesus as a "carpenter's son," not as a "carpenter." Luke's account about Jesus' meeting with the Temple elders at age 12 records Jesus declaring that his future was not linked to the profession of his physical father, but with the calling of his spiritual Father in heaven. When his parents chided Jesus for being in the Temple rather than with them, Jesus replied "know you not that I must be about my Father's business?" This does not portray Jesus as a "rebel" since verse 51 shows that he was an obedient youth, but it shows that as early as age twelve, God's Spirit was drawing Jesus away from the carpenter "business" of Joseph, and toward the spiritual "business" of God.

As a child growing up in a carpenter's household, Jesus was certainly familiar with carpentry, but the Bible does not assert that he was a carpenter in Nazareth during the "missing years." Mark's account of Jesus' visit to his old home synagogue (Mark 6:1-6) does quote townsfolk as calling Jesus a "carpenter." However, these were the same townsfolk who struggled to identify Jesus, as the context confirms. Note that the Bible itself does not declare "Jesus was a carpenter," but rather quotes the comments of those who did not know very well. That some hometown folk would call him a "carpenter" is consistent with the likelihood that Jesus had been a carpenter's apprentice to Joseph when they had last seen him.

This passage also declares that Jesus had four brothers and at least two sisters. Jesus was an oldest son in a family of at least seven siblings. Whatever the number of siblings, it is clear that Mary had a large family after Jesus was born.

The Bible never mentions Joseph, the step-father of Jesus, after the episode of Jesus being in the Temple at age twelve. Since Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the siblings of Jesus are cited as living in Nazareth when Jesus is 30 years old and Joseph is not mentioned, it is apparent that Joseph died during those "missing years." Since Joseph of Arimathea was already spending a lot of time with Jesus at age twelve, he likely became Jesus' guardian after Joseph died. Joseph of Arimathea was surely a good role model for Jesus as Luke 23:50 refers to him as "good" and "just."

Given the fact that Joseph of Arimathea was a man of prominence in the Jewish community, and Jesus' precocious wisdom was known to the Temple elders in his pre-teen years, how is it possible that no record of Jesus' activities in Palestine exists for the missing eighteen years of Jesus' life? The logical answer is that he was not present in Palestine during that time!

Ordinarily, with the death of a father, the oldest son (even a young one like Jesus) would have been compelled to begin working for a living to support the family. However, since Joseph of Arimathea was a wealthy relative (who could guarantee the economic health of the family), Jesus was free to pursue his real calling in life. Also, the Parthian Magi had lavished gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh upon Jesus when they had visited him shortly after his birth. Since this large sum of wealth would have been held "in trust" for him by either his parents or Joseph of Arimathea, Jesus could have tapped that wealth to provide for his family's needs without having to work as a carpenter.

In *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, E. Raymond Capt cites evidence that Joseph of Arimathea was an international merchant involved with the tin trade in the British Isles. Earlier chapters of this book documented that the British Isles were Israelite regions since at least the reign of Solomon. Also, chapter four presented evidence that large bodies of the tribes of Simeon and Dan entered Briton and Ireland around 721 B.C. when ancient Israel fell to Assyria, adding more Israelites to the population base of the British Isles. It is hardly surprising that Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the tribe of Judah, would be trading with people descended from the other tribes of Israel.

Capt cites the account of Gildas Badonicus (an early British historian of the sixth century A.D.) which refers to Joseph of Arimathea as a "nobilis decurio."²⁰ The very fact that an early historian of Britain discusses Joseph of Arimathea at all gives weight to accounts that Joseph was involved with the events of early Briton. Capt asserts that Joseph's role was as follows:

"The same title 'Decurio' [applied to Joseph of Arimathea] is used by St. Jerome in his translation of the Vulgate of St. Mark's 'honourable counsellor' (Mark 15:43) and St. Luke's 'counsellor.' (Luke 23:50) In the Roman world, a 'decurio' denoted an important Roman office, usually connected with the general management of a mining district. The implication is that Joseph was in charge of Rome's mining interests in Britain. Such a position would require Joseph to spend a considerable amount of time away from his homeland."²¹

Indeed, Joseph had to be a prominent man in the Roman world to receive immediate access to Pilate, the Roman administrator of Judea, during the intense political turmoil surrounding the crucifixion (Mark 15:43-45). Unless Joseph of Arimathea was both known to and trusted by Pilate and the Roman rulers of Judea, he would not have been allowed swift access to Pontius Pilate at so sensitive and critical a time. Capt also states that during that period, both Roman and Jewish law called for the disposal of the bodies of criminals in common pits with all memory of them removed, unless the body was promptly claimed by a relative.²² The fact that Joseph of Arimathea came forward to claim Jesus' body is convincing evidence that he was a relative of Jesus. That he obtained such approval not by going to an lower official, but to Pilate himself, indicates that he was used to doing business with the highest Roman officials.

However, what of the activities of Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus during the "missing eighteen years?" If Jesus were under Joseph of Arimathea's tutelage during those years, he would have spent considerable time traveling, given that Joseph's business involved international trade between the nations of that day. While the information which follows is based on legends and traditions, they are buttressed by the Bible's implication that Jesus was absent from Palestine for a prolonged period of time. Obviously, Jesus went somewhere during that time, and legends and traditions offer the only evidence that exists.

Many traditions assert that Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus were not only present in Britain, but had homes in the area of Glastonbury, England. Supporting these traditions, Capt cites evidence that Glastonbury bore two titles from ancient times - "Secretum Domini" and "Domus Dei" (Latin for "The Secret of the Lord," and "The House of God").²³ William Steuart McBirnie, in his book, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, also wrote concerning these traditions:

"There certainly is no other tradition known concerning the history of St. Joseph of Arimathea and since the British tradition is vigorous we see no reason to challenge it...If in any country there is a strong tradition concerning some Apostolic figures, and no counter-tradition elsewhere, then we at least stand on the ground of possibility and even probability. So it is with...St. Joseph."²⁴

Capt also lists a fifteenth century document that Joseph of Arimathea converted King Arviragus of first century A.D. Britain to the Christian religion, and that this early king in Britain gave Joseph and his party twelve portions of tax-free land in the area of Glastonbury.²⁵ This tax-free land in Glastonbury is confirmed in the Domesday Book of early English history under the title "Domus Dei."²⁶ The fact that there were twelve portions of land is significant. Did God inspire this symbolism - one portion for each of the twelve tribes of Israel?

Another fact cited by Capt is that the Druids worshipped a "trinity" of gods "known as 'Beli,'

the Creator as regards the past; 'Taran,' the controlling providence of the present, and 'Yesu,' the coming saviour of the future."²⁷ The name "Beli" preserves a Hebrew word for "Lord",²⁸ and in its expectation of a coming "Yesu" savior, Druidism thus anticipated Christianity and pointed to the coming saviour under the very name by which Christ was called."²⁹ The name "Jesus" is from the Greek, but the Hebrew name of Jesus was likely "Yeshuah," meaning "salvation."³⁰ The presence of Hebrew words in Britain's Druidic religion indicates that it had some roots in the religion of the ancient Israelites. This is logical given the dominant presence of Israelites in Britain throughout the first millennium B.C.

Other ancient legends assert that Jesus travelled as far east as India and Nepal.³¹ There is a biblical basis for legends that Jesus could have travelled both in the British Isles, and as far into Asia as India. In Matthew 15:24, Jesus said: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel." The House of Israel refers to the ten tribes of Israel who have been identified in earlier chapters as including the early Britons, the Sacae/Saka Scythians and the Parthians in Asia. Since the area of Parthian/Saka dominance extended as far as India,³² groups of the ten tribes of Israel could be found that far into Asia. Since Jesus said He was "sent" to those ten tribes, it is logical that He travelled to where the various tribes of the House of Israel lived in the first century A.D. Since the British Isles and even portions of India (at the eastern edge of Parthia's empire) were then inhabited by the tribes of Israel, Jesus' presence among these people would be a fulfillment of that scripture.

As seen earlier, Jesus lived during a period of peace between Parthia and Rome. During this period, trade flourished between the merchants of both empires. Rawlinson records that this trade was "considerable," and that merchants brought "various metals and numerous manufactured articles" from Rome into Parthia.³³ Given the indications that Joseph of Arimathea was involved in the Roman mining (metals) trade, and that Joseph's homeland in Judea was ideally located to facilitate exports into Parthia and Asia via overland trade routes, it is likely that Joseph's business included the export of metal products into Parthia and Asia.

As Jesus grew, he likely became a trusted member of Joseph's international trading business. Who could possibly be better suited than Jesus to supervise Joseph's business trade with Parthian territories? Jesus had already been worshipped by members of the Magi, the Parthian ruling elite! Jesus was assured of a very warm reception in Parthia due to the Magi's favor, and would have been given access to any portion of Parthia's sphere of influence that He wished to visit. Jesus' participation in Joseph's international trading business gave him an ideal opportunity to visit those regions to which the ten tribes of Israel had migrated (Briton, Parthia, Scythia and other Asian locations).

One other possibility exists. Earlier chapters have shown that both the Israelite/Phoenician and the Carthaginian Empires of the first millennium B.C. planted colonies of Israelites in North America. It was also shown that some Carthaginians likely fled North Africa to seek refuge in their North American colony after the fall of Carthage.

In chapter five we also saw evidence that this Punic colony in North America lasted until about 500 A.D., so there was a significant Israelite civilisation in North America during the life of Christ. Since Christ was visiting the regions of the earth inhabited by the descendants of the ten tribes, could He have visited ancient North America as well? The surprising answer may be "Yes!"

Consider the Quetzalcoatl legends of the ancient New World. While "Quetzalcoatl" is usually depicted as a serpent god, the legends record that some Quetzalcoatl legends are quite different.

