



## A BIBLICAL WORD FOR AN URBAN WORLD

I have Ray Bakke to thank for the following insights and some of the following language. Bakke is a distinguished professor of global urban ministry and Chairman of the Board of Regents at Bakke Graduate University of Ministry. In his book, *A Biblical Word for an Urban World* he gives us a fresh look at the first two chapters of the first gospel.

### The Reporter

The reporter of the story has broken faith. He's an outsider. He is not politically correct. He is not socially acceptable. Religiously, he is unclean. He has taken a job with the Romans collecting taxes. This flies in the face of any nationalist, cultural, or religious (never mind spiritual) solidarity with the occupied community. To the Jews, he has denied his heritage, his nation, his God. He sold his soul. Yet Jesus called him. Now the spirit of Christ inspires him to get the story straight. Our "outsider" reveals the inside Christmas story.

### Getting ready for Christmas

Getting ready for Christmas takes longer than one might think; a couple thousand years or better would be a conservative estimate. Bakke calls Matthew 1:1-7 "the cemetery tour."

Matthew's genealogy includes four women. Really! Of all the good, godly, moral, upstanding, law-keeping women in Israel's history, couldn't the reporter have chosen better? Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, he includes Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba; each story a soap opera. That women be included is noteworthy enough. That these women be so

recognized is enough to shake a first century Jew to his core. The most scandalous races of the world are noted as being contributors to the bloodline of the God-man; Canaanite, Moabite, Hittite mixing and mingling with the Jew, God's chosen. Matthew says the Jew is not the only one chosen, but that God has had the world in view from the beginning. Gender, ethnicity, and scandal notwithstanding, Matthew lays groundwork for a story of the savior of the world. He makes clear that the blood of this sacrifice is blood that came from the peoples of the world. Matthew's message is that, even in the scandalous history of a people, God can be working redemption.

### The Long Awaited Day

In the language of a newsflash, Matthew scripts the drama of divine intervention; a virgin birth, a messiah's arrival, the fulfillment of prophecy. The Jews could not save themselves with their law-keeping and efforts at morality. Deliverance would have to come from outside. Supernatural intervention was needed. The miraculous was a necessity.

Salvation will not come from within. It will not come from a person, and it will not come from within a people or a nation. It will not come from a mere human. It must come from without. Heaven must visit earth. God must become man. The world will not solve its own problems. The cities will not lift themselves from their own crises. Education will not rescue us. Business will not deliver us. The arts will not purify us. Our advanced health care systems will not heal us. We need Jesus, who will save His people from their sins.

### The Refugee

"Matthew wanted us to know that the Christmas story is about an Asian-born Jesus who became an African refugee. Did you know that, of the 100 babies born worldwide every 7 seconds of this day, over half will be born in Asia? Did you know that over half of the world's 30 million refugees are Africans going from country to find bread? Matthew wants us to know that our savior, Jesus, understands the stuff that people are experiencing, Bakke points out.

### Out of Town Guests

"While Luke, the Gentile, tells us that the first visitors are local shepherds," Bakke says, "Matthew, the Jew, informs us that, among the first visitors are international scholars from the place we now call Iraq." Iraqis seeking the savior.

Tens of thousands of Jews were marched 900 miles to Babylon. In both stories of Jewish exile, Assyrians of the north and Babylonians of the south are the bad guys. At the end of the Old Testament, it looks like the enemy has his foot on the neck of God's chosen. Did Daniel, son of the exile, win converts in Babylon who themselves won converts whose spiritual grandchildren read Daniel's commentary and, understanding the significance of Jesus' natal star, traveled the 900 miles from Babylon to Judah, not to conquer but to worship the king of the Jews? These enemies of Israel were among the first to come with gifts instead of swords. Matthew's record communicates good news that is above political boundaries. This good news is cross-cultural. This good news is global.