

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
IX. God's Unbiased Witnesses Of Messiah's Birth
(Luke 2:8-20)

I. Introduction

- A. If the witnesses to Messiah Jesus' birth had been schooled in the Mosaic Law so that they would have understood all the prophetic details and traditional expectations of Messiah's birth, their claims that a certain child who was born in Bethlehem was the Messiah could have been viewed skeptically by many other people.
- B. God thus sent His heavenly angels to a very unbiased group of shepherds in the fields around Bethlehem so that their testimony would have the ring of obvious truth for all Israel.
- C. That event is recorded in Luke 2:8-20, what we view for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. God's Unbiased Witnesses Of Messiah's Birth, Luke 2:8-20.

- A. The "most unlikely recipients" of the revelation of God's angels to Israel to confirm the birth of the Messiah, and the most "unprejudiced witnesses" of that event would be shepherds (J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 60:
 - 1. They "were despised" for being "unable to observe the customary laws of ceremonial purification," Ibid.
 - 2. The shepherds also "had not been schooled in the law and therefore were considered ignorant," Ibid.
- B. Being outsiders to Israel's scholarly and religious circles, what such shepherds would witness that would deeply cause them to believe that Jesus at His birth was the Messiah and God would be unbiased and truthful.
- C. Thus, we view the testimony of the Bethlehem shepherds at Christ's birth (as follows), Luke 2:8-20:
 - 1. Suddenly, after more than 500 years of the absence of the display of the divine glory of God in Israel, the lowly shepherds in Bethlehem's fields were shocked by the blazing appearance of the angel of the Lord and the brilliant light of God's glory invading the dark wintry night and shining all around them, terrifying them, Luke 2:8-9; Ibid.
 - 2. The angel told them to "stop being afraid for your own benefit" (*me phobeisthe*, the negative particle *me* with the present middle imperative of *phobeo*, "be afraid;" U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 207; The Analy. Grk. Lex. (Zon.), 1972, p. 427-428), for the angel brought good news of great joy for all the people, v. 10.
 - 3. That news was that on that day, a Savior had been born to them in Bethlehem, the nearby city of David, Who was "Messiah" the "Lord," Israel's Old Testament God! (Ryrie St. Bib., KJV, 1978, ftn. to Lk. 2:11)
 - 4. Such an astounding statement would require a validating sign, so the Angel gave two signs to them:
 - a. First, the shepherds would find the newborn Messiah and Lord "wrapped up in swaddling clothes" (*sparganoo*, Moulton & Milligan, The Vocab. of the Grk. N. T., 1972, p. 582), Luke 2:12a.
 - b. Second, the shepherds would find Him lying in a "feeding-trough, manger" (*phatne*, Ibid., p. 665), v. 12b.
 - c. Both signs were unexpected for a newborn Messiah and Lord: He was expected to be born in a finer room than a stall for animals and be dressed in fine clothes, not strips of cloth like a poor baby! (Ibid., Pentecost)
 - 5. Suddenly, the angel was joined by a multitude of God's angels praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." (Luke 2:13-14; Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Luke 2:14. The emphasis in this statement on God's grace that contrasts with typical religious teaching implies its divine origin: "The peace promised is not given universally to men who possess good will toward God but individually to men who are the recipients of His favor and grace," Ibid.
 - 6. The shepherds then left their sheep in the field and went to Bethlehem to see what the Lord had made known to them, and they found precisely what the angel had described to them, Luke 2:15-16.
 - 7. Thrilled at this fulfillment of the angel's predicted signs, the shepherds informed Mary, Joseph and the other people what they had seen and heard, and how God's Word to them had been fulfilled, v. 17.
 - 8. Their testimony created wonder in their hearers, treasured memories for Mary to ponder and praise to God by the shepherds for all that they had seen and heard in accord with the angel's message to them, v. 18-20.

Lesson: *God sent His angels to the most unbiased witnesses of His Son's birth in Israel to indicate through their resulting testimony and joyous, worshipful response the VALIDITY of their report that God's holy angels declared Jesus Christ at His birth to be the Messiah and Israel's Old Testament God incarnated in human flesh.*

Application: *(1) May we believe the unbiased testimony of the Bethlehem shepherds as to the validity of the truth that Jesus Christ is Israel's long-promised Messiah and God Incarnate. (2) May we join the shepherds, all who marveled at their testimony, and Jesus' earthly mother Mary in glorifying God for His gift of our great Savior.*