

Communion

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[0 : 0 0] Messianic prophecy. And yet, I think you'd probably agree that in usual lists of Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, those that foretell the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's anointed Savior and King, quite often this passage doesn't figure.

It's not so well known as the one about Jesus' birth in Bethlehem or Isaiah 53 about His sufferings on Calvary. But it is nonetheless a very clear description before His coming of who the Lord Jesus Christ was. In one respect, it's actually the widest of all the Messianic prophecies, because what you have here is a description of Jesus as both King and at the same time as Priest.

We're going to develop that, but I'm sure you've noticed it, the two terms referring to the same person. But before we go into it in greater depth, let me just sketch in very quickly the background.

the Jews have returned from their 50 years, and for some of them, in fact, it was 70 years' captivity in Babylon. But not all of them have come. There are some who have stayed on in Babylon, no doubt that a variety of reasons. Some would have been too old and frail to be able to make the long journey back to Judah. Others, well, they'd settle down, and as their captivity eased a bit over the years, they got into business. Some maybe things were prospering, and they just didn't feel like starting up from scratch again. And others, of course, like Daniel. Well, Daniel was old by the time the release came, but he and others had responsibilities, even in the royal court. And so, quite a number didn't go back.

Just the same as we saw in 1947-48, when the State of Israel was formed, and certainly not all Jews came back to Israel. Many did, but more stayed away, especially in the United States. We know that, and how from there, they sought to support those who had made the journey back to the chosen homeland.

[3 : 1 7] And that's rather like the situation you have here. There are exiles, if you look at verse 10, take silver and gold from the exiles, were given their names, who have arrived from Babylon.

It seems they hadn't made the journey back to stay there, but here they come with financial help for the people who've gone back to Israel. And they're expressing their solidarity with God's people there in Zion. And it's rather surprising the way in which Zechariah asks them to demonstrate that solidarity. Because in verse 11, he says to them, take the silver and the gold and make a crown and set it on the head of the head of the high priest. Not in the head of any king, but of the priest.

Now, we all know that throughout the history of Israel, there was a strict separation between the kings and the kings and the priests. You remember how when they were delivered from Egypt, that God chose Moses as the civil leader, the equivalent of a king, and He chose Aaron as the high priest.

And Moses couldn't do Aaron's job, and Aaron couldn't do Moses' job. It was God Himself who had decreed that. And as you read through the history of Israel, you find, for example, the incident when King Uzziah, who had started out being an excellent king, a godly king, but things went downhill later in his life.

And in 2 Chronicles 20, you read of that very sad occasion when Uzziah went into the temple, and he, the king, took the incense and offered incense on the altar. But that was for the priests.

[5 : 48] God had ordained it was the priests. And you remember how a very valiant man, Jehoiada, the high priest, stepped forward and said, King, you have authority, the highest authority within the realm. Well, he didn't say these words. I'm putting them into his mouth, but it's basically what he said. It is not permitted for you as king to usurp the ministry of the priests.

And because Uzziah lost his temper and stormed about in pride, we know what happened. God punished him, and he became a leper till the day of his death. And we, of course, know in our own constitution how we have also the separation of offices, the legislative, the executive, and the judicial. And we very rightly insist that the one does not usurp the duties of the other.

And yet, that being so, and these people all knew that. It was God who had said it. And yet here they listened to the words of God's prophet who says, make a crown and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua, son of Josedach.

And it goes on to say that this high priest with a crown on his head, he will build the temple of the Lord. But they knew that God had chosen a different man to be the civil leader, a different man to build the temple of the temple of the Lord. Not Joshua the high priest, it was Zerubbabel.

He, it says earlier in Zechariah, he was a man who was going to do the building, not the priest. So, they must have been asking themselves, these people, as they listened to that, what's all this about? Why is Zechariah God's prophet? Why is he telling us to do what God always told us not to do? Why is he telling us to mix up the offices of king and priest? It's not right.

[8 : 18] Why are we doing it? Well, clearly, God was preparing them for something totally new.

Something that they had never seen in the history of the covenant people. Somebody, at some time or other, was going to be king and priest, the same person. In a sense, that's what Joshua was being asked to become, though it wasn't fulfilled in the way that it would be later.

And they were told that between the two, the king and the priest, there would be, at the end of verse 13, there will be harmony between the two. Not like the day when Jehozadak, the high priest, or Jehoiada rather, the high priest, went to Isaiah the king and told him off, gave him a severe warning from God. There was no harmony between the two then, because they were different people. But here, sometime or other, somehow or other, there's going to be a king and a priest as one. And those exiles who have come from Babylon and are asked to do this, they might well have been asking themselves, well, if there's going to be somebody like that that we've never, ever seen before or dreamt of before, how will we know him?

