

The Mystery of Christmas

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 81-17

A NOTE ABOUT THIS TRANSCRIPT

The following sermon transcript does not match the *video* version of the sermon—it matches only the audio version. Here's a brief explanation why.

John MacArthur routinely preaches a sermon more than once on the same date, during different worship services at Grace Community Church. Normally, for a given sermon title, our website features the audio and video that were recorded during the same worship service. Very occasionally, though, we will post the audio from one service and the video from another. Such was the case for the sermon titled "I and the Father Are One, Part 2," the transcript of which follows below. The transcript is of the audio version.

As you know, we've been in a series in Galatians, and we'll hold off on that until next Lord's Day. And this morning, just to think a little bit about the Christmas season as we live through it again this year, what comes to my mind is how enigmatic Christmas is, how paradoxical it is, how contradictory Christmas is.

I looked up the word "paradox" knowing that it comes from two Greek words: *doxa*, which essentially means "a fact," "a truth," "an idea," *para*, "alongside." Paradox means "two truths laid alongside each other," which are both realities, and yet are somewhat contradictory. One classic Old English definition would be this, that paradox is something seemingly absurd and yet true.

And there are some serious paradoxes around Christmas; it has a split personality for sure. There is Santa Claus, a mythical, supernaturally-empowered, fat elf who slides down chimneys, and whose entire verbal contribution to the world is "ho-ho-ho." I'm not sure how he's managed to have such a lasting impact. And juxtaposed to him is none other than the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is supernatural, the God-man whose words are profound and deep and eternal and life-giving. And somehow this culture is caught somewhere between those two very different characters. Mass confusion seems to exist: furious rushing everywhere, traffic madness, crowds; impossible schedules, while we all celebrate peace on earth, find very little of it, so that even suicide rates are at an all-year high at Christmas season.

Two thousand years ago one star lit the sky over the spot where the Lord was born; and now so many houses have lights, and so many lights shine in so many places. We're almost drowning in lights around the Christmas season. And many stores are lit up, you know, places where you can go and buy what isn't needed and won't fit. There's just a kind of Christmas chaos.

The first Christmas was a poor one: a manger, a stable. Christmas today is a display of wealth as

millions of people spend billions of dollars to indulge in temporal things. First Christmas, wise men came to worship; and today, fools worldwide ignore the One the wise men worshiped. Santa Claus gives you what you want because you deserve it; Jesus Christ gives you what you need even though you don't deserve it. Very different.

Those are sample paradoxes, not the important ones that I want to address this morning. But I do want to show you the paradoxical, enigmatic, apparently contradictory nature of Christianity that demonstrates to us its supernatural character and revelation. And to be able to see this, we need to go to the other side of Christmas, the before Christmas side back in the Old Testament and look at some of the prophecies concerning the Messiah.

Now we know that the prophecies concerning the Messiah were very difficult to understand, much more difficult for the prophets who prophesied them than even for us; and they were inspired by the Spirit of God to write what the Lord told them to write. Even at that, they could not understand what they were writing. And we hear Peter say this in 1 Peter 1:10 and 11, "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow."

The prophecies were about two things: the sufferings of the Messiah, and the glories of the Messiah. And those two juxtaposed throughout the prophecies of the Old Testament made it difficult for even the prophets who wrote the prophecies down to understand, so that they made careful searches and inquiries into what person and what time they themselves were even writing about.

The Old Testament presents the coming Messiah as a conqueror; and yet in other passages, it presents Him as a defeated enemy. In some Old Testament prophecies, He is seen as bringing joy to the world; in other Old Testament prophecies, He is seen as a man of sorrows. Sometimes He is seen as the conqueror, sometimes as the one who is rejected. Sometimes He is seen in great triumph and strength, and sometimes in abject weakness. He is the one who will bring life; and yet in other prophecies, He is the one who will die. Some speak of Him as King of glory, King of heaven and earth, eternal King, desire of all nations; and yet other prophets say there will be nothing about Him that men should desire Him.

