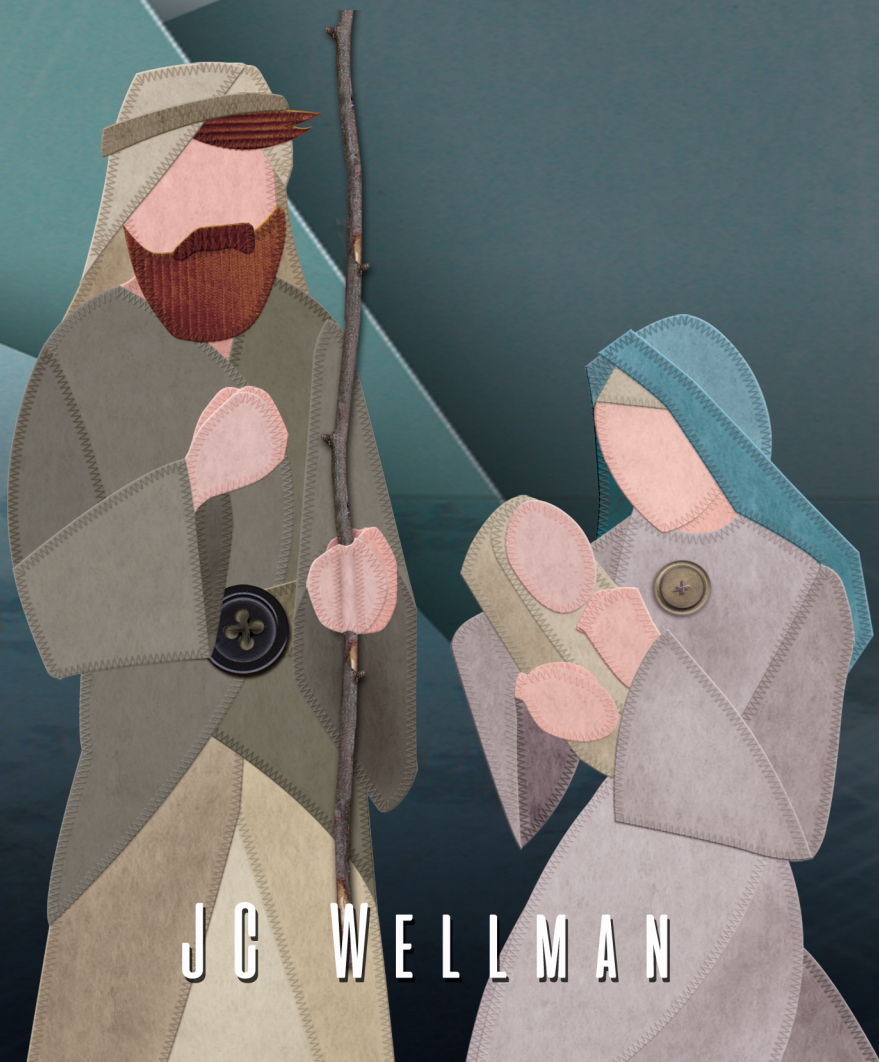


THE *Christ* OF
CHRISTMAS

WHAT JESUS' LIFE SAYS ABOUT CHRISTMAS



J C W E L L M A N

The Christ of Christmas

What Jesus' Life Says About Christmas



J. Clent Wellman

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by J. Clent Wellman

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*For believers everywhere, that we might
celebrate Christmas every day of the year.*

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INTRODUCTION

Christmas is my favorite holiday, and the Christmas season is my favorite time of the year. I love the cold weather, the jolly attitudes, and the time spent with loved ones.

Most of all, I love celebrating Christ.

In a society where Jesus is increasingly unwelcome, I love that the name of the most popular day of the year integrally includes “Christ.” It’s true that many want to “take Christ out of Christmas,” namely by replacing “Christmas” with the word “holiday,” but I’m convinced that keeping Christ in Christmas is about more than the word we use to describe a day on the calendar. Moreover, it’s the believer’s responsibility, not the unbeliever’s, to keep Christ at the forefront of the season, and we need to be prudent in how we do that.

