

The St. Paul Center presents...

Journey Through Scripture

Week 6: Jesus Christ

- 1000 B. C. Kings David & Solomon reign over all 12 tribes and the nations.
- 930 B. C. The northern 10 tribes break away and form their own kingdom, called the House of "Israel" or "Ephraim." The southern kingdom becomes known as the House of "Judah."
- 722 B. C. The Assyrians carry the northern tribes off into exile and scatter them to the nations. They are never heard from again.
- 586 B. C. The Babylonians carry the southern tribes off into exile.
- ~515 B. C. The southern tribes, also called, "the Jews," return from their exile and start rebuild.
- ~200 B. C. Greeks overtake Jerusalem
- ~152 B. C. Hasmonean dynasty; 37 B.C. = Herodian dynasty

Son of David, Son of Abraham

The New Testament begins with Mathew's genealogy, which identifies Jesus as the "son of David, the son of Abraham." These were the two people to whom God swore His most important Old Testament oaths. Through Abraham's son God swore that He would bless all nations. Through David's son God swore He that He would establish an everlasting Kingdom, which would include the Gentiles. Jesus will therefore be the one through whom mankind will be restored to as God's covenant family – He will restore the Kingdom, but in a way that far surpasses anything Solomon reigned over.

Matthew's account of the genealogy of Jesus is the work of a literary artist. The genealogy is structured around three sets of 14 generations:

- ⇒ 14 generations from Abraham to David
- ⇒ 14 generations from David to the Babylonian captivity
- ⇒ 14 generations from the Babylonian captivity to Jesus

The numerical value of David's name in Hebrew is "14" (D = 4; V = 6; D = 4; *there were no vowels in ancient Hebrew*). By structuring the genealogy this way Matthew underscores Jesus' Davidic pedigree. In fact, David's name is the 14th name mentioned. Jesus and David are also the only two in the genealogy who are given titles (1:6 = "David *the King*"; 1:16 = "Jesus... who is called *Christ*").

The genealogy, however, does not mention that the Jews returned from their Babylonian captivity in about 515 B.C. This indicates that the restoration from exile has not *really* happened yet. Jesus will be the one to accomplish that.

Jesus' Hometowns

Jesus is born in Bethlehem, David's hometown (cf. 1 Sam. 16). When the three wise men come looking for Jesus because of the famous Christmas star, King Herod becomes aware of Jesus' birth. Of course, Herod realized that he was an imposter king of Israel – not only did he lack Davidic ancestry, he was not even an Israelite. He was an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. Herod tries to kill Jesus by ordering the deaths of all the male children two years and younger. Perhaps the mysterious star reminded Herod of Balaam's prophecy: "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not nigh: a star shall come forth out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab... Edom shall be dispossessed... (Num. 24:17, 18).

After fleeing to Egypt to escape Herod, the Holy Family finally settled in Nazareth. Matthew tells us that this was to fulfill the prophecy: “He shall be called a Nazarene.” However, no such prophecy is found in the Old Testament. Did Matthew make a mistake? Of course not.

“Nazarene” comes from the Hebrew word *netser*, which means “branch.” The prophets often called the Messiah, “the Branch” (cf. Jer. 23:5; 33:14-16; Zech. 3:8; 6:11-13). For example, Isaiah used the image of a tree stump, which had once been the tree of Jesse, David’s father, symbolizing that the Davidic line had apparently been “cut down.” However, Isaiah went on to describe a “branch” that would grow out of the stump, foretelling the coming a future Davidic King who would restore the Kingdom from exile (cf. Is. 11:1-2, 10-16).

The New Exodus

John the Baptist is introduced as the “voice crying out in the wilderness” foretold by Isaiah 40:3. This voice would come to announce the deliverance of Israel from the exile – the New Exodus. Just as Moses had delivered God’s people from their bondage in Egypt, so now God would restore Israel from all the Gentile nations they had been sent to as captives.

John the Baptist dresses as Elijah did, wearing a garment of camel’s hair and a leather belt (Mt. 3:4; 1 Kings 1:8). The Book of Sirach stated that Elijah would come to announce the restoration of Israel: “[Elijah will return] to turn the heart of the father to the son, and to restore the tribes of Jacob” (Sir. 48:10).