These kinds of enigmatic paradoxical statements need an explanation, because they appear on the surface to present someone who is caught in some level of absurdity because of these kind of contradictions. He is to be the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and yet He is a lamb led to slaughter. He is to be the Judge of all the world. He is to come and judge sinners, burning them with unquenchable fire; and yet He is to be unjustly judged by sinners, and executed as a criminal. All of these conundrum-like truths are lying side by side in the Old Testament and caused the prophets to search to find out what time, what person could possibly fulfill all of these.

This query stretched even into the New Testament. Open your Bible to Matthew 11, and let's go to chapter 11, verses 1 and following, and come into the curious situation with regard to the last Old Testament prophet, the herald of Jesus Himself, John the Baptist. John the Baptist was really miraculously conceived. Zacharias and Elizabeth were barren into their very old age. The Lord allowed them to have this son who would be the last of the Old Testament prophets really after four hundred years of silence, and he would be the prophet who announced the arrival, not anticipating the coming as the other prophets, but announcing the arrival of the Messiah, which is exactly what

John the Baptist did.

As we find him here in chapter 11, however, things have not gone the way he thought they would go. He is in prison. He is in a prison that's part of a Herodian palace about five miles east of the Dead Sea and fifteen miles south of the northern shore. This is a fortress called Machaerus. It is a very desolate place. Apparently he is allowed visitors, and folks have come and given him some information about what the Messiah, Jesus, is doing, and John is highly confused. To understand his confusion turn to Luke chapter 3 and listen to his message. And this is not a message that he developed on his own, this is a message that came to him from God Himself.

Chapter 3 of Luke and verse 1: "The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate is the governor of Judea; Herod is the tetrarch of Galilee; and his brother Philip, tetrarch of the region of Ituraea, Trachonitis, Lysanias, tetrarch of Abilene," – these are the sons of Herod the Great – "in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas," – listen to this – "the word of God came to John." So John spoke the word of God prophetically about the Messiah. He is still an Old Testament prophet. The Messiah is here, but His real work has not yet culminated in His death and resurrection. So John is still prophesying about the Messiah as prophecies come to him from the Lord Himself.

"He came into the district around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." He's preaching that because judgment is coming. And the Lord, the word of the Lord comes to him, and he is to speak the words of Isaiah the prophet, and here is what he is to say: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness," – that's him – "Make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. Every ravine will be filled, every mountain and hill will be brought low; the crooked will become straight, and the rough roads smooth; and all flesh will see the salvation of God." He's preaching millennial glory, millennial kingdom. He's preaching the restored earth, paradise regained. He's preaching salvation. And along with that, he's preaching judgment.

"So he began" – in verse 7 – "saying to the crowds who were going out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father,' for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. Indeed the axe is already laid at the root of the trees; so every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'"

Further down in that chapter notice verse 16: "John speaking again, 'As for me, I baptize you with water. One is coming who is mightier than I; I'm not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.' – the fire of judgment – 'His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; and He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'"

This is John's message. It is a message of repentance, crying out for forgiveness, a message of salvation, a message of the establishment of the kingdom, and the judgment of all sinners. John has seen none of that. There is no great work of salvation being done in Israel. The nation has rejected Him. There is no judgment on them as of yet, there is no fiery holocaust on their heads, and John doesn't understand what's going on.

Back to Matthew 11, he sends his disciples to Jesus, and in verse 3, having heard of the works of

Christ – and they're not works of judgment, and they don't even appear to be works of salvation or the establishment of the kingdom, "He sent word by his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?'" Something isn't right. He is confused.

Notice the Lord's answer: "Jesus answered and said to them," – the disciples of John who had come to represent him – 'Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.'" That is the opposite of judgment. That is benevolence. That is mercy. That is kindness. That is blessing. That is healing like never in the history of the world.