In "Voyages to the New World", Nigel Davies includes a compilation of various Quetzalcoatl

legends. These legends include the assertions that Quetzalcoatl "had a white skin and...was traditionally expected to return...but once only, in human form," that "amid the lamentations of his people, Quetzalcoatl thereafter set out on his long journey to the place in the East where he was destined to meet his end," that "he rose to heaven and entered therein," and that "he remained four days in the land of the dead and, on the eighth day, reappeared as the Morning Star."³⁴ Davies also comments that Quetzalcoatl is depicted as being a "god in human form," and that he was the "creator God".³⁵ It is also significant that the humanized Quetzalcoatl legends appear only in the Christian era.

There are additional Peruvian legends about a deity named Viracocha, who "departed across the sea," but was "destined to return."³⁶ Viracocha is also portrayed in Spanish sources "like Quetzalcoatl - as a benevolent figure who travelled from place to place, preaching repentance and performing miracles."³⁷ Charles Boland's book, "They All Discovered America", adds that "the first Quetzalcoatl is said to have sprung from a virgin birth."³⁸

Old World legends about a human-deity who was a benevolent white (Semitic) person, preached repentance, performed miracles, was both divine and human at the same time, was born of a virgin, was from the Old World, took a long journey to the East (across the Atlantic toward the Old World) on a mission of self-sacrifice, was dead, but was resurrected and rose to heaven, and who would return at a future time unmistakably point to one (and only one) historical person: Jesus Christ. Indeed, many of the doctrines about the humanised Quetzalcoatl parallel Christian teachings about Jesus Christ! Even Quetzalcoatl's title (the "Morning Star"), is one of Jesus Christ's biblical titles (Revelation 22:16). The many Christian themes attached to the early Quetzalcoatl strongly indicate that the humanized Quetzalcoatl represented Jesus Christ who visited the New World during the "lost" years of his life. These ancient New World legends even record that he returned to the Old World aware of the destiny of self-sacrifice which was ahead of him.

The fanciful legends depicting Quetzalcoatl as a serpent god do not, of course, apply to Jesus Christ. Since Satan is depicted as a "serpent" in the Bible (Genesis 3:1-13, Revelation 12:9-15), it is apparent that the worship of Quetzalcoatl was subverted from biblical themes into a form of Satan-worship (even including rites of human sacrifice). The separate legendary figure of Viracocha may also be based on Jesus Christ, or even one of the Apostles who were sent by Christ to "all nations" (Matthew 28:19).

Earlier chapters presented much evidence that Israelite civilisations were established in the New World by the Hebrew Phoenicians, Carthaginians, and Iberians. These Israelites, by bringing Old World knowledge and customs to the New World, had a large role in the founding of New World civilisations. For example, the Carthaginians who colonised the New World were Israelites who practiced human sacrifice as part of their Baal worship. The fact that ancient New World cultures practiced human sacrifice indicates this grisly practice was planted in the New World by the Carthaginians. Since Carthaginians were also North Africans (familiar with Egypt's pyramids), it is also likely that the presence of pyramids in the Meso-American civilisations of the New World attests to linkages between the two regions.

At this juncture, we will digress to examine this subject. While this will not directly involve the life of Christ, it will support the contention that Jesus Christ was in the New World by establishing that the Christian religion was present in the New World soon after the lifetime of Jesus Christ - demonstrating that the sea route to the New World was known during Christ's lifetime. To the extent people in the New World were Israelites, it provides a biblical basis for Jesus Christ to visit the New World as Matthew 15:24 records that he was "sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (the ten tribes)."

Matthew 15 contains a persuasive argument on this point. In Matthew 15:21-28, a gentile

woman asked Jesus to heal her daughter (something that Jesus readily did for Jews). Jesus initially refused to help, stating he was sent only to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Only via a repeated, humble approach did this gentile woman move Jesus to help her. Jesus' reluctance to help gentiles "in his own backyard" argues that he would not have wasted any time journeying across the Atlantic to visit or evangelise inhabitants of the New World unless they were Israelites!

We have already seen much evidence documenting that there was a substantial Israelite presence in the New World both before and during Christ's lifetime. There is also evidence that Israelites were present well after his lifetime as well. Some of this evidence will be examined to demonstrate that trans-atlantic voyages were possible at many times in the Christian era, including the first century A.D.

The Toltec civilisation flourished in Meso-America from 900 A.D. until 1200 A.D. The Encyclopedia Americana states:

"Their capital was Tollan, now Tula...the name 'Toltec' is derived from the name of their capital...the most important figure in Toltec history was...Topiltzin."³⁹

One of the branches of the Israelite tribe of Issachar was named after "Tola" (Numbers 26:23). Notice the similarity between the Israelite name Tola and the root words Tollan, Tula, and Toltec, indicating the tribe of Issachar was involved in founding the Toltec civilisation. An intermediate location where they may have also left their tribal name is found in Thule, Greenland. An analysis of Topiltzin's name points to a Viking/Scandinavian origin. His name concludes with the syllable "-zin." The letters "z" and "s" are phonetically similar. Substituting an "s" for the "z" in his name, we get Topilt-sin, or Topilt-son. The suffix "-son" or "-son" is very common at the ends of Scandinavian names. The consonants "S-N" or "Z-N" at the end of Topiltzin's name argue for a Scandinavian origin for this man.

An article by Lawrence Athy, Jr. printed in the Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications, and entitled "Foreign Influences on the Priesthood and Nobility of Pre-Columbian America" maintains that the Olmec and Toltec civilisations were ruled and directed by foreign elites who were tall and bearded. This foreign elite was in sharp contrast to the squat, flat-nosed and rarely-bearded Indian peasants over whom the foreign elites ruled. Clearly, the foreign elites exhibited characteristics of Semitic people from the Old World. Athy notes that by the time of the founding of the Toltec civilisation, these "tall bearded elites" had been present in the New World for "over two thousand years."⁴⁰

The Toltec ruler named Topiltzin was "a venerable and devout person...an old man with a long red beard turning white...who had come from a foreign country."⁴¹ Athy further relates:

"Topiltzin and his Toltecs were gentle people, were opposed by a wicked leader of many of the native people, and were persecuted to the point that the 'Toltecs abandoned this country and returned to their place of origin.' Topiltzin called together the people of Tula explaining that he was leaving due to persecution, and 'prophesied the arrival of strangers who would come...from the east'...thus the people were to be punished for their mistreatment of the Toltecs.'...Topiltzin also told them that the arrival of the strangers would not be witnessed by them...but would be seen by the fourth or fifth generation."⁴²

The Spaniards under Cortez arrived approximately three hundred years later and fulfilled Topiltzin's prophecy about the destruction of the Aztec culture (which had followed the Toltecs). Athy adds:

"Cortez had arrived in the year 1 Reed in the Aztec calendar...the year in which Topiltzin had

been born - the year in which the return of his sons had been forecast. "⁴³

In chapter five, it was noted that Christian inscriptions dating from the first to the third centuries A.D. were found in the Mayan ruins of Comalcalco, indicating Christianity existed in the New World very soon after the life of Jesus Christ. There is further evidence that Christianity was at one time well-established and widespread in the New World, but that it had degenerated over time as Christian symbols and practices were blended into the sun-worship religion of the native populations found by the Spaniards. Consider the following:

"Many of the Catholic rituals taught to the Maya were already familiar to them, to the great surprise of the early missionaries. The Maya practiced baptism in water, confirmation, fasting...The cross was a familiar ikon...When the friars explained that the cross was the sign of God, who had died on the Tree of Good and Evil and now lives in the heavens, the Maya accepted it as another version of a story they already knew."⁴⁴

The cross, in particular, was a well-known symbol in the New World, especially among the ruling elites. Walter Stender wrote:

"When the Spaniards conquered Peru, they were astonished and puzzled to find crosses in the temples and palaces of the royal Inca family...For the Incas the use of the cross was a continuance from preceding cultures...it becomes evident that the cross had a religious significance."⁴⁵

Stender also records the following:

"The Mayas used it [the cross]...in one of their glyphs... Legends exist from various sites in South America that white men came to the natives to teach them a better way of social life. A similarity is obvious with the well-known Meso-American traditions, where white men arrived and tried to develop the cultural level of the natives...all these white men...were bearded, and another feature is particularly remarkable: the garments of these white visitors been decorated with white and black crosses...At the time of the Spanish conquest there was a broad awareness in South America of an early presence of white residents..."⁴⁶

Stender's article documents that the symbol of the cross had been present in the New World at least as early as the middle of the first millennium. Combined with the evidence (from chapter five) that a Christian inscription had been placed at Comalcalco in the first to the third centuries A.D., it can be seen that Christianity had been present in the New World from virtually the beginning of the Christian era!

During the Middle Ages, there were Christian Norseman allied with the Catholic Church of Rome. The Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications has reproduced a series of letters from three different popes, dated 1282, 1448 and 1492 A.D., written to Norse bishops and a church in Greenland.⁴⁷ The letter of Pope Martin IV to a Norwegian Archbishop in 1282 A.D. concerned the tithes of the Greenland churches, and the letter of Pope Nicolaus V in 1448 A.D. acknowledged that Christians in Greenland "For almost 600 years [had] kept the faith of Christ..."⁴⁸ This extraordinary papal letter places Christians in Greenland in the ninth century A.D.

Viking voyages to the New World had been taking place for centuries prior to Pope Nicolaus V's letter, and Icelandic history records that a Catholic bishop named Eric Gnuppsen travelled from Iceland to the New World (Vinland) in the year 1121 A.D.⁴⁹

This concludes the above digression on the evidence of Christianity in the New World. It was deemed necessary to confirm that Christians were voyaging to the New World not only in the

first century A.D., but at many other times prior to the arrival of Columbus or Cortez. While not directly relating to the life of Jesus Christ, it does provide background information indicating that it is not so revolutionary a proposal to assert the Jesus Christ visited the New World during the eighteen year period about which the Bible is silent. We will now examine specific evidence that it was possible for Jesus Christ to have made a journey to the New World in his lifetime.