We've never seen it before. How are we going to know who this special person is going to be? And here, I think, as we look through what happened, we find some answers, answers not for them, but answers for us, although we have the benefit that they didn't have. We look back, and we see how all this came to pass. First of all, he would be recognized, this strange personage, a king and a priest in one, he would be recognized by the title he bears, by the title he bears.

Look at verse 12. Tell him, this is what the Lord Almighty says, Here is the man whose name is the branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. Now, they knew about that. These people all knew their Bibles, the prophecies, and so on. So, they knew that there was somebody who would be called the branch who was going to, at some time, at some time come. Isaiah, Isaiah 11, 1, speaks of that personage. There shall come forth a shoot out of the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And what the prophet had been saying then was that it would only be when the house of David, which became such a powerful dynasty, David and Solomon and others, their great empire, it would only be when that tree was cut down.

[11 : 49] And then, from out of the stump, it looked as if everything had gone, everything demolished. And we know historically that's what happened when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the whole temple and city and dynasty. But out of that stump, there would come a shoot, a little green shoot.

When the mighty tree, the royal house of David had fallen, then from beneath, it actually says here, he will branch out from his place. And quite a few of the commentators indicate that the Hebrew word used here does of the meaning of from below, from beneath. It's from a humble place, there will come the shoot. And don't you think of other words of the prophet Isaiah? He shall grow up before us as a root out of a dry ground. He has no form or comeliness, no beauty that we should desire.

Humble, despised, rejected. But he's the shoot that is springing up out of the stump of Jesse.

And when our Lord came, we know how that was true. We know how humble were his circumstances. The Messiah that others expected would come from above. He would be from the royal house.

He would be ruling there in the kingdom. He would drive out the enemies at the head of a mighty army. But here's this one who comes. He's just like that little branch, born in a humble family, in relative poverty. A man who would grow up in an ordinary job, hardly known by anybody.

[13 : 53] And then as he goes about his ministry. The foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests. But he had nowhere to lay his head. But then we're told further about that branch that he was, in Isaiah chapter 4 at verse 2, that he is the branch of the Lord. Not any old little branch or shoot, but the branch of the Lord. But the branch of the Lord, and the branch of the Lord, the people were told, and we are told, will be beautiful and glorious. And so we read in others of the prophecies the same kind of thing. Jeremiah tells us, chapter 33, in those days and at that time, will I cause the branch of righteousness to grow up to David, and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land. And I think what we have here is that these people, those exiles, they're being told by the prophet, don't be fooled by the outward circumstances of

Messiah, who will be both king and priest, amazingly. Don't be fooled by his outward circumstances. Don't be fooled by the fact that in appearance he's nothing to look at. He seems to be so very ordinary, and indeed more than ordinary, despised, rejected, scorned, and scoffed at.

And it's the same for us. Not to be fooled by the outward circumstances, by the world's attitude to the one whom we know as God's chosen king and our beloved Savior.

I'm reminded of a small meeting I was at when we were in London. We had quite close connections with London City Mission, and on this occasion some of the missionaries were sharing some of their experiences in their work. And there was one young lady who was a qualified teacher, and she'd been asked to teach a kind of chaplaincy or religious education function in a particular school in a very deprived part of inner London. And she knew that teaching Bible truth, that in a situation like that you had to begin from at the beginning, that there would be no understanding, basic understanding of things.

And so she asked the question, who was the founder of Christianity? And not a hand went up, and they just sat there. And she looked at them. I mean, the person that Christianity takes its name from. Think of the name. Still, no child answered. And then she saw one boy who was obviously a bit agitated, and he was sort of putting his hand up a little bit. He obviously wanted to say something, and said, yes, yes, yes, you tell me. No, miss. Yes, do you know who it is? I think I do, miss, but I've been told not to use swear words.

[17 : 39] Despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And yet, here is the title he bears, the branch that shall come, become the great tree that will become King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And these exiles are told that that's the person whom they are to expect. But they'll know him not only by the title he bears, they'll also know him by the tasks he performs. And there are at least three that are spelt out for us in the words of Zechariah. First of all, they're told that he'll build. Verse 12, here's a man whose name is a branch. He will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord.