And our Lord, by the way, is quoting in those words from Isaiah 35 and Isaiah 61. So He is saying, "The prophets not only prophesied about judgment, fiery judgment, they prophesied as well about mercy and kindness and the relief of suffering." "So the Messiah is to do both?" And in verse 6 comes our Lord's direct message to John the Baptist: "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me. Trust Me. Trust Me. Don't draw any wrong conclusions. Don't be offended by what you think is the full picture."

John is facing that same tension that the Old Testament prophets all faced: "What is this going to be like when He comes? Who can do what He has been prophesied to do? And how can these contradictory, enigmatic components come together in one person in one time?"

It is a marvelous reality in Scripture that the diverse and seemingly contradictory prophecies regarding Messiah make it impossible for any other person than the true Messiah to fulfill them. They are too contradictory, too paradoxical, too enigmatic, and too complex, and too prolific. All of these Old Testament prophecies are locked treasures to which the key is the New Testament. What was difficult for the prophets to understand, what was well nigh impossible for John the Baptist to understand, you and I understand perfectly, because we have the New Testament, we have the full record. And the New Testament ends with the book of Revelation that stretches to the ultimate fulfillment of all the prophecies of the glories to follow His suffering. Mystery, paradox, enigma make it impossible to counterfeit. They had a hard time getting it; we get it, we see it.

Listen to this, Matthew 13. Our Lord said to His disciples, verse 17, "Truly I say to you, many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it." That was what it was like even to be a righteous person and to be a prophet in the Old Testament; you didn't have a clear picture, you didn't have a clear sound.

But back up to verse 16, our Lord says to His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear." These paradoxical things to them are crystal clear to us. Let me show you a handful of them.

First of all is the mystery of the incarnation. Go back to Isaiah 7, the mystery of the incarnation. The story of Christmas, the reality of Christmas is the birth of the Son of God and the Son of Man, both man and God in one person. We see that. We understand it on this side because we have the full New Testament revelation of the nature of Christ.

But listen to the words of Isaiah 7:14. Ahaz the king is the context, and God wanted to give him a sign, and he refused to receive a sign from God. But the Lord broadened that to a sign for the world

really, verse 14: “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”

A virgin will bear a son; that has never happened. That’s impossible. But that was necessary, because there had to be a human in the equation, but not two humans: a human and God. So the Holy Spirit conceives in Mary the child who is both son of Mary, Son of God.

How are they to understand the Old Testament prophets, “A virgin being with child”? Well, they understand a child; that’s normal process. You give birth to a child. And yet this is not just a child, this is a son; and this is a son whose name is Immanuel.

The Lord Himself by His own will, by His own power will produce a supernatural sign identifying a king far greater than Ahaz, the great King. The sign is this: “A virgin shall conceive.” The word “virgin” in Hebrew is *almah*. All Old Testament uses refer to a virgin. The word “behold” is here because it’s a shocking statement in and of itself. There will be a child, but also a son – a child, speaking perhaps of His humanity; and a son, speaking of His deity. And He will be Immanuel, which means “God with us.”

And we know in Matthew chapter 1 this prophecy is quoted in verse 23 as fulfilled in Jesus. He is truly God, truly man. Let me say it again: truly God, truly man. This is the ultimate absurdity. This is the ultimate conundrum, enigma that someone would be one hundred percent of one thing and one hundred percent of another indivisible.

Go over to chapter 9 of Isaiah. And again Isaiah injects another of these prophecies, verse 6: “For a child will be born,” again speaking of the child; makes reference to natural birth. Everyone is born as a child, of course. But also, that child will be a son given; not just a child born, but a son given. Given by whom? Given by God. So again you have man and God. You have fully man, fully God in one being; born, and yet given; born to a woman, and yet given from heaven, as if He already existed because He did.