There is no doubt that the means for Jesus Christ to travel to the New World did exist. Earlier chapters have shown that huge Phoenician and Carthaginian vessels crossed the Atlantic throughout the first millennium B.C., and Roman vessels also learned the routes in later centuries.

Records exist that the Romans had ocean-going vessels as large as 1200-1600 tons displacement, and that such vessels could be 180 feet in length, have a beam of 45 feet and a cargo hold 44 feet deep.⁵⁰ Josephus records that he rode in a Roman passenger ship carrying 600 people⁵¹ and Acts 27:9-36 records that Paul rode in a Roman vessel carrying 276 people in a dangerous sailing season (when a reduced passenger total was likely). Roman artifacts have also been found in the New World. Boland comments on Roman artifacts found on the American east coast.⁵² In *Saga America*, Dr. Fell documents that Roman coins, artifacts and inscriptions have been found in the American states of Alabama, Tennessee, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Georgia, and others.⁵³ Dr. Fell's comments on Jewish coins (second century A.D.) being found in Kentucky, and the Missouri-Arkansas border region confirm that sailing routes from Judea to ancient North America were known in the early Christian era.⁵⁴ Dr. Fell also wrote concerning a Hebrew inscription found in Tennessee:

"...the Bat Creek stone from Tennessee, supposed by the Smithsonian finders to be Cherokee, but recognised by all Hebrew scholars who have studied it as a Hebrew text of the first century A.D. Dr Robert Stieglitz of New York reads it as 'A comet for the Hebrews,' with reference to Halley's comet, which 'hung over Jerusalem like a flaming sword' in the year 69 A.D. during the first revolt...The evidence suggests that Kentucky and Tennessee became havens of refuge for persecuted Hebrews..."⁵⁵

The above piece of evidence places Judean Jews travelling to ancient North America in the first century A.D. (Just decades after Jesus Christ's lifetime). From this evidence, it can be seen that trans-atlantic routes existed during the lifetime of Jesus Christ. Since Joseph of Arimathea was involved in an international trading firm which necessitated long oceanic voyages, Jesus would have ready access to sailing routes to North America. If Joseph was also a Roman official (a "decurio"), he would have had privileged access to Rome's knowledge of routes to North America.

There is an episode in the Bible which indicates that Jesus was physically adapted to the effects of long ocean voyages. Mark 4:35-41 describes an event in which Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee and were caught in a storm. Verse 37 states: "there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full." Afraid for their lives, the disciples found Jesus "in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow." After being forceably awakened by the disciples, Jesus commanded the wind to "be still," and an immediate calm prevailed. Apparently Jesus was sleeping in a lower deck. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was a human being as well as the Son of God, and that He "was in all points tempted like as we are".

If Jesus experienced all the sensations which we experience, his human body was subject to sea sickness and nausea. That Jesus was able to sleep on a ship that was rolling and pitching in a severe storm indicates that His human body had previously become adapted to

the buffeting of waves and the movements of sea swells. His involvement with Joseph of Arimathea's international trading business would have given him ample time to get his "sea legs." While the context of this account shows that this storm was the most severe experienced by these fishermen on an inland lake, it was likely less severe than the storms and sea swells experienced by Jesus on the open ocean (enabling him to sleep through a storm on an inland lake).

Another biblical account also supports the concept that Jesus was outside of Palestine during the "hidden years." In John 10:16, Jesus had a discourse with the Jews in which he said:

"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also must I bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

In Matthew 10:6 and 15:24, Jesus referred to the "lost sheep" of the House of Israel (the ten tribes of Israel). In Mark 6:34, Jesus regarded the multitudes who followed him as "sheep," and most of those multitudes would have been Jews of Judea. Since sheep dwell in "folds," what was meant by Jesus' imagery of John 10:16 that he had "sheep" in more than one "fold?" Jesus refers to Judea (the land of the Jews) as "this fold," but informs them that they are not the only "fold." Clearly, the other "fold" was where the descendants of the ten tribes of Israel lived. Since Jesus told them "Other sheep I have [in other folds]," his use of the present tense indicates that it was already an accomplished fact: he already had "sheep" (followers) in a "fold" other than Judea. Since there is no evidence of Jesus being in Judea from ages 12 to 30, he had plenty of time to visit and preach to the descendants of the ten tribes of Israel during those eighteen years.

The Gospel books of the Bible (Matthew-John) are eyewitness accounts of Jesus' ministry to the House of Judah, which lasted 3 ½ years. None of his ministry to the House of Israel is recorded for us in the Bible even though the Bible implies it had occurred prior to Jesus' ministry in Judea. The life of Jesus, as presented in the Bible, is like a book in which only the first and the last few chapters are included, with all the middle chapters (the majority of the book) left out!

The Apostle John wrote that the Gospel accounts did not provide a comprehensive account of the life of Christ. John 21:25 states:

"there were also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

John's assertion that the life of Jesus was extraordinarily active and eventful is significant in light of the fact that the Bible says nothing about his life from age 12 to age 30. It is logical that many of Jesus' undescribed activities spoken of by John 21:25 were not done in Judea, or they would have been discussed in the "eyewitness" gospels. Many of Jesus' unwritten exploits must have been performed outside of Judea, and this is consistent with legends that Jesus travelled to many parts of the ancient world.

There are reasons to believe that the response of the ten tribes of Israel to Jesus was favorable. Since some of Parthia's ruling class worshipped Jesus when he was a child, they likely welcomed him eagerly in Parthia's Asian empire when he was a young man. The positive legends about the first Quetzalcoatl (which parallel many biblical facts about Jesus' life) indicate that he made a lasting, favorable impression in the New World. The Druids of the British Isles and Northwest Europe had long expected a savior named Yesu (Yeshuah), and the legends of early Briton record a warm response to Joseph of Arimathea and other early Christians. It seems apparent why Jesus told the Jews he had "sheep" in other "folds."

The New Testament records that Jesus was well-received by the common people of the House of Judah. (Indeed, who could respond negatively to one who miraculously healed so many people?) It was the Jewish hierarchy which reacted negatively to Jesus. The reason is simple. The nations of the ten tribes of Israel were sovereign nations at the time Jesus visited them. Therefore, they didn't resent that Jesus' mission did not include physical "salvation" from oppressors. They didn't need any! In sharp contrast, the House of Judah (the portion that lived in Judea) was hungry for physical "salvation" from Roman oppression. Their rulers had little interest in a message of spiritual salvation; they wanted a Messiah bringing physical salvation from Rome!

As Jesus approached age thirty, he said good-bye both to his great-uncle's international mining and trading business, to his "sheep" living in the "folds" of the ten tribes of Israel, and returned to his native land of Judea. The satisfying years of international responsibility and warm welcomes among many diverse and distant people were over. The difficult years of his earthly mission were now ahead of him, and he knew it.

The New Testament teaches that if Jesus Christ had failed in his mission (to atone for mankind's sins) God the Father (the "Most High God" of the Old Testament), would not have permitted a single human being to ever taste eternal life since mankind would have had no atoning sacrifice. If Jesus failed, all mankind died with him. This young Jewish man, with the royal blood of King David in his veins, and filled with the Holy Spirit of his Father (the "Most High God"), must have had a tremendous load on his mind as he made what was to be his last trip home. He must have felt like he was "carrying the world on his shoulders" as he returned to Judea, for so he was.

PART THREE: HIS MINISTRY AND DEATH!

The Bible asserts that Jesus Christ began his ministry at the age of thirty (Luke 3:23). This is significant because the Old Testament required a man to be thirty years old in order to serve in the priesthood (Numbers 4:3). Jesus Christ, who was God in the flesh, was not subject to the normal human maturation schedule. His discourse with the Temple elders indicated that he was spiritually mature at the age of twelve. However, due to the sensitivities of the Jewish community in Judea, Jesus did not enter their culture in a priestly role until he attained the age of thirty.

When Jesus returned to Judea, one of his first public acts was to be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-16). This affirmed the ministry of John the Baptist, and set an example for his future followers concerning the necessity of water baptism. Since he went to the Jordan River to be baptised, and Matthew 3:16 states "Jesus, when he was baptised went up...out of the water," it is clear that Jesus' baptism was by immersion.

After his baptism, Matthew 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-15 tell us of a direct confrontation between Jesus and Satan the devil. Satan repeatedly tempted Jesus in an effort to entice him into doing something sinful or idolatrous. If Jesus had failed the test, he could not have served as the sinless "Passover lamb" which mankind needed for its salvation. Luke 4:2 asserts that Jesus fasted for 40 days to prepare for his spiritual battle with Satan. Fasting is frequently discussed in the Bible as a means of drawing nearer to God.

One of Satan's temptations involved his showing Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world," and saying: "all this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine."

Satan claimed to be the unseen ruler of the earth, who had the authority to select national leaders as he wished. Furthermore, he was offering temporal power over all the earth to Jesus if he chose Satan as his lord. Significantly, Jesus did not dispute Satan's claim to being the unseen lord of all the world's nations, and that he had the power to select their human rulers.

Jesus, in resisting these temptations, was qualifying to replace Satan as the ruler of the earth, but the Bible is clear that the actual rulership of Christ will not occur until his second coming. His first coming was to qualify to replace Satan as world ruler, and to become an atonement for all mankind so they could have eternal life. The Bible acknowledges Satan as the "prince of this world" (John 12:31 and 14:30), and acknowledges him as "the prince" of this world even after the death of Christ (Ephesians 2:2). He will remain the "prince" of this world until Jesus dethrones him at his second coming, at which point Revelation 20:1-3 states that Satan will be imprisoned and restrained from invisibly manipulating the nations.

Consider Satan's sweeping offer and Jesus' response. Jesus did not challenge Satan's right to give the world rulership which he offered; however, he declined a temporal world rulership under Satan's auspices in favor of a future, eternal world rulership under God (Revelation 19:11-16, 20:1-6).

