Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

How Christmas Solves the Prophetic Puzzle
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-451

This morning we're going to talk about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. I feel a little bit like an echo since we have started the gospel of John a couple of months ago and we've been talking about the person of Christ quite extensively in detail going through the first chapter and in to the second chapter of John. And by the way, we'll continue that next Sunday morning in John chapter 2.

Also, to add to our discussions about Christ, we have been for about a year now looking at Christ in the Old Testament and seeing prophecies of Him that are laid out in the Old Testament. And there are some more of those to come. And that's why I say, focusing on Christ today may be a bit of an echo but His person is so wondrous and so unparalled and the truth about Him so inexhaustible that I think it's a delight for me, and I hope it is for you to look again.

Now we know that Christmas is a very paradoxical time of year, it's an enigmatic time of year, it's full of conundrums. We know somehow that in the midst the shepherds and the wise men, reindeer get added to the mix, and we're not quite sure how that all goes together. We understand that there's a paradoxical focus on a figure called Santa Claus who gives you what you want if you're good. And then there's Jesus Christ who gives you what you need if you recognize you're bad. And those are juxtaposed against each other. We understand all of that. We get those paradoxes and I think we sort them out pretty well. I think you do as well as I do because you know the truth of the Word of God.

But there are some other paradoxical realities that are related only to Jesus Christ Himself. There are some conundrums, some enigmas that appear in Scripture as we think about the Lord Jesus Christ. And just a reminder that Christianity is alone the religion in the world that has two books separated by hundreds of years. Book one, the Old Testament, predicts what will happen, and book two, coming hundreds of years later, the fulfillment of those prophecies and thus Christianity is validated as to its divine origin because only God can predict history and bring it to pass.

And so, as we look at the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ and the New Testament record of their fulfillment, we see the evidence of the divine authorship of the Word of God in which the Christian faith is built. The Old Testament presents a sort of Messianic prophecy mosaic and as it begins to piece itself together, it's a little hard to figure out until the central figure of Jesus Christ is placed into the mosaic and then everything makes perfect sense.

If you were a person reading only the Old Testament, and there are people who do that even today, Jewish people, if you were living at a time in the past before the New Testament, and you looked at all the prophecies regarding Messiah, you would find many things that would be hard to resolve. That's why Peter says in 1 Peter 1:10 and 11 that even the prophets who wrote about the Messiah looked at what they wrote to try to figure out what it meant. You see prophecies in the Old Testament talking about the Messiah coming as a conqueror. You see other prophecies defining Him as a man of sorrows, a man of loneliness. You see some prophecies that say He will be rejected by the world, and other prophecies that say the world will bow down to Him in homage.

You see prophecies that tell us that He is the King of glory, that He is the King of heaven, that He's the eternal Savior, that He's the desire of all nations. And then you have prophecies that say there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is a slave, He is a bloody, suffering, crucified and dead figure. And then there are other prophecies that talk about Him being raised from the dead and elevated to an everlasting kingdom. Looking only at the Old Testament, these present all kinds of enigmas to the reader and that's what Peter means when he says they were looking at what they wrote and try to figure out what a person and what time and how this all came together.

Even John the Baptist was struggling to put it together. Turn to Matthew 11 for just a moment, we'll start there. In Matthew chapter 11 John the Baptist by this time is in prison. He has been taken prisoner by Herod Antipas because he has been preaching against Herod's illegitimate marriage and he has denounced Herod for what he has done in taking his brother's wife. And Herod, in anger, Herod is the ruler of Galilee and Peraea, Herod Antipas and he locks John the Baptist up in a prison that is part of a Herodian palace in a gloomy fortress called Machaerus on the backside of the Dead Sea. And John is being held prisoner there for his denunciation of Herod's sexual escapades. He will lose his head there at a drunken party as you well know. And John sitting in prison is getting messages from people who come to visit him, his followers, and he's curious about Jesus. And so he sends his disciples back to Jesus, and we pick it up in verse 2 of Matthew 11 when John while imprisoned heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, "Are you the expected one? Or shall we look for someone else?" That's really an amazing query coming from John the Baptist, because John the Baptist was the herald of Christ, the forerunner of Christ, chosen while he was still in his mother's womb filled with the Holy Spirit. His parents knew he would be the voice of one crying in the wilderness, fulfilling Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3.

