

CHAPTER 9

SETTING THE SCENE FOR THE FIRST COMING OF JESUS

In about the year 2000 BC, God began the process of forming a unique nation called Israel into which His Son, the Second Person of The Trinity, could be born as a human being. This was not done overnight. God spent many centuries developing the nation of Israel. It began with a man called Abraham. He came from a place called Ur of the Chaldees, in what we now call Iraq. God searched for a man with the right heart attitude and He found Abraham. He saw that he was a man who was “*a friend of God*”. God prepared Abraham over many years and gave him a promise which is described in the book of Genesis at Chapter 12 and restated again later at various times:

¹“The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.²”I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.³I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you. ”

Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV)

The promises God made about making Abraham’s descendants into a great nation were eventually fulfilled, but it took a long time. Abraham had a son called Isaac and he, in turn, had a son called Jacob. God repeated to each of them the promises He had made to Abraham. Jacob had twelve sons, and due to a famine throughout all the world at that time, they went into Egypt, where one of Jacob’s sons, Joseph, had become the Prime Minister. They were all therefore preserved from famine. The whole extended family amounted to 70 people when they went into Egypt. They stayed there 430 years.

By the time they came out of Egypt, those 70 descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had grown into a nation of over two million people. It was that nation that God miraculously allowed to walk between the vertical walls of water of the divided Red Sea to escape from Egypt where they had suffered hardship under Pharaoh. The nation of Israel then spent just under forty years living in the desert wilderness before entering into what was then known as the land of Canaan. It is now the land of Israel. This was the land God gave to them to fulfil His promise. The Israelites then spent many hundreds of years living in the land of Israel preparing for the arrival of the unique person that God had promised to them called the “*Messiah*”.

That is the Hebrew word for the equivalent Greek word, “*Christ*,” which means “*anointed one*.” So, when we say Jesus Christ, the second word is a title rather than a name, i.e. Jesus the Christ, or Jesus the Messiah. God promised that this person, the Messiah, or the Christ, would be King of Israel. He also promised that He would rule the whole world and that through Him the whole world would be blessed. Hundreds of different prophecies are made in the Old Testament about this unique person called the Messiah. In order for these to be fulfilled many things had to take place first within the nation of Israel.

Jesus is a direct descendent of King David

About 1000 years BC, which is about 1000 years after Abraham's days, God took a shepherd boy called David and raised him up to be King of Israel. God also promised that one of David’s descendants would sit on David’s throne forever as King of Israel. Jesus, who is the Messiah, is the

heir of King David. Therefore He is legally entitled to rule over the nation of Israel as its King. In the future He will do exactly that.

Jesus descends physically from King David and derives His right to sit on the throne of King David through his mother, Mary. Her lineage is shown in the gospel of Luke at Chapter 3. He also descended from King David through his adoptive father, Joseph. This is shown in the gospel of Matthew at Chapter 1. However, He inherited His right to the throne through His mother, Mary, not His step-father, Joseph. Through the prophet Nathan, God had promised King David that one day he would have an heir who would rule on the throne of Israel forever:

¹² When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

2 Samuel 7:12-13 (NIV)

Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever

2 Samuel 7:16 (NIV)

God also made a covenant (a binding agreement) with King David that God would establish David's Kingdom for ever and give David an heir (Jesus Christ) who would rule forever:

*³ "I have made a covenant with My chosen;
I have sworn to David My servant,
⁴ I will establish your seed forever
And build up your throne to all generations."
Psalm 89:3-4 (NASB)*

Two centuries later the prophet Isaiah enlarged the details of that prophecy about the coming King and Messiah:

*⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD Almighty
will accomplish this.
Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV)*

That prophecy has not yet had a complete fulfilment through David's ordinary human lineage, because David's line lost the kingship several generations later under a king called Zedekiah. They have never regained it since. Thus, for over two thousand five hundred years since then, there has been no Jewish King of Israel. Note that the Kings in Jesus' day i.e. King Herod and his sons, were not Jewish. They were Edomites. They were put in place by the Romans and were nothing to do with the royal line of King David.

But there is a day coming when Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, and the rightful King of Israel, will physically return to this earth. He will then sit on David's throne and become King of Israel. This is not just poetic language. It will all literally happen. So, Jesus is not only the Saviour; He is also the King of Israel and of the whole world. Moreover, He is going to judge the whole world:

³¹ *“But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; ³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.*

³⁴ *“Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*

Matthew 25:31-34 (NASB)

The setting up of the temple system of animal sacrifice - to illustrate how Jesus would one day die as a sacrifice on our behalf

Another important background fact to show the way that God established the nation of Israel to prepare for the coming of His Messiah is that He set up the Temple system of worship and sacrifices. King David had a son called Solomon who built the first Temple, within which goats, lambs and bulls were sacrificed.

This carried on the practice that was seen centuries before at the time of Abraham, and which Moses developed, even before the Temple was built. When God gave the Law to Israel through Moses, God set up a complicated system of sacrifices which had to be given to 'cover' for the sins of the people.

Every day animals were sacrificed. A priest would put his hand on the head of the animal such that the sins of himself, and also the sins of the people of Israel, would be symbolically passed on to that animal. This enabled the people to be made right with God, at least temporarily.

