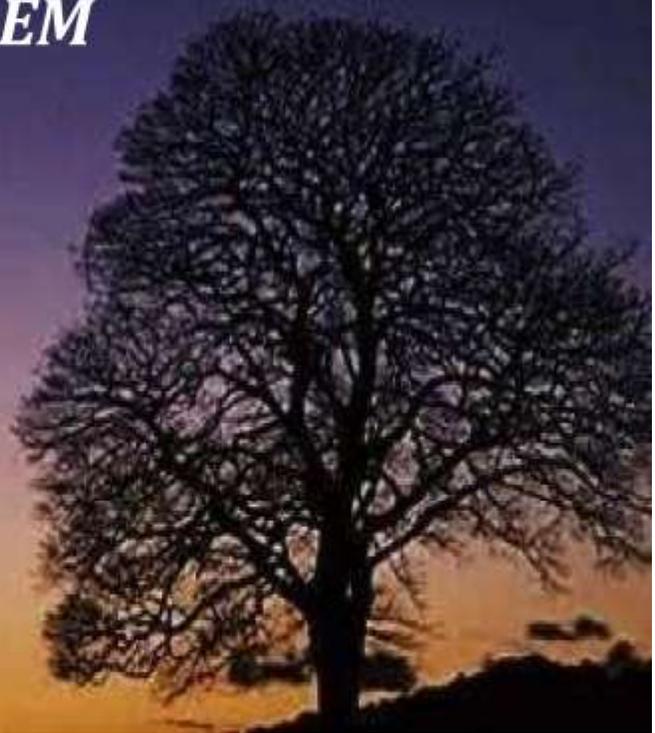




JESUS CHRIST ***“THE BRIGHT AND*** ***MORNING STAR”***

THE BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK
FOR THE
BACK TO JERUSALEM
VISION

DOUG RIGGS



Jesus Christ: “The Bright and Morning Star”

The Biblical Framework for the *Back to Jerusalem* Vision

By Doug Riggs

Introduction

I first met Peter Xu in the spring of 2005. After reading the phenomenal testimonies in ***Back to Jerusalem*** and ***The Heavenly Man*** I contacted the author, Paul Hattaway, and expressed my desire to meet some of these Chinese house church leaders that he mentioned in these books. Paul got me in touch with Peter Xu who has been called the 'Billy Graham' of China. These suffering saints in China have been an inspirational example to me and thousands of others in their suffering for Christ and the gospel.

After meeting with Peter Xu in the spring of 2005 he invited me to go with him to Sinim Institute in Manila, Philippines to share the Word of God with the Chinese students there who were being trained to fulfill the Back to Jerusalem (BTJ) vision.

In March of 2007 Phil Beach and I traveled to China for my second missionary trip to meet with several hundred leaders in six provinces. The eagerness and burning zeal of these dear saints remains a great encouragement to me and is a strong rebuke to the generally low spiritual state of the church in the West!

I just returned from a third meeting with Peter and his associates during a four-day meeting in Los Angeles, California January 27 through February 1. Peter requested that I give a scriptural background for the BTJ vision that God originally gave to the Church in China. The following background references are necessary in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the great end-time purpose to which God has called the Church in China to fulfill for His eternal glory and praise:

What is "Back to Jerusalem"? See web site:

<http://www.backtojerusalem.com/>

Those original Chinese band of saints who received the BTJ vision in NW China in the early part of the last century have grown to thousands today who are earnestly endeavoring to fulfill our Lord's commandment to complete the great commission given in Matthew 28:18-20. These dear saints believe that by fulfilling this command they will both hasten and prepare the way for our Lord's return to establish His kingdom here on earth according to Matthew 24:14.