Israel was sent off into exile because of sin. The restoration from exile therefore implied more than a return to the land – Israel’s return to the land would come about once Israel

returned to the Lord. The restoration of the kingdom from exile meant repentance and forgiveness. Those who were baptized by John, therefore, confessed their sins. This was the message John proclaimed: “Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt. 3:1).

Jesus “Christ”

When Jesus is baptized by John, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy, “And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him” (Is. 11:2). Jesus is anointed by the Spirit. He is the “Messiah” – the “anointed one.”

In the Old Testament the Davidic king was anointed by a prophet. David was anointed by Samuel (1 Sam. 16:13). Solomon was anointed by Nathan (1 Kings 1:32ff.). Jesus is now anointed by the greatest of all the prophets, John the Baptist.

Once Jesus begins His public ministry, His message centers around the “kingdom.” Matthew summarizes Jesus’ ministry: “He went about all Galilee... preaching the gospel of the *kingdom*” (Mt 4:23; italics added).

Many of Jesus’ most famous sayings emphasize the importance of the kingdom.

- ⇒ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 4:23)
- ⇒ “Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name, thy kingdom come” (Mt 5:9-10)
- ⇒ “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed...” (Mt. 13:31)
- ⇒ “I tell you, you are Peter... I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 16:28-29)

Jesus the New Moses

Since Jesus brings about the New Exodus, not only is He the New David, He is also the New Moses. After His baptism, therefore, He passes through the waters, goes out into the wilderness where He fasts for forty days and nights, and is “tested” like Israel in the desert. Jesus resists the temptations of the devil, quoting Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 6-8. In Deuteronomy 6-8 Moses reminds Israel of their sinfulness in the wilderness and tells them what they *should* have done when the Lord tested them. Where Israel failed, Jesus succeeds. (For more on Jesus as the New Moses see Week 4 of this program.)

Galilean Ministry

Matthew tells us that Jesus began his ministry in Capernaum, “in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.” It’s interesting that Matthew highlights the tribal territories since the northern tribes have been in exile since 722 B. C. Yet, Matthew seems to stress the importance of these territories. Why?

The northern tribes were the first tribes to go into exile. Isaiah predicted that where the deportation began the restoration of the kingdom would commence. “In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zeb'ulun and the land of Naph'tali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”

By going up to Galilee – territory of the northern tribes – Jesus makes it clear that He intends to restore all the tribes in His Kingdom. Solomon reigned over all twelve tribes – and He will do nothing less. So immediately after citing Isaiah’s prophecy, Matthew tells us: “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Mt. 4:17).

The Kingdom is God's Family

Like Moses, Jesus climbs up a mountain to teach the law of God – the law of the Kingdom. He doesn't relax the law of Moses though. He internalizes it, intensifies it and internationalizes it. For example, Moses commanded Israel not to commit adultery; Jesus says that anyone who even looks lustfully at a woman commits adultery in his heart.

The dominant theme in Jesus' great sermon is still the Kingdom. Jesus begins by saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God" (Mt. 5:3). Yet, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus introduces a new theme: God is Father. He goes on to teach the disciples to pray, "Our Father." This is the logic behind the whole sermon:

- ⇒ "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48)
- ⇒ "Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from you Father who is in heaven" (Mt. 6:1)
- ⇒ "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?... Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well..." (Mt. 6:25, 32-33)

Here we see something important. The Kingdom of God is more than just a political institution – the Kingdom is the Family of God.

The Keys of the Kingdom

In Matthew 16, Jesus gives Peter the "keys" to the kingdom. The "keys" were a symbol in the Old Testament of the authority of the Prime Minister of the Kingdom. Isaiah tells

us of how God made Eliakim the Prime Minister in the place of Shebna.

“In that day I will call my servant Eli'akim the son of Hilki'ah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah... And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open” (Is. 22:20, 22).

When Jesus gives Peter the keys, He uses very similar language:

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mt. 16:18-19).

Jesus makes Peter the Prime Minister of the Kingdom – giving him His own authority. And just as Eliakim succeeded Shebna as Prime Minister, Peter presumably will have successors as well.