Remember these facts: (A) Jesus had already been worshipped by some of the king-making Magi of Parthia (an ancient "superpower"), and his status as a relative of the Arsacids made him eligible for Parthia's throne, (B) Jesus had been well-received in Briton, and his Hebrew name identified him as the promised Messiah (the "Yesu") expected by the Druids, (C) Jesus had already gained a following in the New World, and was likely the subject of the first Quetzalcoatl legends, and (D) the Jews were expecting the Messiah during his lifetime due to the timetable of Old Testament prophecies. In other words, Satan's offer was quite practical

in human terms. The physical conditions were already in place for Jesus to be made a powerful world leader! Satan was offering his services to use the above circumstances to make Jesus a world emperor if he was willing to choose short-term gain instead of long-term good. Thankfully, Jesus resisted his offer.

It should now be apparent that Jesus Christ was hardly an obscure carpenter in Galilee. At the time he began his ministry, he had concluded visits to the far-flung ten tribes of Israel, utilising his excellent relations with the Parthian Magi to travel east into Asia as well as the transoceanic routes available to him via Joseph of Arimathea's business to travel westward to Europe and the New World. Jesus would have been known to the influential classes of the Parthian Empire, Briton, the New World, and also the Roman officials of the countries in which Joseph's mining and trading company conducted business. Luke 2:52 hints that He was well-liked wherever he went. Luke wrote that after Jesus amazed the teachers in the Temple with his precocious wisdom at age twelve, He: "...increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

Luke's comment that Jesus' wisdom and favor (fame) continued to increase after age twelve contradicts the modern viewpoint that Jesus' went "dormant" to live as an obscure carpenter in Galilee until He "burst" onto the scene at age thirty. Since Jesus was unknown in his Judean hometown at the time He began His ministry at age thirty, it is apparent that the "favor" He had in the eyes of "man" occurred in regions far from Judea and Galilee.

After the confrontation between Jesus and Satan, Jesus began his ministry with miraculous events and numerous appearances in synagogues (Matthew 4:23-25 and Luke 4:14-15). He did mighty miracles, and people "glorified" him (Luke 4:15). Luke 4:16-30 then describes his visit to the synagogue in Nazareth (his home town) where they tried to kill him. This event contained several harbingers of the future impact of Jesus' ministry in Judea.

Luke 4:16 begins by stating that Jesus "came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up." Notice that Luke did not say Nazareth was "where Jesus lived," but rather that Nazareth is "where he had been brought up." This language indicates that Jesus had lived in Nazareth only during his formative years. Indeed, the Living Bible renders this passage as "he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home." Luke's comment clearly indicates that Jesus did not live in Nazareth as a young man or adult!

Luke then tells us that Jesus "as his custom was, went into the synagogue on the Sabbath Day, and stood up for to read." Jesus was still loyal to the religious traditions taught him by his parents, and it was customary for Jesus to observe the Sabbath Day. In other words, Jesus was acting as would any devout Jew of the period. If Jesus had been present in his hometown synagogue from age twelve to age thirty, his wisdom and fame (attested to by Luke) would have been well-known to them as Jesus (even at age twelve) was making no effort to conceal his spiritual maturity. Yet verse 22 shows - that the congregation "wondered at the gracious words" of Jesus and said "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

To reiterate an earlier argument, the local congregation had not experienced Jesus' power or wisdom during the intervening years, and were struggling to identify him. Clearly, Jesus had not been there in many years! If Jesus lived in Nazareth, one must also believe that God's Spirit, which moved Jesus so powerfully at age twelve, went completely dormant for eighteen years and suddenly re-awoke in Him after a long hiatus. This author finds such a viewpoint untenable. All scriptural examples show that once God's Spirit is moving a person, it either waxes stronger or is "quenched." It is not a commodity that can stagnate or go dormant for almost two decades. Indeed, in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25), Jesus regarded a servant who "went dormant" with his gift to be worthy of punishment! It is impossible that Jesus "went dormant" for eighteen years!

Jesus then read (and applied to Himself) a passage from Isaiah 61 which states: "the spirit of the Lord is upon me because he [God] hath anointed me to preach the gospel..." Jesus openly claimed to be the Messiah, the "anointed one" of God when he stated: "this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." In verse 23 Jesus tells them "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself." Jesus is here speaking in the future tense, indicating he already knew he would be mocked during his eventual suffering on the cross.

Mark 6:4 parallels Luke's account, and quotes Jesus as saying: "a prophet is not without honor, but [except] in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." This speaks volumes. Jesus affirmed that he was a prophet, but predicted that his own nation (the Jews), his own community and his own relatives would not recognize Him as the Messiah. There is another implication of this statement which could easily be missed. This statement also implies that while He would not be honored in His own country as a prophet, He would be honored outside His own country, community and family (He would not be "without honor").

Jesus then ended His message to His home-town folk by mentioning an account in which Elijah healed and saved a gentile from Sidon rather than any of his own countrymen. This foreshadows the historical fact that while being generally rejected by his countrymen (the Jews), the benefits of Jesus' ministry would be received by those outside of Judea. This happened when Paul, the Apostles and others spread the message that he was the Messiah to all lands while the Jews mostly rejected him.

Jesus' message infuriated his listeners. They attempted to kill him, and Jesus escaped this "lynch mob" by "passing through the midst of them." The fact that those who sought to kill him did not recognize him as he passed through the angry crowd further illustrates two points. It confirms the contention that he had been gone from his hometown a long time (otherwise they would have recognized him easily), and it also shows that Jesus was an average looking Jew who did not stand out in a crowd.

That Jesus was an average-looking Jew debunks a modern myth about him. The average Jew of Jesus' day did not have "hippie" length hair, as Jesus is depicted as having on modern pictures. If his hair were inordinately long, he would have easily been recognized in a crowd of Jews. Since Paul the Apostle observed in I Corinthians 11:14 that it is a "shame" for a man to have long hair, it is evident that Jesus could not have had long hair. Some confusion on this matter may result from a misunderstanding of the terms "Nazarite" and "Nazarene." A "Nazarite" was one who, during the length of a vow, refrained from drinking alcohol or cutting his hair (Numbers 6:2-5). Since growing long hair would separate them from the rest of the male population, Nazarites could easily be identified by their long hair. Jesus was a "Nazarene" (indicating that he was from Nazareth), but he was no Nazarite, since he drank alcohol (Matthew 11:19 shows that Jesus' detractors called him a "winebibber" because they thought he drank too much wine).

This episode is atypical of Jesus! It shows Jesus going to the synagogue of his boyhood home and rebuking them so strongly that even the "religious" people of the synagogue tried to murder him! This would sound strange if it were not for several hints in the text. The account of this episode in Mark 6:1-6 shows that while the locals voiced no ill feelings toward his mother and siblings, verse 3 states that the townspeople "were offended" at Jesus! Why?

There is a strong implication here that when Jesus left Nazareth soon after age twelve, his memories of Nazareth were not happy ones. Indeed, since Jesus had the Spirit of God from birth, there are many ways in which Jesus would not have "fit in" with the attitudes, actions and interests of the other children in the area. Since Jesus lived a sinless life, he would have

been unwilling to participate in the usual trouble-making and mischief that characterise young boys, making him a target of considerable "hazing" by the other children. Also, since he could confound the Temple elders at age twelve, Jesus was "light years" ahead of his peers in maturity, and would have had almost nothing in common with other boys his age. Also, the strange visit of foreign dignitaries (the Magi) to lavish gifts on Jesus as a little child would have made some townspeople jealous or suspicious of him. If the Magi continued to send emissaries to him over the years (a distinct possibility), this action would have further complicated his life in a rural town of Galilee.

After the death of Joseph, his step-father, his mother Mary may have thought it was best for Jesus to leave the area, and become an "apprentice" to his great uncle and international businessman, Joseph of Arimathea. When Jesus came back to his home area after an eighteen year absence, many of the people in that synagogue were likely the very ones who had hazed and ostracised Jesus when he was a boy. When he claimed to be the Messiah, their reaction was "Oh no, not him!" They were "offended" when they learned that the marvelous new teacher was the same Jesus they had hazed and taunted years ago. The above is supported by Luke 4:15 which indicates that Jesus was "glorified" in all other synagogues, and rejected only in his own hometown.

Another early act of Jesus was his selection of twelve men to serve as the initial apostles of his church (John 1:35-51). Since Jesus knew that each of these men would serve not only as a contemporary spiritual leader, but also as future kings over the tribes of Israel after his second coming (Matthew 19:28), he was selecting people who would fit the distinct temperaments and needs of each of the twelve tribes of Israel! Where had Jesus gained a knowledge of the unique personalities of the various tribes of Israel so he could select a suitable future king for each of them? He obtained such knowledge during his visits to them between ages twelve and thirty. Since only two of the tribes of Israel were present in Judea at the time of Jesus (a fact confirmed by Josephus), the only way he could have gained personal knowledge of each tribe's needs was via international travel!

Before proceeding further, it is worth recalling that Josephus, the Jewish historian who wrote soon after the death of Jesus, did not doubt that Jesus was the Messiah. Josephus openly stated of Jesus - "He was [the] Christ."⁵⁶ He also affirmed the divine miracles of his life with the words "he was a doer of wonderful works," and confirmed the resurrection of Jesus as a historical fact with the words "for he [Jesus] appeared to them [his followers] alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold..."⁵⁷

Josephus, a prominent Jewish leader and historian of that time acknowledged that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and since the Bible records that he was widely "glorified" among the masses, it would seem that many Jews did perceive Jesus to be the promised Messiah. Even some Jewish religious leaders accepted Jesus as one sent by God.

John 3:1-3 states "there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews [who] came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, We know that you are a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that you do, except God be with him." Interestingly, Nicodemus came to Jesus "by night," implying that he was on a secretive mission. He was representing Jewish rulers, because he spoke for a group in saying "we know..." The leaders of the Jews were not ignorant men; they could see from the Old Testament prophecies that the Messiah was due in their time period, they could see that Jesus was doing miracles that only someone with the power of God could do, and they could see that Jesus was fulfilling Messianic prophecies. The words of Nicodemus make that evident. Then why did they later kill Jesus when they knew he was sent from God? There are two plausible answers.