Scriptural Background for the BTJ Vision

It was while I was reading Matthew 10 that I saw the scriptural basis and background for the BTJ vision. In verses 16-23 we see our Lord's warning and preparatory instructions given to the twelve Apostles in verses 6-7 regarding the persecution they will incur in fulfilling His command to "*go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and as you go, preach the gospel saying,*

The kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Then amazingly, in verse 23 Jesus, still speaking to the twelve Apostles, says *"But whenever they persecute you in this city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, **you** (a future remnant of Jews) shall not finish going through the cities of Israel, until the Son of Man comes."* Who are these mysterious Jews (vs1& 6) who will be evangelizing the "cities of Israel" when the Son of Man comes? I suggest that the only scriptural option to this question is the 144,000 Israelites mentioned in Revelation 7:1-11 w/ 14:1-5. In Revelation 7:14 we see the fruit of their ministry: *"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation..."*

When we look at the remnant character of these 144,000 Jewish ambassadors, we need to ask the question, where did these saints witness such examples to inspire them to such a godly stature and holy life? Where is the Church that is moving or ***provoking to jealousy*** the unbelieving Jews today? I suggest that those who have been called to fulfill the BTJ vision will be of the stature and holiness of character to accomplish this and be the precipitating factor the Lord will use to bring to the remembrance of the 144,000 ***AFTER*** the rapture of the Church!

We have another clue in Obadiah 21 to the identity of these Jewish saints who will make up the company of the 144,000: *"The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to Judge the mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord's."*

This indicates that we as Gentiles are not going to be ***directly*** involved in the proclamation of the gospel and deliverance of Israel. God has reserved this privilege to the saved Jewish remnant during the Great Tribulation or last half of Daniel's 70th week (Dan.9:24-27). There is also a prophetic reference to this company of saints mentioned in Zechariah 9:11-10:12. In this passage the near-view prophetic reference was the Maccabees and their war with the Seleucid Greeks during the inter-testament period. This prophecy, like many prophecies, has a dual fulfillment and 'telescopes' to the time of the great tribulation where it will be ultimately fulfilled (see also Daniel 8:23-25 w/ 11:29-35 where Antiochus Epiphanes IV is a type of the antichrist in the tribulation).

So, what is the biblical framework for the BTJ vision? As we approach the time of our Lord's return for His Church, it is the Body of Christ which is presently God's current ambassador to the nations (2Cor. 5:20-21). After the rapture of the Church this responsibility will then be returned to the restored Jewish remnant according to God's original plan and promises to Israel (Ex. 19:5-6 w/ Isa. 42:18-19; 43:10; 44:8 w/ Ezek. 37, etc.).

As noted in the BTJ history the general trend of the spread of the gospel was from Jerusalem westward into Europe and finally to America, which is as far West as one can go! The missionary work of the China Inland Mission,

founded by J. Hudson Taylor, was God's primary means that prepared the way for the BTJ vision which was birthed in N.W. China in the early 20th century.

Simultaneously, during this time in history God was sending missionaries into Korea and Japan as well.

When we read the prophecy of our Lord's first advent in Isaiah 9:1-2 we see that this passage was cited in Matthew 4:12-16 as its fulfillment. Now this is where we need to look at the original language of the N.T., which is Greek. In Matthew 4:16 it states at the end of the verse "*upon them a light dawned*" (NASB). The verb is *anatello* in the Greek. The cognate noun is *anatole* which is the word translated "east" (literally 'the rising sun') in the English. (See also Matthew 2:1-2w/vs.9 and six other places in the N.T. where it is also translated "east": Matt. 8:11;24:27; Lk. 13:29; Rev. 7:2; 16:12; 21:13). This noun, *anatole*, occurs in one other place (Luke 1:78) and is variously translated "*the sunrise from on high*" (NASB); the "*dayspring from on high*" (KJV); "*the rising sun from heaven*" (NIV), "literally, rising from on high, like the rising sun or stars (Isa. 60:19)" A.T. Robertson.

Dr. Thomas L. Constable states:

The Greek word *anatole*, can describe the rising of a heavenly body or the growing of a plant shoot. It is perhaps a double reference to messianic prophecies about the star arising out of Jacob (Num.24:17) and the shoot growing out of Jesse (Isa. 11:1-2). Verse 79 continues the first allusion (cf. Isa. 9:1-2; 59:9).

