

David's Messiah

To prepare for the season of “advent”, also known as Christmas, we’re going to spend a few weeks looking at the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus’ coming. Prophecy is often overlooked as a valuable reference point for the reliability of Scripture and the nature and purpose of Jesus’ coming, but it provides us with great resources for our faith, confirmation of the New Testament accounts as well as strengthening our confidence in the Old Testament documents. Over the month of November, we’ll look at four “types” of prophecy that are fulfilled in Jesus: the Messiah that would come from the line of David; the Suffering Servant of Isaiah; Jerusalem’s King, described most clearly in Zechariah;, and then we’ll link the prophecies of an outpouring of the Spirit with the accounts of Jesus’ birth in Luke’s Gospel.

Let’s begin with the Messiah who would come from the line of David. This goes back all the way to the time of David’s Kingship and his desire to build a temple for the LORD in Jerusalem. But God spoke to Nathan the prophet a word for King David:

“This is what Yahweh says: You are not the one to build Me a temple to live in . . .”

Now watch what happens a few verses later:

“I declare that Yahweh will build a house for you - a dynasty of kings! For when you die, I will raise up one of your sons, and I will make his kingdom strong. He is the one who build a house - a temple - for Me. And I will establish his throne forever.” (1 Chron. 17:4, 10-12)

And David responds to this covenant promise from Yahweh and it’s clear that he is overwhelmed by the thought that his descendants will continue to rule over Israel.

You speak of giving me a lasting dynasty! You speak as though I were someone very great, O LORD God! What more can I say about the way You have honoured me? You know what I am really like. (17:17,18)

This expectation was strengthened in the years that followed. There was a man named Ethan the Ezrahite who probably lived during David’s reign as King in Israel, but was certainly alive by the time of David’s son Solomon. He is referred to as a wise man in 1 Kings 4:31 and he wrote Psalm 89:

Yahweh said, “I have made a solemn agreement with David, My chosen servant I have sworn this oath to him:

‘I will establish your descendants as kings forever; they will sit on your throne from now until eternity.’ (vv. 3,4)

Later in Psalm 89, we read this promise about David:

I will love him and be kind to him forever

My covenant with him will never end.

I will preserve an heir for him;

His throne will be as endless as the days of heaven . . .

I will never stop loving him

Nor let My promise to him fail

*No, I will not break My covenant;
I will not take back a single word I said
I have sworn an oath to David
And in My holiness I cannot lie:
His dynasty will go on forever
His throne is as secure as the sun, as eternal as the moon
My faithful witness in the sky. (89:28f; 33-37)*

Some of the prophets of Israel picked up on this promise and expanded on it in their writings. One of those was Isaiah who penned these famous words:

*For a child is born to us, a son is given to us
And the government will rest on His shoulders
These will be His royal titles:
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace
His ever expanding, peaceful government will never end
He will rule forever with fairness and justice from the throne of His ancestor
David
The passionate commitment of Yahweh Almighty will guarantee this! (Is. 9:6,7)*

Later in Isaiah:

When oppression and destruction have ceased and enemy raiders have disappeared, then David's throne will be established by love. From that throne a faithful king will reign, one who always does what is just and right. (16:4f)

From Jeremiah:

*"For the time is coming," says the LORD, "when I will place a righteous Branch on King David's throne. He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land. And this is His Name: 'The LORD is our Righteousness'. In that day Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety."
(23:5f)*

The same words are found in Jeremiah 33:15 and 16 and they are followed by this:

For this is what Yahweh says: "David will forever have a descendant sitting on the throne of Israel." (33:17)

Now Jeremiah was writing as the Babylonian armies under King Nebuchadnezzar were threatening and, ultimately, defeating and destroying Jerusalem. He brought an end to the kings of Judah, an end to the line of kings that sat on the throne in Jerusalem. There was never another king in Judah after the exile who was descended from David - the Maccabean kings were from the tribe of Levi and the Herods were Idumean, descended from the Edomites who moved into the territory of Judah during the exile.