One possible answer has been offered by William Steuart McBirnie, in his book "The Search for the Twelve Apostles." He states:

"As...history's long judgment has since confirmed, the greatest reason for his condemnation was the fact that Jesus had lanced through the swollen hypocrisy of the Jewish political and ceremonial religion and the religious bureaucracy of professional priests, Pharisees and Saducees. So all the main Jewish leaders, including the official party of the Herodians ...consented to or sought his death."⁵⁸

Josephus essentially agreed with the modern opinion of Stuart McBirnie in stating:

"He [Jesus] was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross..."⁵⁹

This is a very candid statement by Josephus. After declaring the righteousness of Christ and affirming the status of Jesus as "the Christ" (the "anointed one"), Josephus acknowledges that the "principal men among us" (the Jewish leadership) arranged for the death of Christ. The Jewish religious leaders and their allies held much power over the Jewish people in Judea. Their conduct clearly showed that they were more interested in selfishly clinging to their power than in serving the people by a fair administration of the laws of God as given through Moses.

Because Jesus was exposing their hypocrisy and venality, the religious leaders saw Jesus as the symbol of a "reform movement" which could sweep them from power. The Bible records that Jesus was generally "glorified" in the Jewish synagogues of the day (Luke 4:15), and was a popular figure with the general Jewish population. Luke 5:15 records that the fame of Jesus became such that "great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him." Josephus agreed with Luke that Jesus was very popular in Judea by stating that Jesus "drew over to him many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles."⁶⁰

The Pharisees were surely familiar with prophecies that the Messiah would set up a kingdom of his own. Therefore, it was clear to the Pharisees that if Jesus was the Messiah and was destined to set up a kingdom, he would oust them from their authority. Obsessed by their desire to cling to their temporal power, they determined to slay Jesus to prevent the loss of their power...even if it meant killing the Messiah! In arranging the execution of Jesus, they actually fulfilled the prophecies pertaining to the Messiah's betrayal and death. Matthew 26:15 fulfilled Zechariah 11:12's prophecy about "thirty pieces of silver," and Jesus' death to redeem mankind fulfilled the prophecy of Daniel 9:26 that the Messiah would be "cut off, but not for himself."

This first possible explanation suggests that the Jewish leaders did not actually believe the Bible or fear God: that they viewed religion as a means of perpetuating their power over the nation. Matthew 27:1 states that "the chief priests and elders took counsel against Jesus to put him to death." It does not say the whole Jewish nation wanted to slay Jesus. Their middle-of-the-night trial and condemnation of Jesus was designed to thwart any opposition to their plan from the masses who held Jesus in high esteem.

There is also a second possible answer to the question of why the Pharisees arranged the death of Jesus. Consider the life of the Jews under the Roman yoke. They hated the loss of their independence, and keenly resented being ruled by gentile Romans. Many Jews could recall the relative freedom they had enjoyed a few decades previously when the Parthians had briefly freed them from Roman rule. Having had a taste of freedom, they hungered for more of it! The Bible stresses the hatred the Jews felt for the "publicans," the collectors of the

Roman taxes, and Luke 13:1 refers to a violent confrontation in which the Romans executed a number of Jews. Josephus confirms that this was a time of tremendous discontent on the part of the Jews with their Roman rulers, leading to both verbal and violent confrontations.⁶¹

The Jewish leaders were expecting a Messiah who would free them from Roman tyranny. No doubt many were familiar with such Messianic prophecies as Zechariah 14 which promised that the tribes of Israel would be exalted over the gentiles and that Jerusalem would become a world capital. The Jews must have thirsted for these prophecies to be fulfilled in their day and for the Messiah to lead them in a great war against Rome.

As Jesus fulfilled many Messianic prophecies and confirmed his Messiahship by manifesting divine powers, it is logical that the Jews would expect Jesus to start using his divine power against the hated Romans! This expectation must have grown like wildfire, and Jesus' own disciples shared this expectation!

After all, Jesus had promised his twelve closest disciples that they would each rule over one of the tribes of Israel when he (Jesus) would "sit in the throne of his glory" (Matthew 19:28). Jesus consistently spoke of the coming "kingdom of heaven" in many comments and parables. It was common knowledge that Jesus was a direct descendant of King David and the ancient Jewish kings (Luke 2:4). There are many instances cited in the Gospel accounts of the common people addressing Jesus as the "son of David." Also, in Matthew 10:34 Jesus proclaimed that he had come "to bring a sword, not peace." The disciples even quarreled about who would be the greatest in the kingdom which Jesus would rule (Matthew 18:1, Mark 9:33-37). Small wonder there was a widespread expectation that Jesus was about to establish the "Messianic kingdom" in their day.

Little did the people know that the "deliverance" which the prophesied Messiah would bring in their day would be a spiritual deliverance from their sins, not a physical deliverance from Rome. When Jesus had quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 in his rebuke to his home synagogue, he omitted verses 3-11 (the prophecies about the "conquering Messiah") when he told them "this day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." This deliberate omission implied that Jesus would not fulfill those millennial prophecies during his human ministry.

It is possible that some Jewish leaders of the day, not realising that Christ's first coming was to bring spiritual salvation instead of physical salvation from Rome, felt they had to "assist" or "push" Jesus into confronting Rome in order to fulfill all the Messianic prophecies at that time. After all, did not Ezekiel 37:15-28 prophecy that the House of Israel and House of Judah would be united under "David" their King? Since Jesus was a direct descendant of David, and was a relative of the Parthian kings, and had already been worshipped by some of the Parthian nobility that picked Parthian kings, the Jews could easily assume that Jesus was poised to fulfill this prophecy by uniting Parthia (the House of Israel) and the Jews (the House of Judah) in a war against Rome! Those expecting (and wanting) such a war must have been very frustrated and disgusted at what they perceived to be a "cozy" relationship between Jesus and the Romans.

Rome was a despotic empire which tightly controlled its subjects. Yet the entire life of Jesus exhibited a lack of Roman control over his activities. He could travel where he wanted, when he wanted and with whom he wanted without the supervision or permission of Roman authorities. This freedom was permitted by the Romans in spite of the fact that Jesus was drawing huge crowds and talking about a new "kingdom," a message that Rome could easily have seen as encouraging a Jewish revolt. Why did the Romans allow freedoms to Jesus that they regularly denied to others? There are at least four reasons for Rome's permissive attitude toward Jesus.

To begin with, it was discussed earlier in this chapter that Jesus was related to the rulers of the Parthian Empire at a time when Caesar wanted "detente" with the Parthians. The Roman rulers of Judea risked Caesar's wrath if they provoked the Parthians into a war Caesar didn't want! They were likely aware that Jesus Christ was a relative of Parthia's emperor (an Arsacid) because of the widespread knowledge that Jesus was of the royal seed of David. The Romans may even have been aware of Jesus' special relationship with the Parthian Magi, who elected Parthian emperors from the male Arsacids. Rome had great interest in matters which could affect the political relationships between Rome and Parthia, so Rome's actions regarding Jesus could affect Roman-Parthian relations.

Coupling Jesus' "special relationship" with the Parthians with Caesar's decree that good relations with Parthia should not be disturbed, Roman officials in Judea had to be very careful not to antagonise the Parthians by mistreating Jesus Christ! There is an historical legend that supports the contention that Parthia's ruling class was closely watching the affairs of Jesus while he was in Palestine (confirming Rome's need to handle matters involving Jesus Christ with great caution).

This legend relates that a Parthian provincial ruler, King Abgar of Edessa (a city of Northern Mesopotamia) carried on a correspondence with Jesus during his ministry in Palestine. William Steuart McBirnie relates the legend as follows:

"[the legend has come down to us from Eusebius...This legend tells of a correspondence between Jesus and Abgar, King of Edessa (in what is now southern Russia)...Eusebius claims to have seen this correspondence in the archives of Edessa and to have translated it himself from the Syriac language.

McBirnie misidentifies "Edessa" as a city in "southern Russia" (apparently confusing it with "Odessa," a Russian city on the Black Sea). King Abgar's "Edessa" was a city in the northern Mesopotamian region of Parthia's Empire. It was located near the Euphrates River, almost on the border where the Parthian and Roman Empires met. Edessa was ruled by a series of kings named "Abgar," who were vassals of the Parthian Emperor.

Eusebius was a famous Christian historian who lived from 260 A.D. until 340 A.D. The Encyclopaedia Britannica writes concerning him:

"Eusebius was one of the most learned men of his age, and stood high in favour with the emperor Constantine... Eusebius' greatness rests upon his vast erudition and his sound judgement. He is best known by his History of the Christian Church completed in 324 or early in 325 A.D. "⁶³

Eusebius was not a man given to wild claims. Let us examine his own words about the exchange between King Abgar of Edessa and Jesus Christ. Eusebius begins:

"..when King Abgar, the brilliantly successful monarch of the peoples of Mesopotamia, who was dying from a terrible physical disorder which no human power could heal, heard continual mention of the name of Jesus and unanimous tribute to His miracles, he sent a humble request to Him by a letter-carrier, begging relief from his disease."⁶⁴

This record that news of Jesus' miracles was commonly heard in Parthia's western provinces confirms that the trade routes must have been full of news about Jesus' exploits. The following excerpt from King Abgar's letter to Jesus is taken from Eusebius' account:

"Abgar...to Jesus, who has appeared as a gracious saviour in the region of Jerusalem--greeting.