The End Of A World

Instead of riding triumphantly into Jerusalem on a horse, Jesus humbly arrives on a donkey, just as the son of David, Solomon, did (cf. Mt. 21:6-7; 1 Kings 1:38). Jesus' Kingdom is not about earthly / political power. Jesus' Kingdom is heavenly. As we saw in Week 4, the plans for the earthly sanctuary were drawn up after the pattern Moses saw in heaven. The earthly Jerusalem and its temple were meant to point Israel to the heavenly realities they were copies of.

However, the leaders of Jerusalem opposed Jesus. They preferred the earthly temple to the true temple. The earthly

Jerusalem and temple were holy – but when they stood in the way of something holier they became evil. Because of this Jesus cleansed the temple and predicted its coming destruction by the Romans. As they were leaving the temple, Jesus pointed to its large stones and said, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down” (Mt. 24:1-2).

After this Jesus goes on to speak of the last days: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Mt. 24:29-30).

However, He then adds, “Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mt. 24:24-25). In Greek, the word for “generation” implies a period of forty years. Did Jesus really expect the world to end in forty years?

For ancient Israel, the temple was a symbol of the world. For example, the bronze laver symbolized the sea; the court divisions symbolized the three realms of the universe; etc. When the temple was destroyed it symbolized the end of the world.

The Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A. D., about forty years after Jesus’ words. It marked the end of a world – the Old Testament world. The old Jerusalem and temple gave way to the New Jerusalem, the Heavenly Zion, the true Temple.

The Kingdom of Heaven

The earthly Jerusalem was the home of the Davidic king and the location of God's sanctuary, the place of His presence. But it was meant to point mankind toward the true Jerusalem, where Jesus now reigns as King. In the Book of Revelation we find out that the whole heavenly city is one giant sanctuary. We learn that the Triune God is the true temple (cf. Rev. 21:16; 22:22). There we will live in the Trinity forever. As the Catechism states, "This perfect life with the Most Holy Trinity – this communion of life and love with the Trinity... is called 'heaven'" (CCC 1024).

Jesus has come to restore the Kingdom of God. Through the Kingdom God extends His covenant to all, making us children of God. As we have seen, the Kingdom is the Family of God. We come to share in the life of the Divine Family, the Trinity. The inner logic of the Kingdom, therefore, is not political – it's the life-giving love the Trinity.

The Eucharist: The New Passover

Jesus transforms the celebration of the Passover of the first Exodus into the New Passover of the New Exodus. Jesus offers Himself as the true Passover sacrifice. But just as Israel had to eat the lamb to complete their observance of the Passover, Jesus' gives us His Flesh and Blood to eat and drink – we too must eat the Lamb. Because of this Paul explains, "For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the feast" (1 Cor. 5:7-8).

It is only when Jesus established the Eucharist that He finally announced the "New Covenant" – "This is my blood of the New Covenant" (Mt. 26:28). In this, Jesus fulfills Jeremiah's prophecy that Israel would be re-united and restored to the Lord: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of

Israel and the house of Judah...I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

As He established the Eucharist, Jesus tells the apostles:

“You are those who have continued with me in my trials; and I covenant to you, as my Father covenanted to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk. 22:28-30).

The Kingdom is made present in the Church’s Eucharistic celebration. The Kingdom is the Family of God. It is in the Eucharist that we share the same Flesh and Blood – we are made Family. Moreover, the Kingdom is present in the Eucharist because that is where the King is made present.

The New Adam

Jesus bears the curses of all the covenants, fulfilling all the Old Testament promises. As we saw in Week II, as the “New Adam” Jesus goes into a garden (Mt. 26:36-46) and sweats drops of blood (Lk. 22:44), is given a crown of thorns (Mt. 27:29), stripped naked (Mt. 27:31) and dies on the “tree” (Acts. 5:30). As He falls into the sleep of death, His Bride, the Church, is formed from His side (Jn. 19:26-35). Jesus finally appears in His resurrected body, announcing the new creation to a “woman” in a garden (Jn. 20:11-18).

The Son of Abraham

In Genesis 22, Abraham was commanded to take a three-day journey to Mt. Moriah and there sacrifice his only beloved son. As he carried the wood up the mountain, Isaac asked his father, “Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Gen. 22:7). Abraham responded, “God will provide Himself the Lamb” (Gen. 22:8). .

