

“The Wonder of Christmas:”
A Person Promised: The Old Testament Announcements
The Promise Is Also Ours

“Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.... Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.”

Charles Wesley composed these lyrics in 1744 to celebrate the Advent Season based upon his meditation of Haggai 2:6-9.

“This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and what is desired by all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place, I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty.”

The Bible, we have argued, is a very complex, multifaceted book yet it has one simple theme, the glorification of God through the gathering of a people who will adore and delight in Him forever. Satan, who was instrumental in blighting the original habitation of God for His people, appeared to be in total triumph, God’s intentions soundly reversed, when you read the Genesis 3-5 record. Flight replaced delight, death life; harmony and tranquility extinguished. The Bible ends with quite a reversal: Satan is banished, his limited reign ending in judgment and the Lord reigning among His people adored by myriads and myriads in a “world” as perfect in every way as the character of God. Pain will be banished along with disappointment and frustration, mutuality of love the constant expression, and worship our focus. That is the grand story line of the Bible!

The people of God through the centuries have longed for that day of reversal, restoration, and vindication to come. It would and will come in two stages roughly

commensurate with the division of the Bible into two testaments or covenants. The Old Testament or the Hebrew Scriptures tells us of the one who would come to make the restoration possible by accomplishing the basis of its fruition. The New Testament or the Greek Scriptures applies the accomplishments of the anticipated one in gathering a people to dwell with Him forever. The ancient people of God longed for the Messiah, the deliverer, and He came; we long for the return of the deliverer to enact a final redemption establishing His kingdom forever. The aged Simon in the presentation of Jesus at His circumcision, having taken the child in his arms, declared, “Now Lord, Thou hast let thy bond-servant depart in peace, according to Thy word; For my eyes have seen Thy salvation (Luke 2:29-31).”

Today, in anticipation of the celebration of the Advent of the promised restorer of garden, we turn to the witness of the Old Testament writings. Such writings fill the reader, as it did the original readers, with a deep sense of anticipation that the promised one would someday come. The question before us today is this: what do the Hebrew Scriptures tell us about the person that would come to deliver us? What we find in reading the Scriptures is a progressive unfolding of a portrait.

1. Genesis 3:15

This text, the judgment on the serpent, tells us that a post-fall conflict will exist between the “seed of the serpent” and the “seed of the woman;” further, while damage to the “seed of the woman” will be significant, the damage on the “seed of the serpent” will be fatal. All that we can learn about the promised one is that constant conflict will end in victory.

2. Genesis 5

This chapter traces the genealogy from Adam to Noah, the son of Lamech, ten generations. What is most interesting for our purposes is that Noah’s name means “rest.” Lamech viewed his son as one who would reverse the effects of the curse (v. 28)! This suggests that the earliest OT saints lived in hope and anticipation. The one to bring “rest” would be a son of Noah.

3. Genesis 9:26

Here we are told that the blessing would come through a son of Noah, Shem. Thus, the deliverer would be a Shemite.

4. Genesis 12:3

The story of the anticipated is significantly clarified when we learn that a Shemite, Abram, was given a promise from God that “in you all the families

of the earth will be blessed.” This point is elucidated in the rehearsal of the covenant promises when God changed his name to Abraham, “the father of a multitude of nations (17:6).” From Abraham and Sarah would come a son! Paul tells us what not prophet could figure out; the “seed,” the deliverer, a son, is the Christ (Gal. 3:16). The Hebrew Scriptures never tells us this; it can only be deducted through later revelation, as in the case of the Galatians passage.

5. Genesis 21:12

The son through whom the promised seed would come is Isaac.

6. Genesis 27:27-29

Isaac granted the blessing to Jacob. The deliverer would be an Abrahamic Semite via Isaac and Jacob. Later Balaam blesses a son of Jacob without naming him, “A star shall come forth from Jacob and a scepter shall rise from Israel (Num. 24:17).”

7. Genesis 49:10-12

We learn more about the promised seed as Genesis unfolds; he will come from Isaac and Jacob, the son and grandson of Abraham, but here through Judah (Abraham’s great grandson), Jacob’s forth son. Through a son of Judah, a son who is a ruler, “rest” will come!

“Until Shiloh comes” is a difficult phrase to understand. Most are agreed that it refers to David and the establishment of the Israelite empire. Old Testament writers drew on this passage to envision David’s greater royal Son (Ps. 45; 72; 89; 110; 132; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11–15; Isa. 9:6–7; 11:1). New Testament writers see David as a shadow that prefigures the reign of the Messiah, “the lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5). Shiloh means “bearer of rest,” an apt prefigurement for Jesus.