So we have to pay attention to the future tense of Jeremiah's prophecies. "The time is coming," says the LORD; "David will forever have a descendant sitting on the throne." These are prophecies that look into a future time, after the restoration of Judah from their exile in Babylon. So the prophecy of a forever king descended from David is still intact, but there is an interruption in the process. It will happen at some point in the

future, but it's going to be suspended for a period after Nebuchadnezzar ended the kingship of Judah in his conquest of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is very aware of this - he prophesied Nebuchadnezzar's victory on several occasions and he lived through the initial conquest. Ezekiel prophesied during the exile and he wrote about God's people as "the flock of the LORD":

I will set one shepherd over them, even My servant David. He will feed them and be a shepherd to them. And I, Yahweh, will be their God and My servant David will be a prince among My people. (34:23f)

A few chapters later, the message is reaffirmed, this time using the term "king":

My servant David will be their king, and they will have only one shepherd. (37:24)

In the verses that follow, Ezekiel builds on this expectation of the Davidic king. He talks about generation after generation living in the land God had given them. Then this:

And My servant David will be their prince forever. And I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant. I will give them their land and multiply them, and I will put My Temple among them forever. (25b, 26)

So, here is Ezekiel prophesying the everlasting kingdom for David's descendants that seems to have just come to an end. It's clear that both Jeremiah and Ezekiel are looking beyond the situation of their day and ahead to something new that God would be doing. The new thing would incorporate someone who was descended from King David and this person's influence would bring peace and hope to God's people.

There's one more important prophecy that I want to include in this study and that comes near the end of Amos:

In that day I will restore the fallen kingdom of David. It is now like a house in ruins, but I will rebuild its walls and restore its former glory. And Israel will possess what is left of Edom and all the nations I have called to be mine. I, Yahweh, have spoken, and I will do these things. (9:11f)

From all of these prophecies, what kind of expectations are being raised about the kind of king that is coming? When the Jews looked at their ancient texts, what were the prophets telling them to look for?

1. The first is that the coming one would not be an ordinary man. Anyone who will be a "prince forever" is not an ordinary person fulfilling a royal role for a human lifespan. Neither is it normal to say that the coming King would always do what is right and just. And the titles that will be given to this king are not normal titles: "The LORD is our Righteousness", "Wonderful Counsellor", "Mighty God", "Everlasting Father" and "Prince of Peace" are not the expected titles for David's great-great-great-great These are titles of a person who is God or is representing God to a very high degree.
2. The second thing is that this person would be a Saviour for God's people. Oppression and destruction cease and enemy raiders disappear. Jerusalem is rebuilt and resettled, peace reigns and God's people are cared for, shepherded, if

you like, by someone who is wise and just. According to Jeremiah, “In that day Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety.”

3. The third thing to note is that this person would come from the line of David - maybe that's the most obvious thing and should be mentioned first, but all of these points are obvious from the texts we've looked at today.
4. Next, is the powerful claim that this ruler, this shepherd of God's people, would be the forever ruler. “My servant David will be their prince forever!” The verse and a half that I quoted from Ezekiel uses the word forever twice and the word everlasting once. Isaiah 9:7 says, “He will rule forever with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David.”

So this is the expectation created by the prophets of Israel of a coming Messiah from David's line.

It would be hard to overstate the influence of Judah's exile in Babylon. These decades away from their homeland forged a new approach, one which took Yahweh more seriously in the decades that followed. For one thing, there doesn't seem to have been any interest in hand-crafting idols to worship. There was a high commitment to keeping the Sabbaths and the Feast Days and a rising movement towards ritual purity, things like repeated hand washing before being involved in a religious activity. It was in the first couple of centuries after the exile that the ultra conservative group known as the Pharisees emerged in Judea.

As the years went on, and the coming of Messiah drew near, so did Jewish expectation for that coming. The Jewish Talmud and the Apocalyptic literature of the 200 years before Christ show an intense hope for the coming of Messiah. The Jews were still scattered, even though some had returned to rebuild the Temple and restore Jerusalem. One of the key expectations was that the Messiah would bring in the restored Kingdom of Israel and that all those who had been scattered would be restored. One of the psalms from the Psalter of Solomon, a collection from this time period, refers to those days as the time when “the King, the Son of David” would gather together a holy people which he would rule with justice.