He would be the one who comes and announces the Messiah and he did it. One day Jesus showed up where John was baptizing and he pointed to Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And he announced Jesus as the Messiah and he told his own disciples, "Leave me; follow Him." Which they did and he said, "I must decrease and He must increase." So John understood that.

But as he hears the reports of Jesus, they're curiously very different than what he expected Jesus to be and do. And so he poses the question, "Are You really the Messiah?" Which then poses the question to us, "What was confusing him?" Well, the answer to that is to go to Luke 3 for a moment, keep your finger in Matthew 11. But if you go to Luke 3 for a moment, I want to introduce you to the fact that what John said about the Messiah was not something that he himself had invented. It was not something he had presumed. It was given to him by God. And you see that in chapter 3, verse 2, where it says, "The Word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias the priest, in the wilderness." So his message was divinely given. And what was his message? Well, he came with a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And when you look at what he said, given him by God, you can understand the confusion. Drop down to verse 7. "He began saying to the crowd." So he's giving the message to the crowds, that has come to him from God. "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee the wrath to come?" He denounces the people who are coming as snakes running, as it were, from a brushfire that is going to consume them, racing as fast as they can to escape the fire he says, "That's you, a brood of snakes fleeing from blazing wrath." Then he says in verse 8, "Bear fruits in keeping with repentance." Then in verse 9, "Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees so every tree that doesn't bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Now what he's saying is repent, prepare your heart for Messiah is coming, and He's very angry. This is wrath, this is judgment, this is fire. And then, of course, down in verse 16 we get another insight into his ministry message, "He answered and said to them all," all the people that gathered there, "as for me, I baptize you with water but one is coming who is mightier than I and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals, He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire and this is what he said many other times as he preached the gospel to the people," verse 18.

So what does John expect the Messiah to do when He arrives? To judge, to come in fury and anger and wrath with fire to consume the impenitent and the ungodly. But what happens? The Messiah comes, and the reports are coming back to God, return to Matthew 11, and he's hearing of the works of Christ and there aren't really any works of judgment. Instead what is Jesus doing? He's doing works of mercy. He's healing sick people. He's giving sight to blind people and hearing to deaf people. And He's restoring the limbs of people who are paralyzed and He's raising dead people and this is all mercy and grace and compassion. And John is confused by this. And so, in his confusion he says to his disciples, "Ask Him if He is the expected One, or shall we look for someone else?"

Well, Jesus answers the question in verse 4. "He said to them, 'Go and report to John what you hear and see.'" And then Jesus quotes Isaiah 35:5 and 6, and Isaiah 61:1, "Do you not remember what Isaiah said? Go tell John the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them."

In other words, remind John that the ministry of mercy and compassion and healing was part of the messianic prophecy and remind John, Isaiah 61:1, that the Messiah will come to preach the gospel to the poor prisoners, blind and oppressed and to declare the acceptable year of the Lord. Remind John that there's a ministry of compassion, a ministry of mercy, a ministry of grace, as well as a ministry of wrath and fury and fire and judgment. And then tell John this, verse 6, "Blessed is he who doesn't take offense at Me."

What does He mean by that? Don't pre-judge. That's what He's saying. This is a gentle rebuke. Tell John to back up a little bit. Don't stumble because of what you see. Wait for the full picture. There will be fiery judgment. And, of course, we know that will come when He returns, but a preview of that came a few years after this in the destruction of Jerusalem which was an unparalleled holocaust for the Jews.

So John is trying to harmonize what God told him what the Messiah would do with what the Messiah is actually doing. And the answer that Jesus gives him is trust Me, don't be offended, don't be scandalized, don't be thrown off course, don't stumble over this. This is an illustration of the fact that diverse and seemingly contradictory prophecies exist and rather than cause an offense, they are a great evidence of the veracity of Scripture because how do you resolve all of these? Somebody looking only at the Old Testament sees the complexity of these enigmatic statements about one person and can't find any resolution until Jesus appears, and then everything is perfectly resolved in Him.