"I have heard about you and about the cures you perform...If the report is true, you make the blind see again and the lame walk about; you cleanse lepers...and raise the dead...I concluded that...either you are God and came down from heaven to do these things, or you are God's Son doing them. Accordingly I am writing you to beg you to come to me, whatever the inconvenience, and cure the disorder from which I suffer. I may add that I understand the Jews are treating you with contempt and desire to injure you: my city is very small, but highly esteemed, adequate for both of us."⁶⁵

The reports heard by Abgar closely parallel the narratives in the Gospel accounts about the miracles of Jesus. King Abgar professes his faith in Jesus, is desperate for Jesus to come, and offers him refuge in Edessa from the risks faced by Jesus in Jerusalem. It is remarkable that Eusebius preserved for us a record that Jesus was given an official offer of sanctuary in Parthian territory from the dangers he faced in Jerusalem. According to Eusebius, the following reply was sent by Jesus Christ himself to King Abgar by a courier named Ananias.

"Happy are you who believed in me without having seen me! For it is written of me that those who have seen me will not believe in me, and those who have not seen me will believe and live. As to your request that I should come to you, I must complete all that I was sent to do here, and on completing it must at once be taken up to the One who sent me. When I have been taken up I will send you one of my disciples to cure your disorder and bring life to you and those with you."⁶⁶

This letter attributed to Jesus would have been about three hundred years old when Eusebius read it in the Royal Records of Edessa, and it reflects a doctrine and attitude entirely compatible with that expressed by Jesus in the Gospel accounts. Jesus' words give the impression that His crucifixion may have been imminent.

Significantly, while Jesus was reluctant to perform a healing for a non-Israelite in Palestine (Matthew 15:21-28), He readily agreed to send someone to heal King Abgar. This argues that King Abgar and his Parthian subjects were Israelites from one of the ten tribes of Israel. If Jesus had travelled in Parthia's empire during His missing eighteen years, He would have known this to be true from personal experience and, therefore, He exhibited no reluctance to heal King Abgar.

There is more to the story. According to Eusebius, the archives of Edessa recorded that after Jesus' death and resurrection, Thaddaeus (mentioned in Mark 3:18) was sent by the Apostle Thomas to Edessa. Once there, he not only healed many of King Abgar's subjects, but also laid hands on King Abgar himself and healed the king. King Abgar ordered his subjects to assemble and hear the preaching of Thaddaeus, and offered him silver and gold (which Thaddaeus refused). King Abgar is quoted as stating to Thaddaeus:

"I believed in Him (Jesus) so strongly that I wanted to take an army and destroy the Jews who crucified Him, if I had not been prevented by the imperial power of Rome from doing so."⁶⁷

Remarkable! Here is a record of a Parthian vassal king wishing to mount a military campaign to punish those responsible for crucifying Jesus Christ! However, Abgar acknowledges that he alone did not have the power to challenge the Roman army in Judea (the Parthian Emperor would have to mass the armies of many of his feudal kings, like Abgar, to fight the Romans). This account confirms that Jesus had strong supporters within the Parthian Empire, justifying Rome's reluctance to interfere with his life.

The second reason for amicable relations between Jesus and the Romans is that Jesus was likely well-known to Roman officials who had met him through contacts with Joseph of Arimathea's company. If Joseph was a Roman "Decurio," a Roman mining official, who travelled between Judea and Briton, people affiliated with Joseph's company came in contact with Roman officials on a constant basis. This would have occurred in Briton, the Mediterranean region, and wherever the goods of Joseph's company were shipped and transported within the Roman Empire. It is likely that Jesus assisted in Joseph's business as he travelled under Joseph's tutelage. At any rate, it would have been well-known that Joseph was the mentor of Jesus.

During those years Jesus must have developed a personal rapport with a number of Roman officials. Indeed, while most of the Jewish community recoiled from personal contacts with Romans as "unclean gentiles," Jesus had no reluctance in dealing with Romans. The example of Jesus' willingness to use miraculous power to heal the servant of a Roman centurion (Matthew 8) is such an example. While this surely won for Jesus goodwill with the Romans, it must have infuriated the Jewish leaders who wanted their Messiah to fight the Romans, not heal them!

If Joseph of Arimathea was a Roman Decurio, he certainly possessed Roman citizenship. Since Jesus was a blood relative and youthful protege of Joseph of Arimathea, it is also very possible that Jesus Christ obtained Roman citizenship during his "lost" eighteen years! If Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus Christ possessed Roman citizenship, it further explains why (A) Joseph was given quick access to Pilate, the Roman governor, after Jesus was crucified; and (B) why Jesus came and went as he pleased! If Jesus was a Roman citizen, he had the right to travel as he wished within the Roman Empire! It was not unusual for Jews of that period to be Roman citizens. The apostle Paul (first named Saul) was also a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37-38, 22:22-29).

A third reason that enabled Jesus to go wherever he wished and do whatever he pleased was the fact that Jesus was wealthy! The Parthian Magi had given Jesus costly gifts of "gold, myrrh, and frankincense." We are not told how much gold and costly spices were given to Jesus, but it was no doubt a substantial amount. The Parthians regarded Jesus as royalty, and it was the ancient custom to give a royal personage a truly worthy gift when coming into his presence. Since the Parthian Magi were directed to Jesus by an angel of God their sense of awe likely resulted in unusually large gifts being given to Jesus. This gold was likely held in trust for him until he was older (first by his physical father, and then by Joseph of Arimathea after his father's death). When he reached legal adulthood, Jesus controlled it. Also, since Jesus' mentor, Joseph of Arimathea, was also wealthy, one can be sure Jesus shared in that wealth. In all cultures and times, wealth can open a lot of doors.

Jesus' financial resources were confirmed by the fact that he and his band of disciples travelled for years without any visible means of support! In spite of their itinerant lifestyles Jesus' band had monetary resources. (John 13:29 shows Judas Iscariot was their treasurer in charge of disbursements.) John 12:3-6 reveals that people around Jesus could afford expensive purchases and that Judas, the treasurer, was an embezzler. Judas was, therefore, handling sums of money large enough for him to think his embezzling would not be noticed. Judas' comment in John 12:5 also indicates that Jesus' group was in the habit of making donations to the poor. The fact that Jesus and his group never had to ask for donations from "the multitudes," but rather gave money to the poor confirms that Jesus travelled with plenty of financial resources to take care of his followers.

The fourth reason why Rome allowed Jesus to travel and speak as he did is that Rome had reason to believe that part of his message actually served Roman interests. The Roman rulers, knowing about Jesus' connection to Parthian royalty and seeing His divine powers,

were likely quite relieved to hear Jesus preaching a message which did not include inflammatory remarks toward Rome.

For example, Matthew 22:15-22 records one attempt by Jewish leaders to push Jesus into a confrontation with Rome. The Pharisees wanted to entangle Jesus on the subject of the hated Roman taxes, and they made sure the "Herodians" (Roman sympathisers) were there to listen. They asked Jesus whether it was lawful for the Jews to pay Roman taxes? They apparently expected Jesus to answer "no," and wanted the Roman sympathisers to hear His answer, hoping to bring Jesus and Rome into conflict. However, Jesus declined the role of "tax protester," and said "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." Hearing Jesus response, the Herodians (and Romans) had to be pleased with His answer. The non-confrontational relationship of Jesus and the Romans continued to the chagrin of the Jewish leaders.

Indeed, when the Jewish leaders urged Pilate to crucify Jesus, some of them may have seen it as a final attempt to make Jesus use His divine powers against Rome to save Himself. Since similar desires for war existed among the disciples of Jesus, an alliance between the Sanhedrin and one of Jesus' disciples (Judas) to bring about this confrontation is understandable. They may have assumed that if Jesus' own life were put at risk, He would use His miraculous powers to save His life and fight the Romans.

Support for this possibility is found in the actions of Judas after Jesus Christ allowed himself to be crucified. Judas was so shocked at Jesus' death that he hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). Clearly, Judas had not expected that the outcome of his actions would be the death of Jesus. Perhaps Judas also assumed that Jesus would, when pushed to the point of death, finally oppose the Romans with His divine powers. If so, this hope was a result of wishful thinking and flawed prophetic understanding. Daniel 9:26 had prophesied that the Messiah would be killed, and Jesus had tried to prepare His followers for this event, telling them he would be buried for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). Also, the angel who had announced the birth of Jesus to Joseph in Matthew 1:21 had said only that "He shall save his people from their sins" (the angel did not say "He shall save his people from the Romans.") However, most Jews weren't interested in being saved from their sins; they wanted a Messiah who would save them from Rome!

Let us examine the political pressures on the participants who were involved in the trial and execution of Jesus to learn more about what really was happening.

Jesus was not only aware of his prophesied death, but also seemed to realize the manner in which it would occur. He told his listeners that his death would involve "a lifting up from the earth" (John 12:32-33), which occurred when He was lifted up on a cross. The Pharisees, not realizing (or not accepting) that the Messiah had to die, became the instruments of fulfilling Daniel's prophecy that the Messiah would be "cut off." It never occurred to the Pharisees that the "conquering Messiah" prophecies would have to wait for a second coming of the Messiah.

It should be pointed out that the Jewish race, as a whole, is not collectively responsible for the death of Christ. As noted earlier, Josephus confirmed that it was the Jewish leaders (not the whole nation) who caused His death at the hands of the Romans. Those Jews who cried out to Pilate "crucify him," and "let his blood be upon us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:22-25) were an infinitesimally small fraction of the Jewish race at the time. The Jews crying for the blood of Jesus to be spilled and placed on their progeny were suborned agents of the Sanhedrin in a plot to engineer the death of Christ.

Even if God placed a curse on the offspring of those who participated in this "kangaroo court" (which is possible!), it excuses the 99.9+% of the Jewish race who did not participate in the

murder of Jesus and did not even know about it until it was over. The vast majority of the Jews living in Judea were not aware of Jesus' crucifixion until well after the event. The many Jews living in Parthian provinces were also oblivious to the crucifixion as it occurred. One can hardly blame these multitudes of Jews (or their descendants) for causing the death of Jesus Christ.