A later work, from the time of Jesus, was the Book of Jubilees and it included similar hopes of a gathering of those who had been scattered by the exile and a prophecy of Jerusalem being an eternally existing holy city where God would dwell among His people from His sanctuary - the Temple.

So there are several steps in creating an expectation that God would send His Messiah to the Jewish people. The first was the promise he gave through the prophet Nathan to David himself - that he would always have a descendant on the throne of God's people. That idea was remembered and expanded on in Psalm 89.

Then you have the prophets of Israel talking about the restoration of David's kingship at some future point. Amos and Isaiah, in the earlier prophetic period, and then Jeremiah and Ezekiel around the time of the Jewish exile to Babylon.

Then you have the Jewish apocalyptic writers just prior to, and during, the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. They reinforced the expectation of a coming king, a restoration of David's kingdom and a return of the scattered faithful to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. And the rabbis of that period also showed an interest in the coming King, but, being influenced by the pervasive power of Greek philosophy, their Messiah took on the form of a military hero, a commander of the armies of God who would free the people from bondage to Rome.

It's such an interesting time, and we see how Jesus' arrival created such problems for the Jewish leaders. Their expectation was for something much different and they didn't have the capacity to adjust their thinking to the reality that was right in front of them.

Now, what are the lessons that we should be learning from the Jewish expectation of a Messiah who would be a king born into the line of David, their great hero of the early days of nationhood about 1000 years prior to Jesus' coming?

1. The first thing I want to emphasize to us is the reliability of God's promises. The promise he made to David in about the year 1000 BC was a promise that David would have an eternal throne through his descendants and it was through his descendent, Jesus the Messiah, that this took place. That's how the book of Revelation portrays Jesus at the end of history: King of kings and Lord of lords. Peter refers to Jesus' Kingdom with these words (2 Peter 1:11)

God will open wide the gates of heaven for you to enter the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Yes, there was a major interruption in the plan of God to have His people led by godly rulers, but the bottom line was that a true and just King came from David's line and brought with Him the Kingdom of His Father in heaven.

So, God's promises are reliable - we can trust Him - and He wants us to.

2. The second emphasis is based on the first - and that is that there is a Lord of history. When God speaks through His prophets, He tells those who will listen what will be taking place down the road. He is the Lord of time and He sees the end from the beginning. It's all there before Him. I know we're all used to hearing the word "God" and we think we know something about Him - and we do - but He's so much more than we imagine Him to be. He's awesome in glory and power, in wisdom and insight, in His purpose and His plan. He is worthy of our praise, not only for what He has done for us, but in even greater measure because of who He is. He is the one who can say, "The virgin will be with child and will conceive a son, and you shall call His name, "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father" because He can make it happen, even if it's 800 years later.

3. The third thing that I notice as I look at both the prophecies of the coming King in the line of David, and in the Jewish expectation, based at least partly on those prophecies, is that how far off we can get in our predictions based on our own imaginations, our own fears, our own desires. I mentioned that some of the rabbis were adapting their

views to the Greek philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and so were starting to expect a kind of “ideal man” who would be a great soldier, great leader, inspiring presence for Judah’s people. We have to be careful that our hopes and expectations are not fashioned because of some new philosophy that is capturing a large portion of our generations, but continue to be rooted in Scripture and in the principles the Bible teaches. Don’t believe that Jesus promoted tolerance of all sorts of evil simply because He forgave people’s sins - that’s a modern twisting of the tale. Jesus called people to a new direction, living in response to God.

4. Finally, let’s not miss the big picture. The God who knows the future, who knows what will happen to His people in generations to come, is the God who knows you. He knows everything about your life, all your strengths, all the good He has poured into you, all the victories and accomplishments you have had in your life. He also knows your pain and struggle and defeat and, knowing all this, He loves you with an everlasting, unbreakable love. David knew his God. He knew that God was worthy of far more than the praises of Israel, but was worthy of the praises of all nations - and he called for that in several of his psalms. Among the key things David knew about his God was that God is loving, that He has compassion on all He has made, that He forgives sin, that He is a Redeemer, One who restores and heals brokenness. It is this descendent of David who is now seated at God’s right hand.