I want to show you some of those mysteries that come together in Christ in unique ways. And I know you know a lot of them, there are about 330 prophecies in the Old Testament about the Lord Jesus, and most of them were fulfilled in His first coming, many of them will be fulfilled in His Second Coming. He comes first in mercy; He comes second in wrath and judgment. But I want to show you some of the prophecies. I'll start with a familiar one, and then we'll look at some that might be not quite so familiar.

There is the mystery of the Messiah as Man and God, the mystery of the Messiah as Man and God. Now if you've been to the concert, you know that I've given a little message from Isaiah and I've talked about the fact that Isaiah 7 and Isaiah 9 present the Messiah as both Man and God. The Lord will give you a sign when the Messiah comes. That's important, Isaiah 7:14. How do you know when the Messiah arrives? How do we know when He shows up? What's the sign? "The Lord Himself will give you a sign," that's what Isaiah says 700 years before Jesus is born, and here's the sign: "A virgin will be with child. A virgin will be with child. And the child will be God with us." That's the sign.

Well, that's only happened one time in human history as Matthew 1 that I read you earlier indicates. It happened in the case of Jesus Christ who was the son of Mary and the Holy Spirit, not Mary and

Joseph. That's the sign. He will be a Son, that is He will be human, born of a woman, but He will be Emmanuel, God with us. And then I point out in the ninth chapter where we read a child will be born, a Son will be given. A child born, that's human; a Son given, that's a preexisting Son given to us. So you have One who is both an eternal Son given and a human Son born. That's the humanity and deity of Jesus.

But you can imagine until Jesus came how enigmatic those statements are. And if you look a little deeper into that issue, you see some things that were very difficult for them to understand. For example, Genesis 3:15 said that the one who comes to destroy Satan, the Messiah essentially, will be the seed of the woman. Daniel 7:13 says He will be the Son of Man. Psalm 2:7 says, "He will be the Son of God." Genesis 22 says He will be the seed of Abraham. Isaiah 11 tells us that He will be the root of Jesse and 2 Samuel tells us He'll be the Son of David.

Now let me pull all that together for you. How can someone be the seed of a woman when a woman has no seed? How can someone be the Son of Man at the same time the Son of God? How can He be the seed of Abraham and yet be before Abraham? How can He be the Son of David and be the root of Jesse, David's father? How can God be Man and Man be God and at the same time be a Son of Man and the Son of God. How can one be a Son of Man and yet have no human father, and how can He be a seed of a woman when there is no such seed? Well, you get a little bit of the challenge for an Old Testament prophet to understand the very things he wrote.

Turn to Matthew 22 verse 41. The Pharisees are spending this portion of the week, Passion Week, the last week of our Lord's life before His crucifixion, asking Him all kinds of questions and finally He turns the table and asks them a question. They're gathered together, He asked them a question, this is Matthew 22:41, "What do you think about the Messiah? What do you think about the Messiah? Whose Son is He?" They said to Him, "The Son of David." Of course, that's...all the way back to 2 Samuel 7, the promise that the coming King whose kingdom will be everlasting is going to be a Son of David. So they knew that. In fact, that when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem early in that week, they hailed Him as the Son of David because that's the Messianic line. So they said, "Son of David."

He said to them, "Then how does David in the spirit call Him Lord saying the Lord said to My Lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I put your enemies beneath your feet?'" And He's doing a little exposition of Psalm 110. In Psalm 110, "The Lord said to My Lord, 'Sit at My right hand.'" That's David writing. David says the Lord God says to My Lord, the Son of God, "Sit at My right hand." How can the Messiah be David's son and David's Lord? How can He be David's Son and precede David's father? Be the root of Jesse who is David's father? How can He be David's Son and David's Lord? All of these things pose impossible dilemmas that cannot be resolved except in Jesus Christ. And that is why the Jewish world, having rejected Jesus Christ, has essentially forfeited any hope of a Messiah because these things could never come together in anyone other than Christ, never. And Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." He is fully Man and fully God.