This is why one of the worst things a Christian can do is force non-Christians to use the word “Christmas” without telling them of its Christ. It undermines the purpose for which Christ came. He didn’t come to wage a battle over the name of a holiday. He came so that people could know God personally.

He wanted people to see God, and touch God, and know God.

So, God became man. He was born in a cradle, which led to a cross, which will lead to a second coming in the clouds, and ultimately a crown upon his head.

It's the Christian's job to present this message to the world, and this cannot be done by forced appellation. The world must know that Jesus is Christ the Lord. They must know the depths and riches of his life's episodes like the cradle, the cross, the clouds, and the crown. They must know the purpose for which God became man.

It's only then that we will keep the Christ in Christmas, and it's only then that the term will be spoken with the conviction it deserves.

This book is a compilation of devotionals I gave to Mission Dorado Baptist Church in Odessa, Texas during the 2016 Christmas season. The goal is to show the beauty of Christ by expositing some of the major moments of his life. My hope is that it will show you the glory of the Christ of Christmas in a fresh way, one that inspires you to see that the Christmas message is one that lasts all year long.

CHAPTER 1: THE CRADLE

"No Crib for a Bed"

The manger is often remembered as the thing Jesus was "away in," as the Christmas hymn so famously states, but the message of the manger is one that merits a better description than the one given in the respective song, which simply describes it as "not a crib."

Prominently presented in Luke's account of Jesus' birth, the manger is described as the place in which Mary laid Jesus after snuggling him in a cloth (Lk 2:7). However, some translations instead use "feeding trough," a description that perhaps gives the modern, Western mind a more apropos picture of Jesus' first bassinet.

The feeding trough motif is fleshed out by a careful reading of the rest of Luke 2:7.

The second part to Luke 2:7 states Jesus was laid in a "feeding trough" because "there was no room for them at the ..." Many translations render the next word "inn," but some translate it "lodging place," a small, but interesting disparity that lends insight into the original nativity scene (and one that helps establish the nature of the manger).

The Greek word used for “inn” or “lodging place” in Luke 2:7 is *katalyma*, which is commonly understood as a “guest room” as opposed to an “inn.” Luke 22:11, for example, uses *katalyma* to describe the “Upper Room” where Jesus would host the Passover meal. It was a spare room to a private home, not a hotel room in an inn. The Greek word *pandocheion* in Luke 10:34, on the other hand, better conveys an “inn,” a room one would rent. Luke uses this word when he describes the Good Samaritan taking the injured man to an “inn” where he paid two denarii to an “innkeeper.”

The word Luke uses in 2:7 is therefore better rendered “guest room” rather than “inn.” Consequently, the angry innkeeper was more likely a humble homeowner, one rooted in a culture of Middle-Eastern hospitality that would not have subjected a pregnant woman to an outside stable, but instead to the confines of his own home, however crowded it would have been.

Kenneth Bailey, accomplished theologian and founder of the Institute for Middle Eastern New Testament Studies, contends that first century houses in Palestine typically had a large family space (like a modern living room), a guest room (often built on the roof; the space

of which there was “no room” for Joseph and Mary), and a room that held a family’s animals at night (like a modern day garage that stores vehicles).¹ The “manger” or “feeding trough,” therefore, was located inside the house, not outside, so the animals would have a place from which to eat at night. It was likely a hewn rock, or a depression in the floor.

A “manger” was thus a place reserved for feeding animals, a detail that is not insignificant.

I have one animal that lives in my house, a dog named Biscuit. I never look at Biscuit’s food bowl and think about using it for any other function besides holding his food. This is likened to how a first century mind would have understood the word “manger.” It would have been (and still is!) a curious thing to hear a baby was placed in a feeding trough, but once the listener learned the guest room was full, it would make sense because it was the only space left in the house, much like a person sleeping on the floor if all the beds and couches are taken.