It is he who will build the temple of the Lord. I wonder why is that repeated? Why does Zechariah bring the fact of building in twice? He will build the temple of the Lord, and literally, yes, even he will build the temple of the Lord.

Perhaps it was precisely because of what we've been seeing. It was such an unusual concept that the priest, remember the situation, the crown is put in the head of the high priest, not of the civil ruler. And now Zechariah is saying, this man, the priest with the crown on his head, how odd, they'd never seen that before, he's going to do what a priest had never done. That wasn't his job.

He was the mediator. He was the man who attended to the liturgy, to the sacrifices. He is going to build the temple of the Lord. And it was, as I say, such an unusual concept, because it was Zerubbabel, we're told, who was going to build the temple of the Lord. I think it's in chapter 4 at verse 9. Yes, there it is. The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this temple.

His hands will also complete it. A bit complicated, isn't it? The prophet has said, Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of the royal line, though he was not a king, a very downgraded royal line, he'd laid the foundation, and Zechariah says, he'll finish it. And now he's saying to them, looking at the high priest, he's the man who's going to build. He's the man who is going to be responsible for the erection of God's temple.

[20 : 48] So, what's being talked about? Well, clearly, it's not the present temple in front of their eyes in the city of Jerusalem, because they've been told Zerubbabel's going to build it.

It's not some future temple of the kind that another contemporary of these exiles back in Babylon had prophesied about, Ezekiel. The last chapters of Ezekiel do speak of a temple, a very strange temple if you actually go through it closely and test out all its measurements and so on.

It couldn't be that temple, because that temple, we're told, had sacrifices, had sacrificing priests.

And we know that when Jesus came and offered himself, it was once for all. No more priests, no more sacrifices, no more blood on the altar, for the blood was shed on Calvary.

And so, we're reminded, they not yet. It was still to come, but we're reminded of those words of the Lord Jesus to the Samaritan woman who was trying to divert his attention from the conviction of her own sin that he was bringing to her. And she started talking about buildings. You know, we worship in this temple, the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. You Jews, you worship in the temple in Jerusalem.

[22 : 34] Which is the right one? And Jesus says, you remember, neither the time is coming. Well, neither in this temple, the Samaritan one, nor in Jerusalem will men worship the Father, but only those who worship Him in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such worshipers.

And of course, we praise God for what came true through the coming of the Lord Jesus, our royal priest, our kingly mediator. Here, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we are the temple of the living God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit. Or more succinctly, when he writes to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians 6, we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, I will live with them and walk among them.

And so, the exiles are told, this person who's coming, he's going to build. Not a material temple, not the one that Zerubbabel's building, and you folks are taking part in it and helping. Not some future temple, even the one that Ezekiel prophesied to you, but the temple that Jesus indwells and that He creates as He brings men and women to be living stones in His temple. So, by the tasks He performs, they will know Him, firstly because He'll build, and then secondly, because He'll reign.

He'll reign. You find that in verse 13. It is He who will build the temple of the Lord, and He will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on His throne. And we know that this personage so strange to them, a priest with a crown on His head, a royal priest, or a priestly king, He'll be clothed with a crown on His throne. And we know that He came. We know that He came.

We know that He came in the person of the Lord Jesus, fulfilling these two fundamental offices. And we know that through His death and resurrection, He accomplished the work that God had given to Him, and He ascended into heaven, and we sang about it as we began our service.

[25 : 20] Thou hast, O Lord, most glorious, ascended up on high, and in triumph, and in...oh, forgotten it. Glorious, and in triumph, glorious, well, led captives' captivity, and here is our Lord reigning gloriously.

And we could have sung Psalm 24 about the gates being lifted up so that the King of glory, having completed His work, would enter in. And one day, you and I know that that work will be gloriously and fully completed. He shall reign until all His enemies bow before His feet.

When every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. So, they're being told, these exiles, that there is a personage coming, one who is both king and priest, who will build and who will reign. And what you and I need to remember, even though I've just referred to you to what is yet to come, when Jesus will return, and when all sin will be banished, when the new heavens and the new earth will be created, and righteousness will dwell forever there. But Jesus Christ is not just going to reign then, He is reigning now, because He has completed His work as priest and is now reigning.

Stephen had a glimpse of it, hadn't He, as he was being stoned to death, because he saw right there and then He saw right there and then He saw right there and then He saw right there and then He saw right there.

And friends, let's never ever forget that we're not just holding grimly on in a world that is surely full of sin, in a world where Satan rages still. We're not just holding grimly on until that promised future glory.