Consider now the extremely delicate position in which this conspiracy against Jesus placed the Roman rulers of Palestine.

The first priority for Pontius Pilate and the Romans was to carry out the will of Caesar. What pleased the native population was secondary. Remember that the life of Christ occurred during a period of stability between the empires of Rome and Parthia, a stability which Caesar wanted to maintain. Therefore, it was a top priority for Pilate to avoid incidents which could bring about a confrontation with the Parthian Empire. Pilate also knew that when Rome had provoked Parthia several decades prior to that time, Parthia had driven the Romans out of Palestine and controlled it for three years.

Rome likely had good intelligence about matters involving the political activities of people in their provinces, and was aware that Jesus Christ was a special favorite of high Parthian officials. Rome was also likely aware that communications took place between Jesus Christ and Parthian officials, including at least one Parthian vassal (King Abgar). Rome surely knew that Jesus Christ was a distant relative of the Parthian emperor (an "Arsacid" via the "Phares" bloodline of King David), and had to tread lightly where Jesus was concerned. Rome also favored the non-revolutionary message of Jesus, and had no desire to execute Him. Since Jesus espoused the payment of Roman taxes, fomented no revolts, and was popular with the masses, the Romans viewed Him as a counterweight to the revolutionary zealots among the Jews.

Jesus was also very likely a personal friend of some Roman officials as a result of Jesus' relationship with Romans during his association with Joseph of Arimathea's international business. Additionally, Roman spies had undoubtedly witnessed some of the miracles of Jesus and had reported these events to Roman leaders.

Since Jesus was close to the ruling elites of Parthia and was likely seen as a stabilising influence for Roman interests in Palestine, Rome was disinclined to harm Jesus. In view of His miraculous powers, the polytheistic Romans were likely also averse to harming someone who was so "close to the gods."

When the Jewish religious leaders demanded that Jesus be crucified, Pilate was in a terrible quandary. He had compelling political reasons for not harming Jesus, yet he also wanted to handle the situation in a manner that did not precipitate a Jewish rebellion. Another factor which must have concerned him was whether he was being "set up" by the Jewish leaders to do something which would precipitate a war not only with the Jews but with Parthia. After all, there were many Parthians who served the same God of the Jews, and they were present in large numbers in Jerusalem during the annual Holy Days (Acts 2:9). Since Jesus was crucified during the Passover season, Parthians were surely present in Jerusalem at that time. Pilate could have wondered whether the Jews were plotting with the Parthians to provoke an incident (i.e. crucifying an Arsacid) which could precipitate a Parthian-Jewish war versus Rome. This would anger Caesar, so Pilate had to avoid that possibility at all costs.

Matthew 27:18 and Mark 15:10 record that Pilate knew the Jewish leaders had "framed" Jesus. Pilate's behavior showed that he did not want to crucify Jesus Christ, and he freely offered Jesus an opportunity to defend Himself (Matthew 27:11-14). Pilate "marveled greatly" when Jesus took no action to avail himself of Pilate's offer (ordinarily, anyone would do

anything to avoid the hideous fate of crucifixion!) The implication is that if Jesus had made any effort whatsoever to defend Himself, Pilate would have released Jesus. Knowing this and knowing that His central mission was to sacrifice Himself for mankind, Jesus' silence actually thwarted Pilate's effort to free him.

Pilate grew exasperated with Jesus' refusal to defend Himself, and said privately to Jesus: 'You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?' (John 19:10). In modern words, Pilate was saying to Jesus: "C'mon, get with it Jesus, play ball with me, and I'll set you free."

Even though Jesus refused to defend Himself, Pilate was still determined to keep Jesus alive. He next offered to free Jesus as part of a Passover tradition, giving the public a choice between Jesus and a prisoner named Barabbas (Matthew 27:15-23). Pilate was likely again taken aback when the crowd requested freedom for Barabbas instead of Jesus. Pilate did not realize that the Sanhedrin had "stacked the deck" against Jesus by having only their followers in the crowd (verse 20). Pilate's own wife then pressured him not to harm Jesus, saying she was having nightmares about the situation, and adding her view that Jesus was a "just man" (Matthew 27:19).

Pilate tried a third ploy to keep Jesus alive by an outright declaration of his innocence. Luke 23:4 quotes Pilate as telling the Jewish leaders and their mob "I find no fault in this man." When the mob called for the crucifixion of Jesus, Pilate publicly defended Jesus, saying "Why, what evil has he done?" (Matthew 27:23). Pilate was relieved to hear that Jesus was a Galilean because it gave him a fourth option for keeping Jesus alive: a delaying tactic by giving the whole mess to Herod (who had jurisdiction over Galilee). Herod, however, gave this "hot potato" right back to Pilate (Luke 23:5-11).

Most people have failed to appreciate that Pilate, the Roman governor, tried repeatedly to keep Jesus alive! When Romans wanted to execute someone, they didn't worry about "due process," yet here we see Pilate pursuing several options to prevent or stall the crucifixion of Jesus in spite of considerable pressure to the contrary. Luke 23:20 openly declares that Pilate was "willing to release Jesus."

Finally, Pilate realised he was out of options. As Matthew 27:24 puts it: "Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but rather that a tumult was made..." The mob scene was ready to turn into a riot. The Passover celebration was one of the biggest of the year, and a violent riot at that time could develop into a revolution. So, even though he knew Jesus was innocent, he finally agreed to crucify Jesus to forestall the most immediate threat to Roman interests. Even in condemning Jesus, Pilate engaged in political posturing to keep this event from turning into a confrontation with Parthia. Washing his hands before the multitude, he proclaimed himself "innocent of the blood of this just person" (Matthew 27:24). In doing this, Pilate was disassociating Rome from the killing of a celebrity who was popular with powerful Parthians. Pilate wanted it publicly obvious that the responsibility for this crucifixion lay with the Jewish hierarchy, not with Rome.

In John 18:33-37, Pilate asked Jesus if He was really a king (his asking about Jesus' royal status implies he knew about Jesus' royal "Arsacid" bloodline). Jesus replied: "My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews..." Jesus added: 'You say that I am a King, For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world...' Jesus acknowledged that He was born "a king," that His kingdom was "not of this world (the first century A.D.)," but that he would become a king in the future. Jesus also stated (verse 11): "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above." Jesus meant that unless Jesus' death was according to the will of God, no temporal government could have had any power over Him.

This is affirmed by a comment of Jesus Christ in Matthew 26:52-54. When one of his disciples tried to resist the taking of Jesus by attempting to kill a would-be captor, Jesus told him not to resist with the words:

"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?"

His comment reveals that He was voluntarily refusing to use divine power to save Himself in order to fulfill scriptures (such as Daniel 9:26). However, it is very sobering to realize that Jesus affirmed that if he were but to ask, the Father would "at once" send twelve legions of angels to rescue him. This statement shows that while it was the Father's will to save mankind, the final decision to "go through with it" belonged to Jesus, that if He chose not to "go through with it," the Father would have honored that choice and sent thousands of angels to slay all who threatened Him! If Jesus had made that choice, mankind would have had no sacrifice, and the doorway of salvation would have been closed. Jesus knew the stakes, and put mankind's long-term good ahead of His short-term safety. Indeed, if Jesus had refused to "go through with it," the whole plan of salvation (which required a sinless, sacrificed savior for mankind's sins) would have been cancelled. This brings up a sobering possibility.

If Jesus had "opted out" of being a sacrifice (terminating the plan of salvation), the legions of angels might have destroyed not just Jesus' tormentors but all mankind since the very existence of mankind would have become moot. If there were no savior to ransom mankind, there would have been no purpose in a continued existence for mankind itself. Jesus may well have seen legions of death angels poised in the spirit world to terminate mankind if Jesus chose not to implement the plan of salvation for mankind. If so, Jesus had a very stark choice set before him that no human being could see. If Jesus called on the Father to rescue Him and stop the crucifixion, mankind would die, but if Jesus chose to sacrifice himself, mankind would live. It was up to Jesus.

Jesus knew that if He asked for angelic rescue, none of his human friends could ever be saved. So He gave up His life, and made salvation available for not only His beloved friends, but all humanity. If the people at the crucifixion scene had realised the awesome choice before Jesus, they would have all fallen trembling at his feet. Jesus chose to let mankind live even as it tortured, mocked and reviled him (Matthew 27:39-44).

When Jesus died, many supernatural events occurred to confirm that Jesus was the divine son of a very real God (the "Most High") who had watched the entire episode from heaven. Matthew 27:51-54 records that: "the veil of the temple was torn in two, from top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks were broken apart; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept [were dead] arose, And came out of the graves...and went into the holy city and appeared to many."

The tearing of the curtain in the temple, which had sealed off the Holy of Holies, signified that the death of Jesus Christ meant that there were no longer any limitations on human access to God, and the concurrent resurrections of many people both testified that Jesus had triumphed over death and foreshadowed that there would be a future resurrection as a result of Jesus death.

The key question concerning the death of Jesus Christ is "Did he really rise from the dead?" He foretold that he would rise again after a period of three days (Matthew 12:40), and many eyewitness accounts are included in the Bible that he fulfilled his promise. Whether the reader believes His resurrection to be a fact depends on: (A) the faith the reader places in the eye-witness accounts in the Bible, (B) the credibility of the Bible (based on fulfilled

prophecies, the unity of the Bible with the record of ancient history, etc.), and (C) the evidence of answered prayer (offered in the name of Jesus) in the personal experience of the reader. However, we also have the contemporary affirmation of Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived shortly after the time of Christ, that "he [Jesus] appeared to them alive again the third day."⁶⁸

This chapter has provided information which permits the life of Jesus Christ to be viewed in a much broader perspective than was previously possible. It is clear from the evidence presented in this chapter that Jesus Christ was not only a real historical figure, but also a prominent personality of His time whose fame extended far beyond the borders of Judea. The evidence is very strong that He was the Son of God, and prophecies declare that His second coming will see Him crowned king over all nations (Acts 1:9-11, Revelation 19:11-20:6).