Verses 11-12 must be read from a poetic perspective, not with a strictly literal mindset. It seems that when “Shiloh comes,” nature will be tamed, no longer rebellious. Wine, the symbol of blessing and prosperity, will be abundant; His character (v. 12) will be that of strength and power.

His person established, the prophets reveal His character and accomplishments.

8. Isaiah 7:14

This is a much-celebrated text being quoted in the birth narrative by

Matthew (1:23). In the context of the Isaiah passage several observations can be made: first, the passage is about deliverance from a military threat to the Southern Kingdom by a coalition of kings (Pekah of the Northern

Kingdom and Rezin of Syria). Second, the promise is that the threat will not materialize. Third, the illustration is that the threat will be gone before a lady can conceive and bear a son. Fourth, the son is a symbol of divine intervention and should be called accordingly Immanuel (“God with us”).

Matthew uses the verse as a prediction of the unique birth of Jesus. Several observations can be made at this point: first, Matthew does not read Isaiah 7:14 with the strict nuance of its first readers but reassigns the meaning within a subsequent setting. Second, The Hebrew term “almah” can mean a literal virgin, being used that way in the Hebrew Scriptures (Gen. 24:43) and the Greek Septuagint, though the range of meaning can be broader; Matthew interprets the term narrowly. The word is in the feminine form of the masculine equivalent which means a “young man” (II Sam. 17:56, 20:22). The point of the word has more to do with a time element than with sexual experience originally.

9. Isaiah 9:6

Just as the threat came from the Galilee, the north, in the thundering Syrian and Assyrian armies, a deliverer will come as well from the Galilee! The distress, darkness, and gloom of judgment will someday turn to light and joy.

This passage is quoted in part by Matthew (4:13-17) at the beginning of our Lord’s ministry in the Galilee and is a fulfillment of Isaiah’s words. Unfortunately, as in Isaiah’s day, the people of Galilee rejected the “greater prophet” to experience judgment once more, but not all of them.

a. The promise of an end to gloom, but the coming of light, vv.1-2
The introductory verse (actually, 8:23 in the Hebrew text) is perhaps better translated, “There will be no more gloom for the land which was anxious.” This makes the line positive, fitting the context better.

The reference to the humiliation of Zebulun and Naphtali refers to the Galilee that Tiglath-pileser III conquered in 734-733, making it a vassal state to Assyria. “Way to the sea” refers to the region of Dor on the Mediterranean coast south of Mt. Carmel, “beyond the Jordan” to the Golan Heights east of the Sea of Galilee; and “Galilee of the Gentiles” refers to the area southeast of the sea of Galilee.

The “darkness” refers to judgment, the “light” to a coming Davidic king.

b. The promise of joy and gladness, vv.3-5

Abundance will replace loss, and joy will replace despair. This was partially fulfilled in the first coming of the Child-King but will be fully manifest when He reigns over all the peoples on the earth forever. That day will be characterized by the abolition of war, as the instruments of battle are destroyed in fire.

“As in the day of Midian’s defeat” is a reference to Gideon’s victory in Judges 7-8. It will be a day like the Midian episode, a day of surprising victory!

c. The promise of a deliverer, vv. 6-7

The reason “for” joy is the coming of a special Child.

1) Hope is rooted in the advent of a child, v. 6a

To those who read these words in Isaiah’s day, it must have been confusing. How can a child deliver from the Assyrian threat? The humble origins of this child should not confuse us as to his identity. He was indeed born a child; the Lord of glory condescended to reside in human flesh. This child will be royalty; He will bear the signet of rule. “Child” suggests His ancestry, “Son” His maleness. Says Ortlund, “God’s answer to everything that has ever terrorized us is a child. The power of God is so far superior to the Assyrians and all the big shots of this world that he can defeat them by coming as a mere child. His answer to the bullies swaggering through history is not to become an even bigger bully. His answer is Jesus. . . .”

2) Hope is rooted in the royalty of this child, v.6b

The phrase, “government shall be upon His shoulders,” is a metaphor, a figure of speech. He never donned a uniform, marched at the head of a literal army, or orchestrated a battlefield plan, yet the promise is that He will be a ruling child.