And then there are some mysteries that you might have overlooked. There's the mystery of the line of Judah, the mystery of the line of Judah. When the Messiah is chosen by God before the foundation of the world, of course, to be the Man Jesus, the incarnate Man, the God/Man, the Word becoming flesh, it is laid out in Scripture that He will come through a certain family—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah. He'll come through the tribe of Judah, one of the twelve tribes. He will be of the line of Judah. In Genesis 49:10, it says He will come from Judah. It says there that the scepter, meaning the right to rule, will not depart from Judah until Shiloh comes. Shiloh is a title for Messiah, meaning the One whose right it is. So He's going to come through Judah, the tribe of Judah.

Now that's fine. But there's a problem. And I want you to go back to Genesis 38 to see the issue. This would be in the mind of anyone who knew the Messiah was supposed to come through the line of Judah. There is a big problem here, a very big problem. We'll pick it up at verse 24. About three months later, Judah—now remember, Judah is the chosen line of Messiah—was informed, "Your daughter-in-law, Tamar, your son's wife has played the harlot and behold, she's also with child by harlotry." She prostituted herself and she's pregnant. An outraged Judah says, "Bring her out and let her be burned." Burned? I thought Jews stoned as a form of execution. And the death penalty was required for that kind of adultery. There are two mentions in the Old Testament of crimes that brought someone to be burned. One, Leviticus 21:9, was if the daughter of a priest prostituted herself, she was to be burned. Second, was in the case of incest, Leviticus 20 verse 14, "Burn her." It was while she was being brought out to be burned, that she sent to her father-in-law saying, "I'm with child by the man to whom these things belong." And she said, "Please examine and see whose signet ring and cords and staff are these?" Before you burn me, whose are these that were left in my tent? They were Judah's. He had committed incestuous adultery with his own daughter-in-law. Verse 26, "Judah recognized them, said, 'She's more righteous than I,'" relatively speaking, no pun intended. "Inasmuch as I didn't give her to my son, Shelah, and he didn't have relations with her again. And it came about at the time she was giving birth that behold there were twins in her womb, moreover it took place while she was giving birth, one put out a hand and midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand saying, 'This one came out first,'" that had to do with the laws of primogeniture, who got the inheritance, but it came about as he drew back his hand that behold, his brother came out." This is a problem. "Then she said, 'What a breach you have made for yourself,' so he was named Perez, related to that. Afterward his brother came out who had the scarlet thread on his hand and he was named Zerah, meaning brightness."

Now what is going on here is that Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, seduced him. And apparently it wasn't just once. The language that says he didn't have relationships her again could indicate that it was something he did more than once, but he stopped doing it. This carried a curse. Now here's the problem. This is a pretty serious curse. The curse is laid out in explicit language in the twenty-third chapter of Deuteronomy for this kind of behavior. Listen to what it says. "No one of illegitimate birth shall enter the assembly of the Lord, none of his descendants even to the tenth generation shall enter

the assembly of the Lord."

If you're born of incest, you are excluded from the privileges of worship for ten generations that stigma remains, ten generations. Now some would see that ten generations as kind of a general indication of a long period of time, and it certainly would indicate that. But I want to show you something very interesting. Remember, the Messiah comes through the line of Judah, but now the line of Judah is cursed and they can't even join the assembly of the worshiping people.

Turn to Matthew chapter 1. How is a Jew looking at the Old Testament supposed to process that. The Messiah comes from Judah, but Judah has illegitimate children that are cut off from the assembly of the Lord. Matthew 1, the record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers. Now the line goes through Judah. Judah is the father of those two illegitimate twins, Perez and Zerah by Tamar the prostitute. Perez was the father of Hezron; Hezron the father of Ram; Ram the father of Amminadab; Amminadab the father of Nahshon; Nahshon the father of Salmon; Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, another prostitute, Boaz was the father of Obed by Ruth and Obed the father of Jesse; and Jesse was the father of David." And if you count those between Judah and David, there are ten generations, ten generations. So the curse is over when David is born—a perfect plan, a perfect plan.

David is free from the taint of the sin of Judah and can enter the congregation of the Lord and even be a king with full privileges thus the line after ten generations is purified. David can inherit the kingdom, and Christ comes through David.