¹*The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, ²“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When any of you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock. ³“If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. ⁴He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. ⁵He is to slaughter the young bull before the LORD, and then Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.*

Leviticus 1:1-5 (NIV)

The animals that were sacrificed also symbolised the way in which Jesus Christ would later lay down His own life on the cross and shed His own blood as a sacrifice for our sins. They were a "type" or illustration of the greater sacrifice which Jesus was to make later. That would finally deal with our sin once and for all.

The Scapegoat - another practical illustration of Jesus taking our sins away

Another type, or illustration, of Jesus was the 'scapegoat'. Each year one goat was taken and the High Priest would lay his hands on its head to transfer the sins of the people onto the goat. Then it was released into the wilderness, where it symbolically carried away the sins of the people.

²⁰When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. ²²The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert. *Leviticus 16:20-22 (NIV)*

In the same way, all the sin of the world was later put on the head of Jesus, the ultimate scapegoat. He bore it all upon Himself and took it away from us. We use the word scapegoat today to refer to a person who is blamed in place of others who are actually guilty. That is exactly what happened to Jesus.

The temple sacrifices and the scapegoat are a 'type' (an illustration) of God the Father's ultimate sacrifice of Jesus to take away the guilt of our sin

So, prior to the first coming of Jesus, the people's sins were placed on to the animal that was being sacrificed. It could be a lamb or a goat or a bull. This system was pointing forward symbolically to the coming of Jesus the Messiah. He was to be the ultimate and perfect sacrifice for sin. That is why John the Baptist referred to Him, at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, as the "*Lamb of God*". Even as he said it, John the Baptist did not fully understand all the implications of his own words:

²⁸These things took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing. ²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" *John 1:28-29 (NASB)*

What it meant was that one day Jesus was going to become the ultimate substitutionary sacrifice, to die in our place as a sacrificial lamb. He would take our sins on His own shoulders and be punished for our sins instead of us. The whole Temple system and the animal sacrifices point us to Jesus and help us to understand why He had to die and what His death would achieve in paying for our sins. The animals that died were a 'type' of Jesus. They help us to see the pattern and principle and therefore to understand what Jesus would later do in dying in our place:

¹²He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! *Hebrews 9:12-14 (NIV)*

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. *Hebrews 9:22 (NIV)*

¹²And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. ¹³Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. *Hebrews 13:12-13 (NIV)*

Long before the Temple was ever built God provided an even more dramatic illustration of the sacrifice that God the Father would one day make of His Son, Jesus.

God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his *adult* son, Isaac, as a type of what God would do to Jesus

We saw above how God promised to form a nation (Israel) through Abraham. God told him that that promise would be fulfilled through his *adult* son Isaac and through no other son. However, when Isaac was about 33 years of age God told Abraham to go to Mount Moriah (known to us now as Mount Calvary) and to kill his son Isaac and offer him to God as a sacrifice. Abraham went to Mount Moriah (Calvary) with a heavy heart, dreading what he had to do. But he was willing to do it because God had commanded him to do so.

God allowed this test to go on until almost the last minute. Isaac was placed on an altar. He fully cooperated, even though he was a grown man and could have resisted Abraham. However, at the last moment God told Abraham not to do it. It had been a test of Abraham's faith and obedience and he (and Isaac) had passed that test. Abraham went into that test fully believing that if Isaac was killed on the altar as a sacrifice then God would, inevitably, raise him from the dead. He knew that because God had promised that His chosen nation (Israel) would come through Isaac. Thus he believed that resurrection would be the way for that promise to be fulfilled, i.e. that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

In the end, however, God did not make Abraham go through with it. He stopped him. I will set out the account of this from Genesis 22 because it is a very important drama. It perfectly acts out for us what God the Father was willing to go through 2000 years later when He sacrificed His own Son, Jesus:

¹Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ²He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." ³So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

Genesis 22:1-3 (NASB)

⁹Then they came to the place of which God had told him; and Abraham built the altar there and arranged the wood, and bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from Heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹²He said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." ¹³Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son. ¹⁴Abraham called the name of that place The LORD Will Provide, as it is said to this day, "In the mount of the LORD it will be provided."

Genesis 22:9-14 (NASB)

Not only did God do the very same thing with His Son, Jesus. He actually did it in the very same place, i.e. Mount Calvary, which is also called Mount Moriah. What is more, Isaac and Jesus were about the same age, 33. Although in our traditions Isaac is portrayed as a boy, he was in fact a man. That is how he is portrayed in Jewish circles. In their children's books, when the account of Abraham and Isaac is told, Isaac is correctly pictured as a fully grown man.

The main reason God put Abraham through that ordeal was to test his faith. It was also to provide us with a vivid and dramatic illustration of what Jesus our Messiah and Saviour would one day do for us. See how much emphasis is placed in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament, especially in

the letter to the Hebrews, on the shedding of blood. God is making clear that only the shedding of Jesus' blood, i.e. His death in our place, could pay the price for our sins and enable us to be forgiven. (See chapter 10 for more detail on the importance of the blood of Jesus being shed for us).