This information doesn’t do much to alter the traditional description of a manger, except that a few days before his death Jesus sat in a

¹ Bailey, Kenneth, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, pp. 25-37.

guest room that likely sat over a room with a manger, telling his disciples to “eat” bread, because it represented his body (Lk 22:19). It’s possible the house owner’s animals had been brought in for the night and were feeding from the manger while Jesus connected the dots of his birth, in which he was laid in a feeding trough, and his forthcoming death, where his body would be offered like the bread in his hands.

This is enough to cause us to stop and consider the nature of the manger in a profound way—the first of two bookends, which illustrates that Jesus came to feed an emaciated world with his life.

“I am the bread of life,” Jesus said, “no one who comes to me will ever be hungry” (Jn 6:35). “I assure you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man ... you do not have life in yourselves. Anyone who eats my flesh ... has eternal life” (Jn 6:53-54).

On a final note, my wife, who happens to be a baker, once made a baby Jesus cake for a church youth group party. “Is this weird?” I remember her asking. “People will be eating Jesus.”

“No,” I said. “I think it’s perfect.”

CHAPTER 2: THE CROSS "Oh, Christmas Tree"

Since Christmas celebrates the birthday of Jesus, the cross is usually shelved until Easter. But this kind of mindset undermines the fundamental nature of Jesus' birth. He was born so that he may die, and the story of the cross embodies this best.

To understand the cross, we must consider the substance from whence it came—wood. Wood comes from trees, and so this chapter traces the tree in Scripture in order to discover what it might teach us about the cross.

Think of this chapter as the Bible's take on the Christmas tree.

In Scripture the tree symbolizes the Bible's story of salvation history. The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* states, "Sandwiched between Genesis and Revelation is the tree, the cross of salvation."² One author describes the tree's annual cycle as a symbol of how life always triumphs over death. And so even though the cross symbolizes Jesus' death, it ultimately points to eternal life, and this is the real message of Christmas.

² Ryken, L., Wilhoit, J., and Longman, T., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, p. 890.

Much like how studying a family tree helps to show things about a family's heritage, studying the tree's family tree presents significant insights into the heritage of the cross.

“Tree” in the Old Testament

The first time a “tree” (Heb. *ates*) is mentioned in Scripture is in Genesis 1:11. It was part of the vegetation God created on the third day. Genesis 1:12 says the trees bore fruit, and Genesis 1:29 says God gave the fruit of the trees as food for man, a command echoed in Genesis 2:16. The following verse, however, states there was one tree that was forbidden—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. “From [this tree],” God said, “you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die” (Gen 2:17). A few verses later the serpent is shown tempting the woman. The text says she “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, [so] she took from its fruit and ate” (Gen 3:6). This is known as “The Fall,” an act that ushered in the physical and spiritual death of mankind.

Therefore, the first mention of a tree in Scripture shows how it was used by Satan to

devastate man's eternity, as well as his personal relationship with God. However, while it's true the tree started off on the wrong root, God would use it in redeeming ways:

“There is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its shoots will not die. If its roots grow old in the ground and its stump starts to die in the soil, the smell of water makes it thrive and produce twigs like a sapling” (Job 14:7-9).

The next use of “tree” is when God commissioned Noah to build an ark (Gen 6:14). The ark was made of *ates*, the same Hebrew word for “tree” in Genesis, and became a vessel of refuge from the fallout of the first tree. Anyone who was inside this “tree” was spared from the worldwide flood, while those on the outside suffered the consequences of the Fall. Upon leaving the ark Noah unfortunately committed the same sin Adam and Eve had committed in the Garden. Genesis 9:21 says he ate from a garden in a forbidden way, and, like Adam and Eve, he also became “uncovered.”

It was the Garden of Eden 2.0.

Thus, while the tree was able to temporarily save mankind from the effects of the Flood, it would need something more significant before it could be redeemed, which is precisely what happens in Genesis 22.