What grace, huh? And more; there are four women before you get to Mary, she's the fifth down in verse 16; there are four women, Tamar in verse 3, Rahab in verse 5, Bathsheba in verse 6, all prostituted themselves, and the other woman is Ruth who was an idolater. Four women, three harlots and an idolater and two illegitimate children in the line, but the line is purged at the tenth generation. The curse is removed and God's grace is on exhibit, right? If God couldn't bring His line through sinful people, He couldn't bring it through any because that's the only kind of people there are. A statement of grace. How incredible that David is the first generation after the curse ends.

And then there is the mystery of the Messiah's home—another mystery. Micah 5:2, and this is the answer, you remember, that Herod got when he said, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" Remember? We read it this morning in Matthew. And they said, "Well, He's going to be born in Bethlehem." And that's what it says in Micah 5:2; the prophet writes, "As for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be a ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity." Huh. "There will be a child born in Bethlehem who will also be eternal." There's that same enigma: Man/God, born in a town and yet living eternally. But Bethlehem is identified as His home. Matthew 2:6, they said, the chief priest and

knowledgeable scribes said He's going to be born in Bethlehem. And yet in Hosea chapter 11, verse 1, there is a verse that says, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son." And in Matthew it is quoted that when Jesus was born, Herod said, "I'm going to kill all the male children under the age of two. I'm going to massacre them because there's a king in their midst. When he heard about the king being born, he decided to massacre all the male children."

You know, it's hard to know how many he slaughtered, you think about the children who were killed in Connecticut, it's hard to know how many. But the women wept, didn't they? Borrowing language from Jeremiah, weeping in Rama as the women wept for their children. In Jeremiah the women were weeping because when the Babylonians came they slaughtered their babies, they slaughtered their children and the women were weeping then. And the women then were weeping again when Herod came and slaughtered the babies.

If there were 500 to 1,500 people who lived in the little town of Bethlehem, it would be a number of babies say from 20 to 70, something like that. Well, when Joseph found out that the babies were going to be killed, where did he go? Into Egypt. He went to Egypt. How important was it to go to Egypt? It was important to fulfill the prophecy that out of Egypt have I called My Son. Joseph didn't do that because he wanted to fulfill a prophecy, he did that to save the life of his child. It was Herod who precipitated that by his evil intentions.

Now if you stay with me in Matthew for a moment, you look in Matthew 2:6; He's going to be born in Bethlehem of Judea, the prophet said. Look at verse 13, "Flee to Egypt"; verse 14, "They left for Egypt." And then look at verse 23, "They came and lived in a city called Nazareth, to fulfill what was spoken through the prophets He shall be called a Nazarene." Now there's enough complexity in that prophecy to really validate the messiahship of Jesus. He has to be born in Bethlehem. He has to come out of Egypt, and He has to end up in Nazareth. That prophecy regarding Nazareth is in Isaiah 11:1.

This is an amazing series of things. Born in Bethlehem because of a census that was determined by pagans. Coming out of Egypt because of a massacre determined by a vile king. But how did He end up in Nazareth? Well it tells us. Verse 22, Matthew 2, "When Joseph heard"...well they came into the land of Israel, verse 21, came into the land of Israel and the question was, Where do we go? Knowing we have the Son of God, it probably would make more sense to stay around Jerusalem, Judea, maybe around Bethlehem, the center of things. We don't know what his agenda is, but that was the initial plan. But when he heard, verse 22, that Archelaus was reining over Judea in the place of his father, Herod, he was afraid to go there.

So being warned by God in a dream, he left for the regions of Galilee and came and lived in a city called Nazareth in order to fulfill the prophecy, He shall be called a Nazarene. Now why was he trying to escape? He didn't want to live in Judea because Herod had died and put Archelaus in place in

Judea. Archelaus was a killer. He was a mass murderer. On one occasion, Archelaus slaughtered three thousand Jews in Jerusalem. He was so cruel it was beyond belief, beyond description. He was finally deposed by the Romans who then replaced him with a series of governors, like Pilate. If Herod hadn't changed his will, which he did at the last minute, and put Archelaus in to rule Judea, if Herod hadn't changed his will which he did very often, if he hadn't changed his will, Jesus wouldn't have gone to Nazareth. How can you account for every single detail? Anybody looking at the Old Testament without the story of Jesus would say, "How can He be Bethlehem, Egypt, Nazareth?" In Christ every detail fits perfectly the enigma assault.