Another reason why God had to go to such enormous trouble to establish the nation of Israel as His chosen nation, was that there had to be a place where it would be possible for Jesus, the Messiah, to be born and brought up without sinning. In any other nation, if Jesus had obeyed his parents, He would have had to engage in idolatry and worship false gods. Yet, to disobey His parents would have been sin in itself. So there had to be a nation which worshiped the one true God. Then Jesus could obey His parents without dishonouring God. This was vital, because Jesus had to live a perfectly sinless life.

What about the Gentiles?

You will note that so far in this chapter we have looked solely at what God was doing for Israel, His chosen people. However, if you are a Gentile (non-Jew) like me, then be reassured. This whole plan that God made foresaw you and me and provides a place for us. Until Jesus died and rose again God operated only through Israel. However, now even we Gentiles have access to God's blessings and forgiveness.

Previously, unless we became Jews (which many people did), we were excluded from the benefits of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But now we can join in and participate alongside God's chosen people the Jews. Please carefully read this passage which sets out what a difference Jesus has made for all those who believe in Him, even if we are not Jewish:

¹¹Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—¹²remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. *Ephesians 2:11-21 (NIV)*

Setting the scene for the coming of the Kingdom of God

Everything that God did during the time of the Old Testament was directed towards the coming of His Son to be the Messiah and to establish a Kingdom. This would make all the other kingdoms in this world seem small and insignificant by comparison. In fact, God's intention all along was to tear down those other kingdoms and put them all under the authority of His Son, Jesus Christ:

²⁰The word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month, ²¹"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I am about to shake the Heavens and the earth,

22 and to overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I am about to destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations, and overthrow the chariots and their riders. And the horses and their riders shall go down, every one by the sword of his brother.

Haggai 2:20-22 (ESV)

Everything that Jesus did and also everything He is going to do needs to be seen in the context of Him being a King who has a Kingdom. In fact, He is the *King of Kings* and His Kingdom is going to be perfect and eternal. We cannot say that of any other King or Kingdom that this world has ever known:

***Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and thy dominion endures throughout all generations
Psalm 145:13 (RSV)***

So, even the things that God did long ago when He established the nation of Israel, and later the royal line of David, were all being done to set the scene for the first coming of the King of Kings and for the establishing of His Kingdom. At His first coming, Jesus died for us. At His second coming He will return to the earth to take up His position as King. He is going to overturn the ungodly kingdoms of this world and to replace them with His own Kingdom.

Isaiah prophesied that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son who would be Immanuel - "God with us".

In the eighth century BC Isaiah spoke of how a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son and how that son born to her would be God. The word that the prophet Isaiah uses is '*Immanuel*', which means '*God with us*'. So, even centuries before it happened, the Bible indicated that the Messiah would actually be both God and a man:

***Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;
Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel.
Isaiah 7:14 (KJV)***

Then, in or around the year that we call 4 BC, Jesus Christ was finally born, centuries after the prophecies had been given. He was born in a little village called Bethlehem in southern Israel. Even the place of His birth had been prophesied by the prophet Micah about 700 years earlier:

***But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days
Micah 5:2 (ESV)***

Jesus was born to a virgin called Mary who was a descendant of King David, and it was through her that Jesus inherited the right to be King of Israel and to sit on David's throne. Jesus was conceived within Mary while she was unmarried. This was done by the power of the Holy Spirit:

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with

you!” ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

³⁵ And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

Luke 1:26-35 (ESV)

Mary had been betrothed (engaged) to marry a man called Joseph. When he learned that she was pregnant he intended to divorce her quietly because he knew he was not the father. However, God sent an angel to reveal to Joseph what was happening and why. Joseph therefore married Mary and brought Jesus up as if he was his own son:

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

²³ “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”

(which means, God with us). ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Matthew 1:18-25 (ESV)

When the time came for Jesus to be born, God engineered the circumstances so that the birth would take place in Bethlehem, as Micah had prophesied. It took place there because Joseph and Mary had to travel back to Bethlehem, which was the town that Joseph was from, in order to take part in a population census which the Roman Emperor had ordered:

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of

David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

*¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger.¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

²¹ And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Luke 2:1-21 (ESV)

The name Jesus was given was actually *Yeshua* in Hebrew. It is the same name as *Joshua* and means “Saviour”. Jesus is the Greek version of His Hebrew name. He then grew up in Nazareth and was apprenticed to His human step-father, Joseph, and became a carpenter/builder. That is what He did until the time came, at about the age of 30, for Him to begin His public ministry. He then travelled in and around Israel teaching the people and announcing that the Kingdom of God had begun.

His public ministry lasted for three and a half years and then ended with Him being crucified in Jerusalem and with Him rising from the dead three days later and ascending into Heaven 40 days after that.

So, in this ninth chapter we have looked at 2000 years of Jewish history which set the scene for the coming of the Messiah. Now, in the next chapter, we shall look at exactly how Jesus' death solved the problem of our sin. He made it possible for us to be forgiven, made righteous, and reconciled with God the Father. Thus we are now capable of entering the Kingdom of God and escaping from God's punishment.