In Genesis 22 God told Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. The text says he laid the “wood” (same Hebrew word, *ates*, for “tree”) for the offering on Isaac, and then they walked up the mountain together. Many scholars believe this is the same mountain on which Jesus would eventually be crucified, and that Abraham was serving as an illustration of a Father who was willing to sacrifice his one and only Son. God ultimately stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac by providing a substitution. Realizing the significance of God’s act, Abraham called the place “The Lord Will Provide,” because he believed that one day “It will be provided on the Lord’s mountain” (Gen 22:14).

Consequently, the “tree” would also be used as tinder in animal sacrifices, an act that would atone for the sins of mankind (Lev 1:7, 8, 12, 17:3:5).

Satan, however, would continue to use the tree in blasphemous ways. For example, the prophets often described how Israel carved false gods out of trees (Deut 4:28; Is 45:20;

Hos 4:12; Hab 2:19). Moreover, a chief persecutor of God's people, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed he was like an "enormous tree" under which the nations of the world would find shelter (Dan 4:10). In interpreting the dream Daniel said Nebuchadnezzar was "great and strong," and that his dominion had stretched to the distant parts of the earth, representing how ungodliness reigned in all the corners of the earth (Dan 4:22).

The tree finds redemption in its extensive use in the construction of the tabernacle, and then in the Temple, God's home on earth (Ex 25:5, 10, 13, 28; 26:15, 26; 27:1, 6-ff; 2 Sam 5:11; 1 Kings 6:10-ff). It was also used to build some of the Temple's furniture. Deuteronomy 10:3 says it was the main material of the Ark of the Covenant.

Once the Temple was constructed God had a permanent home in which he could dwell with man on earth, something that hadn't occurred since the Garden of Eden, the last time a tree held a significant place between God and man. A large percentage of the Temple was wood, which meant God had taken the substance Satan had used to separate God and man and used it to personally meet with man again.

One can imagine how Satan felt when he saw God dwelling in a Temple made of "trees,"

with priests using “trees” as kindling to atone for sins. Satan had used the tree to separate God and man, and now it was being used to unite them. Maybe this is what prompted him to spur the Romans towards the art of crucifixion, an act that utilized the tree to kill God’s Son so that permanent atonement would allegedly never be possible.

“Tree” in the New Testament

Each of the four Gospels tells of Jesus dying on the cross, but it’s the Apostles’ statement in Acts 5:30 that best captures the heritage of the cross when they label it as a “tree” (Grk. *xylon*). The same word is used in the same context in Acts 10:39 and 13:29. Paul uses it in Galatians 3:13 to describe how Christ became a curse for us, because “everyone who is hung on a *tree* is cursed” (Deut 21:23). Peter says he bore our sins while “on the *tree*” (1 Pt 2:24). The Gospels also use the same Greek word to describe the “clubs” the mob wielded when they came to arrest Jesus (Mt 26:47, 55; Mk 14:43, 48; Lk 22:52).

In the events leading up to the crucifixion—and in the crucifixion itself—Satan employed the “tree” in attempts to separate God and man for good. However, as Job said, “There is hope

for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again” (Job 14:7-9).

This is best seen with Jesus, the “shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots [that] will bear fruit” (Is 11:1). Interestingly, while carrying the cross, Jesus described himself as the “green wood,” that is, the living tree (Lk 23:31).

The cross shows us that the very thing that was used to usher the Fall in, is the same thing that was used to usher it out.

This is well illustrated in Numbers 21, when (of all things) serpents plagued the Israelites. God told Moses to take a snake image and mount it on a pole. “When anyone who is bitten looks at it, he will recover” (Num 21:8). In telling Moses to set up a bronze serpent, God used Satan’s own image—the original one he employed in the Garden—against him. He turned Satan’s weapon of defeat into one of victory.

The same is true for the tree when it was fashioned into a cross.

Satan tried to use the tree to defeat God for good, but God turned it around for his glory, and today we can look at the cross like the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent.