And the government will rest on His shoulders. Shoulders are the symbol of carrying the weight; and several times in the book of Isaiah, particularly chapter 22, verse 22, you see the use of shoulders to refer to ruling. You carried the weight of rule on your shoulders. You carried the weight of responsibility on your shoulders. This child will have the government on His shoulders. Some of you think you have a lot of responsibility with a family. There are others who have responsibility with a business, or a responsibility with a class of student, or a responsibility for patients in a hospital, or whatever it might be, responsibility for soldiers in a battle, responsibility to lead cities or nations. This, this Ruler, this Child, this fully God, fully man will have on His shoulders the responsibility to rule a kingdom that has no limits and has no end.

Go down to verse 7: “There will be no end to the increase of His government,” no end. “On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore.” It is a kingdom that encompasses all the universe and all eternity. This is a massive responsibility on the shoulders of this child, this son.

That statement, “to the increase of His government there is no end,” means He rules over all, all. His rule will fulfill the promise to David. He will sit on the throne of David, and over his kingdom to fulfill

the Davidic covenant, 2 Samuel 7. He will establish His kingdom with justice and righteousness, which means there's going to be some punishment; that's laid out in Psalm 89 magnificently. He will come and He will establish His kingdom with justice and righteousness.

Psalm 2 says He will rule with a rod of iron – instant justice, instant righteousness, instant punishment. But it will be a kingdom of peace. It'll be a government of peace. Peace will be established by justice and righteousness, and it will last forever; and the zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this. God's plans cannot be altered.

So here's a prophecy about a child to be born, who is also a son given – a child in the earthly sense, a son in the heavenly sense – who will have a kingdom with no limits in terms of space and no limits in terms of time. And to further identify His rule He is given a name. His name is a composite of several things.

Back to verse 6: "His name will be called Wonderful Counselor." That doesn't mean He's really helpful when you have a problem; He is that, but that's not the point. As compared to Solomon who was the wisest man who ever lived, this man is a wonder of a counselor. This is talking about the infinite nature of His wisdom, a wonder of wisdom beyond all rulers, including Solomon. He rules well. He rules over everything well. He rules throughout all eternity because He has wisdom that encompasses all that is required for that. He has the wisdom to rule everything forever flawlessly, and He knows what to do in every situation.

Not only does He know what to do in every situation, He has the power to do it. The second part of His name is Mighty God, Mighty God. His wisdom is equal to His power; His power is equal to His wisdom. Always the Mighty God in the book of Isaiah refers to deity in the absolute sense. He has the wisdom and the power to rule the universe forever.

He is also eternal Father. What is that supposed to mean? That's supposed to communicate to us that He cares for His children. He is a father to His children. He eternally loves His children. He eternally provides for His children. He eternally leads His children to prosperity and blessing.

And then He is the Prince of Peace. This is the character that causes a kingdom of peace. He is the Prince of Peace. All in His presence will be at peace, because we will all have made peace with God and possess the infinitely perfect peace of God. No king could be said to have been always at peace. No king would be a benevolent, loving, kind, providing, caring father to every single person in his kingdom. This is a king like no other king.

What an amazing set of prophecies. A virgin will give birth to a son who made the virgin. A child will be born who is God eternal. He will come into time and space who has always existed. He establishes His kingdom by righteousness and justice, and yet it is a kingdom of peace. Who could possibly fulfill all these prophecies? What person could ever fulfill these prophecies?

Listen to the angel in Luke 1. "Says to Mary, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He'll be great, be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end. And the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most

High will overshadow you; and for that reason this holy Child shall be called the Son of God.”

Yes, everything that was prophesied in Isaiah 7 and Isaiah 9 is fulfilled in the Son of God. “And we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” He is the child who is the eternal God.

In Genesis 3:15 He is said to be the seed of the woman. In Daniel 7:13 He is the Son of Man. In Psalm 2:7 He’s the Son of God. In Genesis 22 He is the son of Abraham, though He existed before Abraham. In 2 Samuel 7 He is the son of David, though in Isaiah 11:10 it says He is the root of Jesse, David’s father. In Matthew 22 He is both David’s son and David’s Lord.