And then there is the mystery of the right to the throne, another very interesting mystery. The Messiah was to be King, let's go back to the genealogy in Matthew for a minute, and pick it up in verse 7. Following David, the line goes through Solomon…the line goes through Solomon. And then it runs all the way down into verse 11 to Jeconiah and you recognize kings there, don't you? Solomon was a king, Rehoboam, Abijah, Jehoshaphat, Joram, all these kings, Hezekiah, Manasseh, familiar names, Josiah, and it comes down to Jeconiah. These were the kings that followed in the line of David, Solomon and Judah.

Then there's a break at verse 11. Jeconiah is the last king before the deportation to Babylon, the Babylonian Captivity. He's the last king. The line goes on, the line goes on after the deportation, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, but there are no kings. Israel doesn't have a king. They haven't had a king since the deportation. They don't have a king now; they've never had a king. So there were no more kings in that royal line. The line goes on but there are no kings after Jeconiah.

What happened? Jeconiah is the last king in Israel. Why? Well, the answer comes in Jeremiah chapter 22, and if you were reading Jeremiah and that's all you had, this is what you would read. "The kingly line comes through Judah, it comes through David, it goes through Solomon, it comes to Jeconiah and then we have a disaster, a real disaster. Here in Jeremiah 22 we're introduced to Jeconiah who is called Coniah, sometimes Jehoiakim, sometimes Jeconiah, sometimes Coniah, the same name. And it says about him, we can drop down to verse 29, it's all talking about him back in verse 24, "'As I live,' declares the Lord,'" and then he starts to talk about Coniah, Jeconiah. He talks about judging him. Verse 28, "Is this man Coniah a despised shattered jar, or is he an undesirable vessel."

He was an evil king. "Why have he and his descendants been hurled out and cast into a land that they hadn't known?" That's the Babylonian Captivity. Why has this punishment come. "O land, land, land, hear the Word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord, write this man down childless. Write as if he never had an offspring." In what sense? "A man who will not prosper in his days." Why? "For no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah." There will never be a king that comes from the loins of Jeconiah, never. They'll never be a king. It doesn't mean he didn't have any children; it meant that he would be childless in the sense of a royal son.

Childless with regard to the throne. No offspring of Jeconiah has ever or will ever reign in Israel, none. Now we have a problem. We have a problem because if you follow the rest of the genealogy, you pick it up in verse 12, Jeconiah...and then you have a whole list of names, all the way down to verse 16, “Jacob in the line of Jeconiah was the father of Joseph.” So if there could never a child from the loins of Jeconiah and Joseph is in his line, how can Jesus be the Messiah? Answer? Because Jesus was not the son of Joseph. From Joseph he received the right to rule but from Mary, the bloodline of David, came through another son, Nathan. The precision of Scripture is stunning, and it says in verse 16, mark the language, every...all the way down, look at it, the father of; the father of; the father of; the father of; the father of; the father of, through the whole genealogy; verse 16, Jacob is the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary by whom Jesus was born. Joseph is not the father of Jesus. He is born by Mary, feminine singular and feminine singulars don’t have children unless miraculously.

So the curse of Jeconiah has no bearing on Jesus because He’s not born from Jeconiah’s loins. But he inherits the dynastic right to rule and misses the curse because He’s conceived by the Holy Spirit and born through Mary.

Then there is the mystery of the stone. Anybody looking at the Old Testament will be a little bit confused about all the reference to the Messiah being a stone, or a rock. They’re all over the place. In Isaiah the Messiah is said to be a sticking stone, or a smashing stone, a stumbling stone. That’s in Isaiah 8. In Isaiah 28, a tested cornerstone. In Psalm 118, a stone the builders rejected that becomes the chief cornerstone. Very vivid language, builders basically determine the symmetry of a building by getting the right cornerstone so that all the lines are correct. He will be a stone rejected, unacceptable, who becomes the chief cornerstone. In Daniel 2 He is identified as a stone cut out without hands that smashes the nations of the world. And if you look at the Old Testament and say, “Well, wait a minute, how can He be a stumbling stone, a rock of offense, a cornerstone, a precious stone, a sure foundation, a smashing, crushing smiting stone—how can He be all of those things?