The Bible states the world was created through Jesus (Col 1:16), which means he created the tree that Adam and Eve used to commit the first sin, the trees that many used to carve out false idols, and the tree on which he himself hung. It's true that Satan used the tree in terrible ways, but it's also true that God used it to help redeem the fallen world.

Some of the final words in Scripture describe a "Tree of Life" that will bear twelve kinds of fruit. The leaves of this tree heal the nations, and "there will no longer be any curse." The thing that was used to curse the world will now sit in the middle of the new heaven and earth as a symbol of eternal life and blessing.

This is because Jesus is the "green tree" (Lk 23:31). He may have been "cut down," but he "sprouted again" from the tomb, and now, through him, "Blessed are those who ... have the right to the tree of life" (Job 14:7-9; Rev 22:14).

As it turns out, the cross was the first Christmas tree, and Jesus is the final and everlasting one.

CHAPTER 3: THE CLOUDS

"I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas"

Science teaches us clouds are a congregation of tiny water droplets so light and small they float in the air. The droplets are indistinguishable by themselves, but together they form an impressive presence in the sky, a presence that has captured man's attention since the days of Noah.

Clouds, therefore, are a visible manifestation of what is unseen, and the scriptures show how God utilizes them as a metaphor for himself. Jeremiah, for example, uses the cloud as a metaphor to describe how God is both present and hidden (Lam 2:2). "No one can see God and live, so the cloud shields people from actually seeing the form of God. It reveals God but also preserves the mystery that surrounds him."³

The scriptures also use the cloud to present Jesus as God. Previously, God would use the cloud to visibly represent his un-seeable presence, but Jesus is the physical manifestation of the God who was once concealed. We can see the Father by looking at Jesus, and this is the true message of Christmas.

³ Ibid., p. 157.

“Cloud” in the Old Testament

The cloud’s first mention in Scripture is Genesis 9:13, when God places his “bow in the *clouds*” after the Great Flood. God tells Noah it is the “sign of the covenant between me and the earth.” This is significant, because it establishes the cloud as more than a carrier of judgment, but a carrier of grace, too. The clouds brought the rain that flooded the earth, but they also carried the rainbow, a promise of hope and peace after the storm.

The Hebrew word for “rainbow” is the same word used to describe a military bow. God took the weapon he used to judge creation and hung it in the sky as a reminder that there is hope after the storm. “The rainbow becomes an image of God’s mercy and peace after the storm of judgment.”⁴

The cloud is next seen as a pillar that guided the Israelites through the wilderness after their exodus from Egypt (Ex 13:21, 22; 14:19, 20, 24). The Israelites were to follow the prompts of the cloud, staying or going as the cloud stayed or went. “At the Lord’s command the Israelites set out, and at the Lord’s command they camped” (Num 9:18). It was the sign of God’s presence among the Israelites,

⁴ Ibid., p. 695.

the visible presence of the invisible God. “The ... cloud ... never left its place in front of the people” (Ex 13:22).

The third significant use of “cloud” in the Old Testament concerns the founding of the Law on Mount Sinai. During the wilderness journey God led his people to the foot of a great mountain on which he would give Moses the Law. The scriptures state the mountain was covered with a thick cloud, one that made the people “shudder” (Ex 19:16). The Law was eventually placed inside the Ark of the Covenant, which sat in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, which itself was filled with a cloud (Ex 33:9). The same manifestation would occur with the Temple’s Holy of Holies, when upon its dedication God’s glory filled it with such a copious cloud the priests were unable to continue ministering (1 Kings 8:10-11). On a related note, Ezekiel shares how he saw a cloud departing from the Temple’s Holy of Holies when God left Israel to her sin (Ez 10:18).

A final noteworthy use of “cloud” in the Old Testament shows how some employ it as a metaphor for a chariot of war (Ps 68:4; Dan 7:13; Na 1:3). Isaiah says, “The Lord rides on a swift cloud” (Is 19:1), and Ezekiel says the day

of the Lord will be “a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations” (Ez 30:3).