Only Jesus Christ fulfills all these prophecies: a father and a son, born of a virgin that He created, the son of Abraham who predates Abraham, the son of David who predates David, the God-man. No wonder He said in John 14:9, “If you’ve seen Me you’ve seen the Father.” It all becomes clear to us in Christ, doesn’t it?

Then, secondly, there’s the mystery of the Lion of Judah. Go back to Genesis 49. Fifty chapters in Genesis, so near the end. Here’s a prophecy that’s so important. We all know about the twelve tribes. We know that the Lord had to pick one of those tribes through whom to bring the Messiah, and He selected Judah.

Genesis 49:10, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,” – that is, it’ll be someone produced out of that family of Judah that will hold the ruler’s staff all the way through – “till Shiloh comes.” Shiloh is simply a term for “Messiah.” It literally means, “the one whose right it is.” It’s a kind of cryptogram for Messiah.

The Messiah then will come from the line of Judah, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. He will rule. He will be from the tribe of Judah. Revelation 5:5 calls Him “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” He had to be born of the line of Judah. If you look at the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 it traces the line through Judah down to David, down all the way till you come to Joseph.

Now there’s a problem here. Go back to the thirty-eighth chapter of Genesis. Genesis 38. Judah had lost his wife; she was dead. He had a son named Er, whom God killed. So Judah is now a widower, and his son Er had married a girl named Tamar. Tamar is now a widow. Tamar wants a child, so in Genesis 38 she dresses herself up like a prostitute, and she goes into the places that prostitutes went, and she waits to seduce her father-in-law Judah. She seduces him successfully and becomes pregnant. The story picks up in verse 24 of Genesis 38.

“It was about three months later that Judah was informed, ‘Your daughter-in-law Tamar has played the harlot, and behold, she’s with child by harlotry.’ Then Judah said, ‘Bring her out and let her be burned!’” That’s a pretty radical response. According to Deuteronomy 22, somebody who commits that act of immorality was to be stoned. But later on in Leviticus 20 and 21, God prescribed burning for one who added incest to immorality. “Burn her!”

“It was while she was being brought out” – to be burned – “that she sent to her father-in-law, saying, ‘I am 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?’” That was the price she exacted from him. She

wanted to be paid; that's what he gave her. She kept it; and now she sends it back to him.

"Judah recognizes, and said, 'She's more righteous than I, inasmuch as I didn't give her to my son Shelah. I should have given her to my son Shelah.'" That was the levirate marriage law. If she had lost the husband, the next son in line would take up the responsibility and marry her, carry on the family. He didn't do that.

"He didn't have relations with her again. It came about at the time she was giving birth there were twins in the womb. And the twins were born" – down in verse 29 – "Perez," – verse 30 – "Zerah." So out of Judah come these cursed children. They are cursed. They are illegitimate children. They are cursed to a severe degree. Let me show you the curse that is laid out in Deuteronomy 23 on such illegitimate children.

Deuteronomy 23, verse 2: "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." To make people think seriously before they committed incest, the Lord lays down a law that for ten generations you can't come into the assembly of the Lord, you can't come to the temple. I mean, that is like the isolation of a leper, for ten generations. How then is it possible that Messiah can come out of a cursed line? How is it possible? Look at Matthew 1, the genealogy.

"This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, son of David, son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah." Verse 3: "Judah the father of Perez, Zerah by Tamar, Perez," – the line comes through Perez, comes down to verse 6 – "David, David." Don't be surprised. David is the tenth from Judah. At David the curse is removed. David is the tenth from Judah.

So David was free from any curse of Judah's sin, and able to enter the congregation of the Lord to reign as king with full privileges. And the curse is removed at the point of David who is the rightful king and the forefather of the Messiah. The line is purified, David is a legitimate king, the heir to the throne, and so is the later Messiah.