Revelation 19:16 prophesies that when Jesus Christ returns, He will bear the title "King of Kings." Modern society has lost track of the real significance of this phrase. George Rawlinson, in his epic history of Parthia entitled *The Sixth Oriental Monarchy*, observed that Parthia's empire was organised as a feudal system with many vassal kings owing their allegiance to the overall Parthian emperor. In view of Parthia's feudal system, he added:

"...Parthian monarchs took the title of 'King of Kings,' so frequent upon their coins... "⁶⁹

Rawlinson also recorded an incident that confirms this title was used by Parthia's emperors during the time of Christ. Discussing events which led to the Parthian-Roman "Summit Conference" in 1 A.D., a few years after Jesus' birth, he records;

"Phraataces [Parthia's emperor]...responded to Augustus, despatching to him a letter wherein he took to himself the favourite Parthian title of 'king of kings,' and addressed the Roman Emperor simply as 'Caesar.'"⁷⁰

The book of Revelation's claim that Jesus will rule forever as "King of Kings" now carries new meaning! Readers in the first century A.D. could recognise that this prophecy predicted that Jesus Christ would inherit the title of Parthia's Emperors at his second coming. Jesus was routinely called the "son of David" in his lifetime, and it was also prophesied before his birth that Jesus would eventually inherit "the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever" (Luke 1:32-33).

Obviously, Jesus did not inherit such a throne in his human lifetime, and no human throne could last "forever." However, Jesus can rule "forever" on the earth after his second coming as "King of Kings." He also will inherit "the throne of his father David" when he inherits the title (and throne) of the Parthian Emperors. This prophecy not only confirms that Parthia's emperors literally sat "in David's throne," but it also verifies that Jesus Christ was himself an Arsacid, a blood relative of Parthia's ruling dynasty!

Also, the missions of the twelve apostles confirm that the Scythians and Parthians were descendants of the ten tribes of Israel. In Matthew 10:5-6, Jesus gave the twelve apostles this mission:

"These twelve Jesus sent forth...saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles...But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The ten tribes of Israel (the "house of Israel") were spiritually, (not physically) "lost" at that time. The apostles stayed with Jesus during his ministry, but they obeyed this commandment of Jesus to go to the ten tribes of Israel after Jesus died. Just before he rose into heaven, Jesus told his apostles in Acts 1:8:

'You shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.'

Since Jesus had earlier sent them to the ten tribes of Israel, and later said they would go "to the uttermost parts of the earth," it is clear that at that time at least some of the descendants of the ten tribes of Israel lived "in the uttermost parts of the earth" (in other words: "a very great distance from Judea").

The book of Acts names only a few of the apostles as being present in Judea for very long after Jesus' ascension, indicating many of them soon departed Judea to evangelise the ten tribes of Israel. Many legends exist about the nations of the earth visited by the apostles. We have already seen the account that Thaddaeus was sent to northern Mesopotamia to heal the Parthian vassal king, Abgar, and evangelise his people. Eusebius also recorded:

"Meanwhile, the holy apostles...were scattered over the whole world. Thomas, tradition tells us, was chosen for Parthia, Andrew for Scythia, John for Asia..."⁷¹

The Encyclopaedia Britannica writes concerning Thomas:

"According to the tradition, St. Thomas founded the Christian churches in Malabar [India], and then crossed to Mylapur, now a suburb of Madras, where the shrine of his martyrdom...still stands on Mt. St. Thomas, where a cross is shown with a Pahlavi [Parthian] inscription."⁷²

Chapter eight documented that portions of the ten tribes established "Sake" kingdoms in India (to the east of Parthia), so Thomas' presence in India is consistent with Christ's charge that they go to the ten tribes of Israel.

Peter wrote the epistle of I Peter while in Babylon (I Peter 5:13), which was then within the Parthian Empire. Some have asserted that Peter's use of "Babylon" symbolised "Rome" but there is nothing in the text to support that view. Peter understood the difference between the cities of Babylon and Rome, and he was a simple fisherman not given to literary or scholarly devices. When Peter said "Babylon," he meant the city of Babylon.

Various legends state that the apostles Thaddeus, Matthias, Andrew, Bartholomew, and Simon the Canaanite (or "Zealot") all evangelised (or passed through) Armenia.⁷³ Armenia was settled by portions of the ten tribes after the fall of Samaria (as noted in chapter four), and was frequently a province of the Parthian Empire (though often disputed with Rome). Armenia was a gateway to Scythia via the Caucasus Mountains, so it is likely that other apostles besides Andrew passed through Armenia on their way to Scythia.

In the Commentary on the Whole Bible by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, the following observations are made in the Introduction to I John:

"Augustine...says this epistle [I John] was written to the Parthians. Bede...says that Athanasius attests the same. By the Parthians may be meant the Christians living beyond the Euphrates in the Parthian territory...in John's prolonged life, we cannot dogmatically assert that he did not visit the Parthian Christians."⁷⁴

This commentary confirms how deeply Christianity had taken hold in Parthia, indicating several apostles must have been there. Also note that this commentary uses the same phrase as Josephus (i.e. "beyond the Euphrates") in referring to Parthian territory.

One account places Jude in northern Persia (within Parthia's empire).⁷⁵ Simon the Zealot is

recorded as taking a missionary journey through North Africa (including the old Punic cities near Carthage), continuing on to the British Isles⁷⁶ where he reportedly perished. Earlier, we examined the legend of Viracocha, who "performed miracles and preached repentance" in ancient America. Was "Viracocha" one of the apostles of Jesus Christ who really did travel to the "uttermost parts of the earth?"

There are many more legends about the lands visited by the twelve apostles, but the above will suffice for this chapter. All the regions and nations discussed earlier in this book as being places inhabited by the ten tribes of Israel are also cited as regions and nations visited by one or more of the twelve apostles. Since Jesus had sent his apostles to the ten tribes of Israel, these legends further confirm that "the lost sheep" of the ten tribes of Israel were located in Parthia, Scythia, Armenia, the North African Punic regions, the British Isles, the Saka kingdoms of India and perhaps even the ancient Americas.

This chapter has illustrated how the life of Jesus Christ involved relationships between the empires of Rome and Parthia.

ENDNOTES: CHAPTER NINE

1. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, III, 3
2. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, p. 98
3. *Ibid*, 99-100
4. *Ibid*, p. 49
5. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Oriental Monarchy*, pp.178-181
6. Josephus, *Antiquities*, xv, I,2
7. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Oriental Monarchy*, pp.199-205
8. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Oriental Monarchy*, p. 216
9. *Ibid*, p. 210
10. *Ibid*, p. 85
11. Young Analytical Concordance to the Bible, see word wise, subhead 8, p.1060
12. Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, IX,1
13. Harper's Bible Dictionary,, "Herod," p. 385
14. Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Asia," Vol.2, p.512
15. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Oriental Monarchy*, pp.117-118
16. *Ibid*, pp.195-198
17. *Ibid*, pp. 218-219
18. *Ibid*, pp. 213-215
19. caps, *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, p. 19
20. Capt, *Ibid*, p. 22
21. caps, *Ibid*, p. 22
22. *Ibid*, p.20
23. *Ibid*, p. 10
24. Mcsirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 230
25. caps, pp. 39-41
26. *Ibid*, p. 41
27. *Ibid*, p.9
28. Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible, see "Lord," subhead 3, pp.616-617
29. Capt, p.9
30. Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible, Hebrew Lexicon, word "Yeshuah," p. 55
31. Capt, *The Traditions of Glastonbury*, p. 7
32. Frye, *The Heritage of Persia*, pp.200-201
33. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Monarchy*, p. 425
34. Davies, *Voyagers to the New World*, pp.125-126
35. *Ibid*, p. 131
36. *Ibid*, pp.126-127
37. *Ibid*, p. 136
38. Roland, *They All Discovered America*, p. 303
39. *Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol.26, "Toltec," p. 829
40. Athy, "Foreign Influences on the Priesthood and Nobility of Pre-Columbian America," *Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications*, Vol. 17, 1988, p. 114
41. *Ibid*, p. 114
42. *Ibid*, p. 115 (Athy cites *Book of the Crods and Rites and the Ancient Calendar* by Fray Diego Duran)
43. *Ibid*, p. 115
44. Morris, Walter, *Living Maya* (as cited in *Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications*, Vol. 17, 1988, p. 196
45. Stender, "The Cross of the Inca," *Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications*, Vol. 17, 1988, pp. 179-181
46. *Ibid*, pp. 181-183
47. *Epigraphic Society Occasional Publications*, Vol. 17, 1988, pp. 255-266
48. *Ibid*, p. 261

49. Boland, pp. 277-280
50. Casson, *The Ancient Mariners*, pp. 174, 215, 235-236
51. *Ibid*, p. 236
52. Boland, pp. 54-78
53. Fell, *Saga America*, pp. 31-35, 124-132, 153
54. *Ibid*, p. 168
55. *Ibid*, p. 168
56. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, III, 3
57. *Ibid*, XVIII, III, 3
58. McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, p. 36
59. Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, 111, 3
60. *Ibid*, XVIII, III, 3
61. *Ibid*, XVIII, III, 1-2
62. McBirnie, p. 203
63. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 8, "Eusebius of Caesarea," p. 892
64. Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, 1, 13
65. *Ibid*, 1, 13
66. *Ibid*, 1, 13
67. *Ibid*, 1, 13
68. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 111, 3
69. Rawlinson, *The Sixth Oriental Monarchy*, p. 88
70. *Ibid*, p. 218
71. Eusebius, *The History of the Church*, III, 1
72. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 22, "Thomas, St.," p. 143
73. McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, pp. 199-202, 243
74. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, "Introduction to I John," p. 1495
75. *Ibid*, p. 206
76. *Ibid*, pp. 207-211