The note in the NET bible regarding this Greek word states:

The Greek term translated *dawn* (ανατολη, *anatolh*) can be a reference to the **morning star** or to **the sun**. (emphasis mine). The Messiah is pictured as a saving light that shows the way. The Greek term was also used to translate the Hebrew word for "branch" or "sprout," so some see a double entendre here with messianic overtones (see Isa. 11:1-10; Jer. 23:5; 33:15; Zech 3:8; 6:12).

Dr. Ralph F. Wilson writes:

"The rising sun" (NIV) or "dayspring from on high" (KJV) is the Greek noun *anatole*. It refers to the rising of stars and the sun, and here refers to "the dawn" as figurative of the coming of the Messiah. "Dayspring" is a picturesque English word meaning daybreak or sunrise. This shaft of early morning sun will suddenly illuminate those "living in darkness and in the shadow of death" (1:79) to turn their darkness into bright daylight. This is reminiscent of Isaiah's

prophecy, later quoted in Matthew 4:16 as referring to Jesus' ministry in Galilee:

"... In the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan

--

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." (Isaiah 9:1-2)

What a marvelous prophecy Zechariah utters upon the naming of his son, John! How his neighbors must have talked for weeks and weeks.

As we look at these Old Testament references cited above, we see an amazing phenomenon: that this term *anatole* which the Holy Spirit uses, is a reference to Jesus as a king (a star=royal monarch) and also the root and offspring of David (Rev. 22:16)! When comparing this verse with verse 17 we see that the Church is the Bride of her Morning-Star-Bridegroom, Jesus Christ; how amazing!

This is very significant as we note the prophecy of the coming Messiah in terms of a "*star shall come forth*" (note the use of the cognate verb *anatello* in the LXX) Numb 24:17. The note in the NET Bible on this verse states:

This is a figure for a king (see also Isa 14:12) not only in the Bible but in the ancient Near Eastern literature as a whole. The immediate reference of the prophecy seems to be to David, but the eschatological theme goes beyond him. There is to be a connection made between this passage and the sighting of a star in its ascendancy by the magi, who then traveled to Bethlehem to see the one born King of the Jews (Matt 2:2). The expression "son of a star" (*Aram Bar Kochba*) became a title for a later (Jewish) claimant to kingship, but he was doomed by the Romans in a.d. 135.

Richard Ritenbaugh states in his publication:

The Branch

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Forerunner, "Prophecy Watch," March 1998

In our frequent studies of the Old Testament prophecies, we have undoubtedly read the sections on the Branch. In many translations, the word "branch" is in all capital letters so it is obvious to the reader that it

refers to the Messiah. Usually, a quick survey of the context shows that the translators were justified in doing so.

Often, when something is so obvious, we tend to take it for granted. We see the simple solution and fail to take the time to dig a little deeper. As Winston Churchill once remarked, "Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened." This is human nature at work.

Is there something more to the Branch than we have realized? Is the Branch's identification as Messiah all that the prophets meant to convey? Is there anything more about the Messiah that His identification as the Branch can tell us? Could it possibly tell us something about ourselves and our tremendous potential as children of God?

What Is a "Branch"?

"Branch" is capitalized six times in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word used in five of them, *semah*, is fairly insignificant. It simply means "sprout, growth or branch." The remaining occurrence has the word *hoter*, meaning "branch" or "twig." We can see, then, that the literal meaning leads to a more metaphorical one.

The Hebrews and other Semitic peoples used the term in a genealogical sense, meaning that a certain person belongs to or descends from a particular family line. To give the same sense, we might use the term "heir," "descendant," "seed," or "scion." Like Hebrew, English links trees and genealogy in such phrases as "family tree" and "the apple doesn't fall very far from the tree."

Of all the "Branch" passages, Isaiah 11:1 shows this usage the best: "There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch [*hoter*] shall grow out of his roots." As the context reveals, the Messiah will descend from the line of Jesse, the father of David. This idea of descent is present in all the "Branch" passages.

(Please note that the term "Root" is used in vs. 10 to designate Jesus Christ as the source or God of David ~ D.R.)