These pictures summarize the cloud in the Old Testament, and present it as a physical manifestation of an otherwise invisible force, and also one that contains both judgment and mercy. The New Testament continues this theme, as the cloud begins to form into a special, discernable shape that shows Jesus as God in the flesh.

“Cloud” in the New Testament

If Christmas is anything, it is God with us. Isaiah prophesied, “The Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel” (Is 7:14), a name which Matthew translates as “God is with us” (Mt 1:23). Therefore, while God disguised himself as a cloud in the Old Testament, he would reveal himself clearly as Jesus in the New Testament (Jn 14:9).

The first mention of a cloud in the New Testament is at Jesus’ Transfiguration, an event that presented Jesus as “God’s Son, in whom [he] is well pleased” (Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk 9:34-35). This is a major claim, because it verified what Mary, the shepherds, and ultimately the magi were told, which is that

Jesus is the “Messiah, the Lord” (Mt 2; Lk 1:32; 2:11).

While it doesn’t specifically use the word “cloud,” perhaps the second significant episode of clouds in the New Testament is at the crucifixion, when “from noon until three in the afternoon, darkness came over the whole land” (Mt 27:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 23:44). This is reminiscent of the dark skies that undoubtedly plagued the world during the forty days of the Flood, but just like the Flood, there is a rainbow in these clouds—Jesus Christ.

The Gospels offer hints of how Jesus is the embodiment of the multicolored rainbow in the clouds, the hope of peace in the midst of the storm. John shares how Jesus was clothed in a purple robe during his scourging (Jn 19:2). Matthew describes it as a scarlet robe (Mt 27:28). Mark shares how, during the Transfiguration, his clothes became “dazzling—extremely white” (Mk 9:3). In describing him as a “priest forever” (Heb 5:6), the author of Hebrews connects Jesus to the blue priestly ephod (Ex 28:31). Ironically, like Joseph (Gen 37), Jesus was stripped of his “coat of many colors” at the time of his death (Jn 19:23). But, also like Joseph, Jesus stands as the redeemer before those who abused him.

He is the rainbow in the clouds, the multi-colored hope in the midst of the storm.

The crucifixion episode also shows us how Jesus is the embodiment of the Temple, the place where the cloud was most visibly present in the Old Testament. “Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days ... he was speaking about ... his body” (Jn 2:19, 21). The temple was the place where God dwelt with man, and in Jesus God physically dwelt with man. People didn’t need to follow the cloud anymore, because the cloud had become a person. “Come, follow *me*,” Jesus said (Mk 4:19).⁵

The next mention of the “cloud” in the New Testament is at Jesus’ ascension, when “a cloud took him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9). Two angels shared how “This same Jesus ... will come in the same way that you have seen him going into heaven,” which means he will return again in the clouds (Acts 1:11).

This is how the story of the cloud ends in the Bible, with the Son of Man returning in it. “The Son of Man [will come] on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mt 24:30; 26:64; Mk 13:26; 14:62; Lk 21:27). The message is that the cloud will serve as a chariot of war for the return of Christ. At the

⁵ Emphasis mine.

final battle Jesus will return with judgment to the wicked, but grace to the saved. He is the fulfilled promise of the rainbow. “Look, he is coming with the clouds,” writes John the Revelator (Rev 1:7). “Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and one like the Son of Man was seated on the cloud” (Rev 14:14).⁶

As a boy growing up in East Texas, I would sometimes lie in my backyard with my siblings and try to pick out shapes in the clouds. “That one looks like a horse!” my brother would say. “That one looks like a smiley face!” my sister would shout.

The story of the cloud teaches us that the cloud of the Old Testament took on the shape of Jesus in the New Testament. It would be like looking up into the sky at a cloud and saying, “That cloud looks like a man!” and then the cloud descending onto earth and actually becoming a man. Suddenly, the phenomenon in the sky has become one of us.

⁶ On a related note, Paul, in describing the rapture, says we will be “caught up together ... in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess 4:17).

“I continued watching ... and suddenly one like a son of man was coming with the clouds of heaven” (Dan 7:13).