[27 : 43] Jesus reigns today. He is the glorious one, the victorious one, now as you and I seek to live for Him and to serve Him. So, the tasks He performs, He'll build, He'll reign, but then Zechariah adds something else, and it is that He'll mediate. He'll mediate. Verse 13, it is He who will build the temple of the Lord, He will be clothed with majesty, He'll sit and rule, but also He will be a priest on His throne.

Now, a king who is only a king can be, and often is in history, nothing but a despot. We think of Pharaoh.

We think of the kings of Babylon and Assyria. We think down to rulers like Napoleon and Hitler and Stalin. They ruled, they reigned, but they reigned in cruelty and in oppression, but not this king, because you see, Zechariah reminds them that he's also a priest. He's the two rolled into one, and the priest, and the priest, you remember, interceded with the atoning blood. The poor, those conscious of their burden of guilt and sin, those who knew that they stood under the judgment of God, and many of whom were also the victims of the oppression of man, they could come to the priest, and the priest. And the priest would take the blood of the sacrifice and pour it on the altar for them, so that their sins might be forgiven, so that they would have their consciences cleansed, so that they would enter into fellowship with the living God.

I did say at the beginning that the concept of a priest and a king in one person was unknown in Israel, and I pointed out how it was forbidden, in fact. The offices were separated.

But perhaps that's not 100% accurate, and maybe some of you have been thinking that from the very beginning, because the Bible does tell us of one priest-king, Melchizedek, the king of Salem.

[30 : 34] Melchizedek, who was both a king and a priest. Melchizedek, who reigned and who interceded.

And we're going to, in a moment or two, we're going to sing about that Melchizedek, who as a writer to the Hebrews reminds us, foreshadowed our priestly king, the Lord Jesus, a priest forever.

After the order of Melchizedek. Without a priest, we can't know the king. We can't know his gracious rule.

And for you and me, that means that we must come to Calvary, where the priest offered the sacrifice, a different sacrifice, a different sacrifice we know, because there were no bulls or goats.

He was also the victim. His blood shed for us. We can't know his protecting hand. We can't know all the good things that a king, a good king does for his people, unless we come to him as the priest and the victim to the place of Calvary with its atoning blood for us.

[32 : 04] So then, they'll know who this strange personage, unexpected personage, they know who he'll be because, firstly, of the title he bears, the branch, secondly, because of the tasks he performs, and then finally, by the people he attracts, by the people he attracts. Verse 15, those who are far away will come and help to build the temple of the Lord, and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. This will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God. They were Jews, these people, these men whose names are given us, Heldai, Tobijah, and Jediah. They were concerned for their fellow Jews.

They were concerned for the city of Jerusalem, God's city. And they could testify to God's mercy, to Israel, all the wonders he had done when he brought them out of the first captivity in Egypt, and the second captivity in Babylon. They were eyewitnesses of that. They knew it in their own experience.

But although they were Jews, and they loved Israel, the situation you have here is that they're coming from a far country. They're coming from a great distance, bringing, we're told, gold and silver from afar.

These were Gentile treasures, and we're told that they had to remain, verse 14, they had to remain as a memorial in the temple of the Lord. And then they're told that those who are afar off will come.

Come to God's house. Surely, Isaiah had said it, surely the island shall look to me, and in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your sons from afar with their silver and gold to the honor of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel. And you can leaf through Zechariah. Do it some other time. I'll just take one of the verses. There are several where you get the same thing referred to with great hope and great assurance, 2.11. Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you, and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. And you've got the same idea in Zechariah 8, 22, and further on in the prophecy. And I don't know about you, but I wonder if it turns your mind to what was going to happen hundreds of years later when the priest king came, not as they might have expected him, but as a little babe there in obscurity in Bethlehem. And what happened?

[35 : 14] Well, those who were far away, they came. And they brought, just as these men brought, they brought gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh for the priestly king, and they worshiped him.

And Paul later on is to write, he came, Jesus came, and he preached peace to you who were far off and to those who were near. Earlier on, we prayed in our prayer of intercession for the church of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. We're part of it, and they're part of us. And here surely it is foreshadowed, as they are taught to look for one who is priest, will reconcile them to God, and as king will conquer all his and their enemies. And the final word, they're told that doing this, look at the last phrase, doing this, it will happen if you diligently obey the Lord your God, and the world will know, as the previous phrase says, that the Lord Almighty has sent me, sent us to them.

And so it's a call to obedience, friends, to Christ as your priest and king, but also to the worldwide proclamation that they might come from afar and also worship our Savior.

Now we're going to sing.