The "Branch" Passages

Let's see what the Bible has to say about the "Branch":

Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:15-17:

"Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

"In those days and at that time I will cause to grow up to David a Branch of righteousness; He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she [Jerusalem] will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." For thus says the Lord, "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel."

Both of these sets of scriptures focus on the Branch as *King*, descending from David, making righteous judgments, ruling and causing peace and security. Thus Revelation 19:16 calls Him, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

Zechariah 3:8-9 "Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they are a wondrous sign; for behold, I am bringing forth

My Servant the BRANCH. For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua: Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription," says the Lord of hosts, "And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day."

Here the Branch is called God's *Servant*, taking away iniquity in one day. This is exactly what Christ did, and is reminiscent of Paul's description in Philippians 2:7: "But [Christ Jesus] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant. . . "

Just a few chapters later, Zechariah provides another angle on the Branch:

Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the Lord; yes, He shall build the temple of the Lord. He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; so He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.
Zechariah 6:12-13

Here He is highlighted as a *Man* whose job is to build the Temple, be glorified, rule as King and function as priest without any controversy between the two offices, thus bringing peace. The Branch is shown as the one Man who fulfills all things perfectly. He is the perfect man.

In this vein, Paul writes, "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (I Timothy 2:5-6).

Finally, we have the ultimate description of the Branch!

In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped. Isaiah 4:2

He is called "the Branch of the Lord"—He is *God's* descendant! He is the Son of God, not just the son of the man David! Yet this verse also describes Him as "the fruit of the earth," meaning that, though He is God, He is also from mankind. He could claim full descent from both Godkind and humankind!

A Hidden Passage

So, we have seen the Branch in four different ways, as a King, Servant, Man and God! Does this ring any bells? John Ritenbaugh gave a series of sermons a few years ago titled "Four Views of Christ." Here we have Old Testament verification of that very same idea! The four views of the Branch are the very same four views that the gospel writers give in the New Testament:

Jeremiah 23 and 33, Matthew shows Christ, the Branch, as *King*.

Zechariah 3, Mark shows Christ, the Branch, as *Servant* of God and man.

Zechariah 6, Luke shows Christ, the Branch, as *Man*, whose job is to build the church and become the perfect Mediator between God and man.

Isaiah 4, John shows Christ, the Branch, as *God* in the flesh.

At first glance, the New Testament seems not to have picked up on this Old Testament prophetic description of the Savior as the Branch. However, Luke 1:78 contains a hidden reference to the Branch, obscured by the translation:

And you, child [John the Baptist], will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. (Luke 1:76-79)

This is the end of Zacharias' prophecy of the Messiah, and it seems to contain not even a hint of a reference to "the Branch."

However, there are two ways to translate the word "Dayspring" in verse 78. It is *anatole* in Greek, meaning "rising up," and Greek speakers usually use it of the sun and stars rising. It often has the sense of "from the east," since the sun rises in the east.

Its second meaning, though, is "shoot" or "branch"! It is the same word that the Septuagint, the Old Testament in Greek, uses in Jeremiah 23:5 and Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12 for "Branch"! At the very least, this is a double entendre, a play on both meanings of the word, to describe the Messiah. This could be translated "the

Branch from on High," which is very similar to Isaiah 4:2, "the Branch of the Lord [YHWH]."

The translators chose to use "Dayspring" because verse 79 contains the imagery of giving light in darkness, just as the dawn chases away the darkness of night. They are undoubtedly correct in their choice, but the idea of "the Branch" is lurking just behind. (End of quote.)

Therefore, Jesus Christ in Luke 1:78 is designated as the **Star** (a royal monarch or King), **Root** (the source or God), **Offspring** (the descendant) of David!