Jesus offers Himself as the only beloved Son of the Father on Mt. Moriah. Like Isaac, He carries the wood up the mountain. There God provides Himself the Lamb. On the third day the Father receives His Son back from the dead, just as Abraham received his son back from the sentence of death he was placed under on the third day. Because of Abraham's faithfulness God swore He would bless all nations – by Jesus' death that oath is fulfilled.

The Passover Lamb

As we saw before, Jesus is the true Passover sacrifice. The Gospel of John underscores this. John tells us that He was condemned the very same hour the Passover lambs were slaughtered, the sixth hour (Jn. 19:14). Though the Roman soldiers broke the legs of the other men executed, Jesus' bones were not broken, fulfilling what was said of the Passover lamb – “not a bone of his shall be broken” (Jn. 19:31-36; Ex. 12:46). When a sponge is lifted up to give Jesus' a drink, John notices that it is placed on a “hyssop” branch – the same kind of branch commanded Israel use to sprinkle the blood of the Passover lamb (Jn. 12:29; Ex. 12:22). Yet, Jesus also wears a seamless garment – the garment worn by the high priest (Jn 19:23; Lev. 16:4). Not only is He the sacrifice, the lamb, He is also the Priest who makes the sacrifice. He offers Himself.

Bearing the Curse For Israel

When Israel violated the covenant they had made with God by worshipping the golden calf, they triggered the curse of the covenant and deserved to die. However, Moses reminded God that if He wiped them out, He would be unable to fulfill His covenant oath to Abraham, by which He swore to bless all nations through Abraham's descendants – Israel. After their sin God instructed Israel to offer animal

sacrifice daily. These sacrifices held Israel in a state of suspended animation until someone could come and bear the curse.

Paul explains that Jesus has borne this curse by dying on the cross. Now God's covenant oath to make Israel a holy nation, a royal priesthood can be fulfilled. Now God can make good on His oath to Abraham – to pour His covenant blessing out on all mankind.

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us -- for it is written, ‘Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree’ that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” (Gal. 3:13-15).

The Resurrection

The work of salvation was not complete with Jesus' death for our sins. Without the Resurrection we could not be saved. “[We are saved through] Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:24-25).

Jesus' Resurrection was more than a recitation – it was more than simply coming back to life. In His Resurrection Jesus' humanity is divinized – glorified (cf. CCC 651-655). By uniting ourselves to Him we share His glorified humanity.

Salvation is more than just a personal relationship between “me and Jesus.” We must share in His resurrected Body; we must become members of His Mystical Body. Just as Jesus lived out His life in His earthly body, now He lives in His Mystical Body – the Church. Paul explains, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ

who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). Christ is truly living in us and is offering Himself to the Father through us.

This was the discovery Saul made when Jesus appeared to Him. Though he was persecuting the Church, Jesus said to Saul that he was actually persecuting Him. Acts 9:4-5: [Saul] heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, why do you persecute me?” And he said, “Who are you Lord?” And He said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting...” (Acts 9:4-5). Saul, who became Paul, later wrote many Epistles that explored how Christ is truly alive and active in His Church.

The Resurrection As Restoration

The restoration of the kingdom was frequently spoken of as “resurrection.” Ezekiel 37 is the clearest example of this. There Ezekiel brings a valley full of dead bodies back to life. The Lord explains that this is a symbol of the restoration of Israel from exile:

“Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people” (Ezek. 37:12-13).

In the Resurrection the Kingdom of God is restored because the King has been restored. God’s people can now share in His covenant family by uniting themselves to Him – to His Mystical Body, the Church... the Kingdom.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) Matthew identifies Jesus as the son of which two important Old Testament figures? What is their significance?

- 2) What is the major theme of Jesus' ministry? How does this theme reflect the fulfillment, not the abolishment, of God's covenant promises in the Old Testament?
- 3) In what ways does the Kingdom restored by Jesus surpass the kingdom of David and Solomon?
- 4) How is the Eucharist the New Passover? How is the Kingdom of God present in the Church's Eucharistic celebration?
- 5) How does Jesus bear the curses triggered by Adam and Eve? How does He bear the curse incurred by Israel so that God's promise to Abraham can be fulfilled?
- 6) How are we saved through the Resurrection? Why does salvation involve something more than simply a relationship between "me and Jesus"?