By the way, there's grace in God's purposes, isn't there, that Tamar is in the line. She's not the only prostitute in this line; there's another one, Rahab. And then there's a pagan woman by the name of Ruth injected, and she actually was the grandmother of David. Grace and perfect accuracy mark the mystery of Judah.

There's a third mystery and it's the mystery of the home of the Messiah. I read you Matthew 2 just to have you have it in your mind. Matthew 2 mentions three places: Bethlehem, Egypt, and Nazareth. Micah 5:2 says Jesus the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem, and He was. Hosea 11:1 says, "Out of Egypt I called My son." And that is quoted in Matthew 2:15 as being fulfilled when Jesus came out of Egypt. And then according to Matthew 2:23 the prophets said He would be called a Nazarene from Nazareth. We don't have a specific prophecy to that regard, but we don't necessarily have all the prophecies of all the prophets written down. The New Testament writer tells us that it was prophesied He would be from Nazareth. So there is the enigma. He's supposed to be from Bethlehem, He's supposed to be from Egypt, and He's supposed to be a Nazarene.

How can all of that come together in one single person? Well, we read how it happens. He goes to

Bethlehem because that's where His family has to register for the census. He goes to Egypt because he is warned in a dream that Herod is going to kill the Messiah while he slaughters all the rest of the two-year-old male children. He comes out of Egypt and He heads back, and He's going to go back into Judea, but changes his mind, because Herod the Great has given his worst son the rule of Judea, Archelaus; and Archelaus was such a madman that on one occasion he slaughtered three thousand Jews in Jerusalem. He didn't want to go there if his father Herod was a threat in the slaughter of the infants. He assumed that Archelaus, of the same kind of wretched, corrupt character as his father, would continue to be a threat. So rather than go back to Judea, He goes to Galilee and ends up in Nazareth.

Without the story of Jesus somebody in the Old Testament might say, "The prophets don't know what they're talking about. Some say that He's going to come from Bethlehem, some say He's going to come from Egypt, and some prophets say He's going to come from Nazareth. How can all of that be true? That's contradictory."

No, it's not. Born in Bethlehem, escapes to Egypt, and ends up in Nazareth. Again, God is orchestrating circumstances. Even the appointment by Herod the Great of Archelaus results in the Lord ending up in the place the prophets said He would be.

How could the prophets of the Old Testament who wrote those things have any idea what they were speaking about, and even in Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt have I called My son," is such a vague prophesy because it seems to be referring to the nation. They would never be able to unscramble that omelet. But when you get to the New Testament it all becomes clear and it's all fulfilled in Christ.

And then there is a fourth interesting enigma: the mystery of the right to the throne. While you're in Matthew 1, follow the genealogy: David, verse 6, then Solomon, and it flows down till you come to verse 11. "Josiah became the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon." Jeconiah. You have these kings from David down to Jeconiah, and then the Babylonian captivity comes.

And there were no more kings in Israel. Okay? No more kings. They went into captivity; they came back out of captivity; there were no more kings. But the kingly line kept going, verse 12: "After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah became the father of Shealtiel," and it keeps going and going – the father of, the father of, the father of, the father of, the father of, down to verse 16: "Jacob was the father of Joseph." So Joseph is in the line of Jeconiah. That was necessary, because the right to rule came through the father, that Jeconiah – or Coniah as he's called – had a problem.

Go back to Jeremiah 22. This is incredibly interesting. God is angry with Jeconiah – sometimes called Jehoiachin or Coniah – and His anger results in an explicit judgment. Verse 24, we'll look at that.

"As I live," declares the Lord, "even though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off; I will give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans," that's the Babylonian captivity. "I will hurl you and your mother who bore you into another country where you were not born, and there you will die. But as for the land to which they desire to return, they will not return to it.