3) Hope is rooted in the character and ministry of this child, v. 6c

The term “name (‘His name shall be called’)” refers to a person’s character. Three couplets describe the character of this Child-Governor. The list begins and ends with the idea of rule. The initial couplets tell us of His person, the latter His rule.

a) He is a wonderful, exceptional, and distinguished advice giver, and extraordinary strategist. This child says, “When counselors fail, I by ignorance or prejudice, even selfishness, but I am forever truth and trustworthy. My advice is always right.”

b) He is “Almighty God.” This child not only possesses wisdom; He has the strength to accomplish His divine will in us. This means that He can heal

every broken heart, comfort the hurt of every shattered and tattered dream, of everyone here today. “Mighty God” can mean a warrior; kings were referred to in this manner because they represented God to their subjects (Ps. 45:6) and this fits with v.7.

- c) He is our “Everlasting Father.” Why is Christ called “Father?” It seems that the term is a figure of speech for creator or controller. Christ created time and times; this suggests that He controls all events, and He does so with consistent parental compassion and care.
- d) He is the “Prince of Peace.” In a book with significant and repeated references to judgment, there are twenty-five references to peace; this is the first of them. It means that in His coming He will bring everlasting peace and blessing.

Chisholm gathers the sense of the verse this way: “To summarize, the messianic ruler’s titles depict Him as an extraordinary military strategist who will be able to execute His plans because of His supernatural abilities as a warrior. His military prowess will ensure His beneficent rule over His people, who will enjoy peace and prosperity because of His ability to subdue all His enemies.”

3) His reign, v. 7

The intense devotion of the Lord for His people will be the cause of this dominion of everlasting peace. It will be uniquely in the sovereign power of God to accomplish.

What can we say of this passage that anticipates the promised deliverer?

1. The promise of deliverance is not altered by adverse circumstances; a promise from God is a promise made sure.
2. This text has been wonderfully, though partially, fulfilled. In part, because the Spirit had in mind the advent of our Lord’s ministry of securing eternal life and reigning over His people though in a broken world through a broken, incomplete people.
3. The ultimate fulfillment will come when all His purchased ones are gathered into His sheepfold and the scourge of sin is removed from us as well as all creation in the new heavens and the new earth.
4. Between those two fulfillments are others because the comforts we receive daily prefigure our ultimate deliverance in the perfect realm and reign of the king.

This is one of the amazing passages in the Bible. It is the longest of the so-called servant songs, descriptions of the Lord's Servant, and the most quoted passage in the Greek Scriptures of the New Testament. Remember that Isaiah is writing these things 700 years before the advent of the Servant.

- 1) Exalted, 52:13
- 2) Humiliated, v. 14
- 3) Triumphant, v.15
- 4) The despised and rejected servant, 53: 1-3
- 5) The vicariously suffering Servant, vv. 4-6
- 6) The obedient and innocent Servant, vv. 7-9
- 7) The crushed, efficacious servant, vv. 10-12

9. Micah 5:2-9

In perilous times during the reign of Ahaz, the prophet chastised the rebellious city of Jerusalem. Part of the judgment narrative is to compare the supposedly great city with a lowly despised town. The point seems to be that man's wisdom cannot be compared to God's. From a lowly place, not a proud city, the promised one will come! Jerusalem will not be saved, but one will come from Bethlehem who will save. The promised ruler will be born in Bethlehem, but He will have existed before his coming.

a. His origin, 5:2

1) His humanity, v. 5a

A deliverer will be born in Bethlehem. So small was the town in Micah's day that the designation was hyphenated (Ephrathah is either district within the town or an alternate name for the town [Ruth 1:2, 4:11]). This confirms the witness of Scripture that the deliverer will come from the tribe of Judah, a greater son of David.

2) His deity, v. 5b

Though this deliverer will be born, He will have no beginning possessing the attribute of eternality or that He transcends time (in the least the verse is saying that He existed before He was born! [Isa 45:21, 46:10]).

b. His work, 5:3-9

1) To gather His brethren, 5:3

When this promised one comes the abandonment of Israel will come to an end.

2) To protect His sheep, 5:4-6

This coming one will identify with His people offering protection (shepherding) and peace.

The picture that emerges from the Hebrew Scriptures is not as clear and precise as you will find in the New Testament. We must remember that God is writing an amazing story of divine love and care that has taken centuries to unfold. It is clear from the writers of the New Testament that they believed that Jesus was the long anticipated promised one! They read in the Hebrew Scriptures what many of them saw with their eyes, heard with their ears, and experienced in their hearts.

He will be in constant conflict with evil.