Earlier we noted the use of the cognate verb *anatello* used in Matthew 4:16 citing Isaiah 9:2 "upon them the light **dawned**". This same verb is used to describe Jesus Christ arising as the Morning Star in the hearts of Church Age believers. The background imagery Peter uses is the planet Venus which rises as the morning star just before sunrise after the long night has run its course. For Israel our Lord will **rise** (LXX *anatello*) as the **Sun of Righteousness** at His second advent to earth (Mal. 4:2). When we compare this verse in Malachi with Isaiah 60:1-3 we see that at the second coming of Jesus Christ the Glory of the Lord "**has risen**" (LXX *anatello*) upon you (Israel). This follows Chapter 59:16-21 where Jesus Christ comes in the full armor of God, glorified **IN** His already-raptured Church, to deliver a remnant of Israel on earth (2Thess. 1:10). Paul cites this passage in Ephesians 6:10-17 where he exhorts the Body of Christ corporately to put on the whole armor of God (the verbal commands are plural). This means that when the Church finally arrives at the goal of the perfect or mature man which is defined as *the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ* (Eph. 4:13) Jesus will come in the person of His Church, His bride, to deliver Israel at the end of the tribulation (see Rev.19:6-9 w/ 14). When we compare 2 Peter 1:19 with Revelation 2:26-28 we see that the hope for the Church is that there will first be an overcoming remnant in whose hearts (plural) Jesus Christ will arise as the Morning Star before He comes to this earth to deliver Israel at the second advent.

How does all this relate to the BTJ vision? Let us return to Matthew 2:1-2 & vs.9. The Magi, or wise men, who came from the east (Grk. *anatole*, the direction of the rising sun) saw a supernatural event described in verse 2 as a star in the east (or in its rising). The note in the NET Bible on this verse is instructive:

Or a star "in its rising," referring to the astrological significance of a star in a particular portion of the sky. The term used for the "East" in v. 1 is *ανατολαί*

(anatolai), a plural form that is used typically of the rising of the sun), while in vv. 2 and 9 the singular ανατολη (anatoih) is used. The singular is typically used of the rising of a star and as such should not normally be translated “in the east” (cf. BDAG pg.74 s.v. 1: “because of the singular and the article in contrast to απο anatolwn, vs. 1, [it is] probably. not a geographical. expression. like the latter, but rather astronomical...likewise. vs. 9”).

Peter in his second epistle refers to Jesus’ transfiguration as the background for helping us to understand the significance of Jesus Christ arising in the hearts of those who will make up a corporate testimony within the church before the rapture. Jesus in His *un-glorified* humanity was displaying His “power and coming (presence) in the glory of His Father” at His second advent (see context: Matt. 16:27-28 w/ 17:1-5; Mk. 9:3; Lk.9:26-29). This ‘morning star testimony’ is defined in 2 Peter 1:16: “we made known to you **the power and coming (presence) of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

Remember that Peter has in his mind the account of Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain in these synoptic gospel accounts cited above. Peter was in the reality of Jesus Christ having risen in his heart as the Morning Star! Therefore, his very person was making known the power and coming of our Lord Jesus! **It is this same morning star testimony becoming a reality in the hearts of those called to fulfill the BTJ vision that will have the authority to bring the gospel through the 10/40 window nations back to Jerusalem!**

There is a remarkable statement regarding the language which Jesus uses in Matthew 24:27 describing His second coming, “As the lightning comes from the **east** (Grk. anatole), and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming (presence) of the Son of Man be.” With respect to this earth, China, Korea and Japan are the furthest east! In light of these remarkable passages of scripture the end-time purpose of the BTJ vision will be fulfilled through an overcoming remnant of saints from the **place of the rising sun (east)** back to Jerusalem (which is west of Asia). This end-time movement of God is a prophetic harbinger to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy and prepare the way for Jesus to return to establish His glorious kingdom on earth and rule with His overcoming saints for a thousand years!

We, as Church-age believers, are living branches in union with the Vine, Jesus Christ (John 15:1-5).

Rev. 2:26 He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; 27 AND HE SHALL RULE

THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father; 28 and **I will give him the morning star** (Emphasis mine)

Rev. 3:20 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. 21 **'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me in My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father in His throne** (Emphasis mine) 22 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

Rev. 22:16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches I am the root and the descendant of David, **the bright (clear) morning star.**" 17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come " And let the one who hears say, "Come " And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

Maranatha!

Doug Riggs