'Is this man Coniah' – or Jeconiah – 'a despised, shattered jar? Is he an undesirable vessel? Why have he and his descendants been hurled out and cast into a land that they had not known? O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord!' Thus says the Lord, 'Write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah.'" He may have children; none of them will ever be a ruler. No child in the descendant line of Jeconiah will ever rule in Israel.

But then you go to Matthew 1 and you see Joseph is in the line of Jeconiah. But that was the line that had the royal right. But notice what verse 16 says: "Jacob was the father of Joseph." And it doesn't say, "Joseph was the father of Jesus." It says, "Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born."

From the line of Jeconiah our Lord received the right to rule, but received no genetic traits. Didn't come from that line. The only humanity He had was derived from Mary, and she had come through another son of David named Nathan – completely different line. So the curse on Jeconiah is bypassed, while the right to rule is acknowledged. He has the right to rule, but He cannot be a son of Jeconiah. These details in the birth of our Lord are so marvelous as to prove the validity of the Scripture.

One final mystery: the mystery of the stone. The Old Testament prophets talked about the Messiah as a stone. Isaiah 8:14 and 15, "A stone to strike, a stone to stumble over." Isaiah 28:16, "A tested corner stone." Psalm 118:22, "A rejected stone that becomes the chief corner stone." Daniel 2:34 and 35, "A stone cut out without hands that smashes all other kingdoms."

Now, what kind of stone is He? Is He a striking stone, a stumbling stone, a smashing stone, a rejected stone, or is He a tested corner stone, a chief corner stone? These seem contradictory. Is He a dangerous stone, or is He a welcoming stone? Is He a rock of refuge, or is He a rock of judgment?

Peter pulls all this together for us. Look at 1 Peter chapter 2, 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 4. And here again the New Testament unlocks the seeming paradox of two different, very, very different kinds of stones.

First Peter 2:4, "Coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God." The Messiah is both the rejected stone, and He is the precious stone. He is both the stone of judgment and the stone of blessing.

What Peter does in verse 6 is reach back to those stone prophecies in the Old Testament: "This is contained in Scripture: 'Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in Him will not be disappointed.' This precious value, then, is for you who believe;" – now follow this – "but for those who disbelieve, 'The stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone,' and, 'A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense'; for they stumble because they're disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed."

The answer to the dilemma of the stone is given in verse 7: "The precious value is for those who believe; for those who disbelieve, He becomes a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." Jesus is both a rock of refuge to those who believe, and a rock of offense to those who do not believe. The issue is belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. You will determine by what you do with

Jesus Christ whether He will be a corner stone, and you'll be a building block in the house of God built eternally on that corner stone; or whether He will be a crushing, smashing stone, obliterating your hope and your life.

First time He came, a star marked His arrival; next time He comes, all the stars in heaven will fall. First time He came, wise men and shepherds brought Him honor; the next time He comes, He'll bring honor to His people. The first time He came, there was no room for Him in the inn; the next time He comes, His glory will not be able to be contained in the universe. The first time He came, only a few saw Him at His arrival; the next time He comes, everyone will see Him. The first time He came as a lamb; the next time He comes as a lion.

Father, again we are under the weight and the wonder of Your truth. Your Word, so powerful, so divine; has a glory all it's own. Thank You for showing us Christ. Thank You for the New Testament, which unlocks all the mysteries, reveals all the parent paradoxes, answers all the riddles, shows us the truth. Those things which were impossible for Old Testament prophets and righteous people to understand are so clear to us that even a child cannot mistake them. We know that You came the first time as the Lamb; You come the next time as a lion. You came the first time as Savior; You come the next time as Judge. You came the first time as a servant; You come the next time as King.

May we see the glory of Christ at this Christmas season, the wonder of how He fulfills all that the Old Testament says, and thus unmistakably is to be declared Your great King: King of kings, Lord of lords, Savior and Redeemer of His people. May there be no one here who leaves and does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

Thank You for the gift of salvation by faith in Christ. Lord, do Your work in every heart, we pray in His name. Amen.

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