The cloud shows us that we can dream about more than a white Christmas. We can dream of a scarlet Christmas, a purple Christmas, and yes, even a blue Christmas, because Jesus is our kaleidoscopic hope in the clouds.

CHAPTER 4: THE CROWN

“Let Earth Receive Her King”

The crown plays a significant role in Jesus’ life—one that helps us understand who he is and why he came—but to understand the crown we must first consider the “king.”

The word “king” is mentioned about two thousand five hundred times in the Old Testament alone, but only a handful of its uses are especially significant. Most of the uses have to do with kings of foreign nations, but the goal of this chapter is to trace the lineage of Israel’s king, because that is the title appropriated to Jesus in the New Testament (“King of the Jews”).

“King” in the Old Testament

The first significant use of “king” in the Bible is in Genesis 14, when it is used to describe Melchizedek, the “king” of Salem. Melchizedek’s name is the combination of two Hebrew words that mean “king” and “righteousness.” The word “salem” means “peace,” and is a nod to the future city of “*Jerusalem*,” which means “city of peace.” Melchizedek is quite literally the king of

righteousness and the king of the city of peace (Heb 7:2). He is also described as a “priest to God Most High” (Gen 14:18). He is a unique and mysterious figure in the Old Testament, and some scholars believe he was the pre-incarnate Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews describes him as “without father, mother, or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God,” implying he came from heaven (Heb 7:3). In the least we can safely assume he is a remarkable foreshadow of Jesus.

It is also worth noting that Abraham is mentioned as having defeated several other kings (Heb 7:1), and in response gave a special offering to Melchizedek, thereby presenting him as the king of all the other kings.

The next significant use of “king” is in Genesis 17:6, when God told Abraham, “I will make kings come from you.” Abraham is the father of the Jews (Gen 12:1-3), and therefore God is hand picking Abraham’s lineage as the lineage that would host the kings of the kings, and ultimately the *King* of kings. The promise is reaffirmed to Jacob in Genesis 35:11, the man after which the nation of Israel is named.

This is part of a larger story that God foresaw and of which he prophesied in

Deuteronomy 17:14. An interesting tension is presented in which Israel desires a king who is not God, but how God would work with the system to bring about his Messiah.

The book of Judges (17:6, 18:1, 19:1) cites the lack of a king as why the Israelites “did what was right in their own eyes.” They came to believe that a human king could solve their issues of disobedience, when in reality it was an act of disobedience. “Appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have,” requested Israel (1 Sam 8:5). “They have rejected *me* as their king,” God tells Samuel, “listen to them, but solemnly warn them and tell them about the customary rights of the king who will reign over them” (1 Sam 8:7, 9).⁷

The key theme in God’s response is that they have rejected him as their king, and the message of the crown is God’s plan to restore himself as the king through the person of Jesus Christ. Hannah prophesied this in her prayer when she said, “The Lord will ... give power to his king; he will lift up the horn of his anointed” (1 Sam 2:10). Moses predicted the same thing in Genesis 49:8-12 and Numbers 24:7-9, 17-19.

Israel’s first king is Saul, who quickly turned

⁷ Emphasis mine.

aside from God's will (1 Sam 9; 15:11). God then chooses a man after his own heart, David, who supplants Saul and establishes a throne through which the Messiah would one day come (1 Sam 16). This is where the Christmas message comes in. As Isaiah prophesied, "a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders" (Is 9:6).

"King" in the New Testament

Luke 2 details a census that required everyone to travel to his hometown. Joseph, Jesus' father, is said to be of the "House of David," and thus traveled to Bethlehem, the city of David. There is an important truth inherent in Joseph's familial line that ought not be overlooked. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus traces Joseph's lineage back to Solomon, which is different from Luke's genealogy, which traces Jesus' lineage through Mary back to Nathan. Both Solomon and Nathan were sons of David, but it was Solomon who properly reigned on David's throne, not Nathan (1 Kings 1). However, Jeremiah 22:30 states a curse was placed on David's bloodline, specifically on Solomon's lineage, which meant that no one from this lineage could ever sit on the

throne again.

This presented a problem, because this was the throne God said would “endure forever” (2 Sam 7:16). Someone would have to circumvent the curse in order to righteously reign on the throne, and some scholars suggest this is why God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary (Lk 1:26-27).

According to Luke’s genealogy, Jesus’ earthly mother hails from Davidic blood, but not Solomonic blood, the rightful heir of the throne. This means Jesus is both eligible and ineligible to reign on David’s throne (Lk 3:23-38). He is of the family of David and free from the curse, but on the other hand he is not of the rightful lineage.

Jesus’ earthly father, however, did not physically contribute to his birth, which means Jesus did not inherit Joseph’s “cursed” blood. He did, however, through adoption inherit Joseph’s Solomonic heritage (Mt 1:1-17) Therefore, Jesus is uniquely qualified to reign on David’s throne, for he is of the Solomonic heritage, but not under its curse.

This presents Jesus as the only individual to ever live who qualifies to reign as the true King on David’s throne. It is no wonder why we sing lyrics like,

Joy to the world,
The Lord has come,
Let earth receive her king!

Matthew's genealogy, by the way, is the first time the word "king" is used in the New Testament (Mt 1:6).

The next substantial use of "king" in the New Testament is in Matthew 21, when it is used to fulfill the prophecies concerning the Messiah's first incarnation (Is 62:11; Zech 9:9). This is what we know as "Palm Sunday," in which the "king comes ... riding on a donkey."

It is next used to refer to Jesus as the King of the Jews, albeit pejoratively as a sign on the cross (Mt 27:11, 29, 37, 42). Jesus was crucified because he claimed to be the King of the Jews, a "crime" of which he was unequivocally guilty.

Paul uses the term twice in his letter to Timothy. His first use describes Jesus as "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God" (1 Tim 1:17). The second use concerns Jesus' second coming (1 Tim 6:15), which is how it is used in Revelation, where Jesus is described as the King of kings who is coming back to reign (Rev 1:5; 19:16).

This leads back to the crown. During his first incarnation Jesus was derogatively

mocked as the King of the Jews, and wore a crown of thorns (Mt 27:29; Mk 15:17; Jn 19:2, 5), but at his second incarnation he will be gloriously hailed as the King of kings with a golden crown upon his head (Rev 14:14; 19:16).

It's fascinating that the first significant king in Scripture is Melchizedek, the king of righteousness who ruled over the city of peace. The text emphasizes him as the most important of all the kings of his day. Jesus is the final King in Scripture, who is a "priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 7:17). Like Melchizedek, Jesus is described as the king of all the kings, but to put it more accurately, he is the King of kings, who will rule over the new city of peace.

Just as God had promised, David's throne would "endure forever," and this ultimately happens through Jesus (2 Sam 7:16). This is what Christmas is all about! "Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Lk 2:11).

The crown shows us Jesus is quite literally the only one who has ever lived who is worthy to wear the crown, and thankfully he humbled himself and became a peasant so that we

could become citizens in his kingdom.

The story of the crown reminds me of one of my favorite Christmas songs:

How many kings stepped down from
their thrones?

How many lords have abandoned their
homes?

How many greats have become the
least for me?

And how many gods have poured out
their hearts

To romance a world that is torn all apart

How many fathers gave up their sons for
me?

Only one did that for me.⁸

Maranatha, and Merry Christmas!

⁸ Written by the band "Downhere."

Works Cited

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Christmas prompts us to remember the first incarnation of Christ. The holiday is specifically about the beginning of that incarnation--Jesus' birth. The mere thought of this is astounding, because it acknowledges that God became man. But in our Christmas celebrations we sometimes forget the baby eventually grew out of the manger. Scripture shows us that every event in Jesus' life enhances the power of the Christmas narrative. This booklet considers four major moments of this life (birth, death, ascension, and second coming) and considers how they impact the Christmas story. My hope is it helps you see Christmas as something you can celebrate all year long.



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