And in one text alone, the answer is gathered together by Peter, 1 Peter 2. He says, “When you come to Christ, you come to a living stone, rejected by men but choice and precious.” There’s the point. To those who believe in Him, He is choice, He is precious, He is the chief cornerstone. And you also as living stones are built up as a spiritual house on Him. Like Paul’s language, we have no other foundation than Christ. As it is contained in Scripture, says Peter in verse 6, and borrows from Isaiah 28, “I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious cornerstone”...here’s the key...“he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.” He is a choice stone, a precious stone, a foundation stone, and a cornerstone to those who believe in Him. To those who do not believe in Him, “He is the stone,” Peter writes, “which the builders rejected, the one that became the cornerstone.” He becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and they stumble because they’re disobedient to the Word and to this doom they are also appointed.

To those who believe, He is a precious cornerstone. To those who reject, He is a crushing, offending stumbling stone. Who is this who is all of these? We let Jesus speak for Himself in Matthew 21, verse 42, “Jesus said to them, ‘Do you never read in the Scriptures? The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone. This came about from the Lord and is marvelous in our eyes. Therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing the fruit of it and he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces. But on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.’”

Whether you fall on Him or He falls on you in judgment, you are crushed to powder. He is a crushing, smiting stone to those who reject Him. He is a precious cornerstone to those who receive Him.

So the enigmas and the paradoxes of prophecy, there are so many. The first time He came, a star marked His arrival. Next time He comes, all the stars fall out of heaven. The first time He came, wise men and shepherds brought gifts. The next time He comes, He brings the gifts to reward His people. The first time He came there was no room for Him. The next time, the whole world will be unable to contain His glory. The first time He came, only a few attended His arrival. The next time He comes, every eye will see Him. The first time He came as a submissive baby. The next time He comes, as sovereign King. And all of this is resolved when you see the full picture of His first and Second Coming.

One final enigma. Revelation chapter 5. John is having a vision of the throne of God, and God is holding a book in His hand which is the title deed to the earth, and the earth is in the hands of the prince of the power of the air, the usurper, Satan. And John is looking at the throne of God and wondering when God is going to take back the earth. And the scroll sealed seven times like a will and testament in the Roman era, contains the right to rule the world. So it’s the title deed to the world. And John in verse 2 sees a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and break its seals? Who is worthy to take back the world from Satan? And no one in heaven or on earth, or under the earth was able to open the book or look into it.” No one. “And I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it.” This is a very vivid vision. One of the elders said to me, one of the twenty-four elders said to me (heaven creatures, heavenly glorified people) said to me, “Stop weeping, behold the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the root of David has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals. The Lion, the King of terrors, judgment.”

“So I saw between the throne with the four living creatures,” those are angels, “and the elders, a Lamb standing.” What? “The angel says, ‘A lion,’ and I turn and what do I see? I see a lamb, a lamb standing as if slain. Verse 7 says, “He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”

In Genesis 49: 9 and 10, it says a lion will come from Judah. In Isaiah 53 it says a lamb will be slain. One and the same. He comes first as the Lamb to be slain. He comes again as the Lion to take His throne. The Lion and the Lamb are one—the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we thank You for the power of holy Scripture, for the truthfulness of it which even in the minutest detail stuns us, elevates our confidence and consequently our joy and our hope. We thank You for all that You have given to us on the pages of Holy Scripture. Everything matters, everything. And it all points to one person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lion and the Lamb, one and the same. The sacrifice for sin and the sovereign of the universe, the Messiah our Lord. And I would pray now that every heart here would be in awe of Him. O God, would You by Your Holy Spirit draw people to Your Son, blessed Son of God, may every heart here be turned to You in adoration and praise to acknowledge that there is no other savior, there is no other redeemer. There is no salvation in any other name. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we can be saved. And may no one walk away without having acknowledged Jesus as Lord and Savior, Lamb and Lion.

Father, do Your work of grace in every heart here. We give You the praise, we give You the glory, O Christ, what an astounding, astounding unfathomable, incomprehensible mystery is resolved in You, O Christ. We adore You, we love You, we worship You, we desire to serve You and lift up Your name and it’s in that name that we pray. Amen.

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