He will be a son of Adam, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David.

He will be a mighty warrior.

He will be royalty, being of the House of David.

He will be born of a virgin.

He will deliver His people.

He will offer comforting advice.

He is almighty God.

He is the creator of time.

He is our peace.

He will be born in Bethlehem

He will have existence before He is born.

He will end the consequences of the curse.

He will be our shepherd.

Applications:

1. The Bible is to and for us, but it is only secondarily about us. The central message of the Bible is about the desire and quest of God to be revealed and revered by His people. We live in a culture, often even within our Christian subculture, that is “me-oriented.” It seems hard for us to grasp that the way to benefit is humility, that we are not the center of the solar system. However, when we discover that there is something greater, and far more important than ourselves, then we can find true meaning, direction, and contentment in life. Do you see the message of the Bible about you or is it about someone far greater? If so, what do you think are the implications?
2. God seems idle in our world, but you must not succumb to believing it. God is crushing the heel of the devil’s minions. God is orchestrating a drama

greater than all the Olympics and Super Bowls combined. No disasters, whether they be the world wars or the many holocausts of the last century, can stymie this grand story that even today is unfolding. The real story of the centuries is the redemption of God’s people to adore and revere Him forever. Can you imagine that someone would care for us so very much that He would take the centuries to make it possible?

3. The Messiah, the deliverer, is a human being, but even saying that He is a special person. His character and His accomplishments are unlike anything any other human could be or do. Why? Because of two things: first, the greatness of our need of deliverance and, second, the greatness of His ability to remedy our malady. How could a human being do this? He is perfect humanity and, thus, could be for us what no one else could be. He did not need a savior, but He could be the savior for us. His perfection was the ground of becoming our imperfection so that we can some day stand in the presence of God in perfection. Without the incarnation, there would have been no redemption!
4. We live in a world that identifies significance with greatness. We tend to prize things of wealth and size; at the same time we tend to despise the small as insignificant. The lesson we can draw from Christ's coming to an obscure village, raised in another one, is that we should not judge importance by size or prestige. The most insignificant place would bring forth the most significant person. Christianity fundamentally makes the point that wisdom is found in unsuspecting places, that worth is not determined by place of birth (education or career). Our faith should constantly shock us with the unexpected. God takes the wisdom of the world and reduces it to foolishness while He takes what others esteem foolish as wise. As you reflect on your values, do you have the same ways of thinking as the Lord of glory?
5. It is worth our meditation to reflect on the words "wonderful counselor" as well as "shepherd." A shepherd cares, guides, and provides for his flock. That is a beautiful metaphor for our Lord Jesus. Further, He is a counselor who gives to His flock profound and solid advice. Counselors these days are paid about \$160.00 an insured session and hopefully their help is truly helpful. That said, I wonder if we would spend less time on the counselor's couch if we spent more time reflecting of the wonder of our Savior in reading His words and prayer. This is in no way to denigrate advice givers, but it is to say that we have one who knows us intimately, whose wisdom is unparalleled, and whose compassion has no end. What advice do you need these days?
6. There is evidence that Jesus was far more than a human in our passages. In Isa 9:6, He is referenced as the "Eternal Father, a phrase that means the creator of time. If Jesus is the creator of time, then certainly He existed before the time He created. In Micah 5:2 the text reads that He existed from long ago or "the days of eternity; in either rendering He is beyond mere humanity, an unparalleled person. Imagine that the babe in the Bethlehem "crib" created the material it was made of! Can you begin to comprehend the wonder of it all? Do you find yourself meditating of the person of our Lord, one truly God and truly man? Why not set aside brief times this season to think of these things everyday? This reminds me of Jesus' conflict (Matt 22:41-46) with the Pharisees asking them a question, "Whose son is the Messiah?" Their answer was that he is the "son of David?" Jesus then said, "How can he be David's son and David's Lord?" We know the answer, do we not?
7. This is truly "the most wonderful time of the year" because our focus is upon

the most wonderful person of all time and eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ. Though the season is filled with many wonderful symbols of family and love, it is my prayer for AGG that we worship the one who was anticipated by the prophets. They cried out, "Come Thou long expected Jesus." That one has come and we celebrate with family and friends that coming. Yet, also utter the same prayer today, "Come Thou long expected Jesus," not to redeem us but to claim us. To claim to the most complete extent the throne of David and reign over us finally and completely setting us free. Will you join me as we celebrate the greatest gift of all?

"Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.... Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring."