

Why Christmas?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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"O come, O come, Immanuel." You know, it's interesting that a season that we typically celebrate through the gospel account has most of its scriptural basis in obscure passages in the Bible, that origination of Immanuel, God with us, find itself way back in the prophecies of Isaiah hundreds of years before the birth of the Christ child, and today in just a moment, we're about to turn in our Bibles to two other places that, shall we say, are not typically known as the Christmas story.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, as we begin to turn the pages of our Bible, as we begin to read and to study and eventually to live out what you're going to show us from your word today, I pray that, God, you would do as only you can do, that you would take all the voices and all of the ideas that are in opposition to your word and somehow as you do it supernaturally, just silence them in our lives. God, if it's possible just put us in the vacuum of your Holy Spirit this morning so we hear directly from you, directly from your word so that our lives will never be the same. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

As I mentioned, a couple of passages that we don't think of when it comes to the Christmas season both in the Old Testament, the book of Jeremiah 22, one of the major prophets, somewhat in the middle of your Bible, and then we're going to find ourselves taking a journey through the book of Genesis beginning in chapter 3. So we're going to start off in just a moment in Jeremiah 22. The book of Jeremiah is hopefully you are well aware, is a part of our Bible reading plan right now and if you're up-to-date on the Bible reading plan, you can testify that we're not in the midst of good news, are we? But here in chapter 22, in the midst of all of the chaos, in the midst of all the things that are happening, there is this glimpse of good news that does not sound like good news at the forefront.

When it comes to the Christmas season, we know the who, Jesus Christ, we talk a whole lot about the what, the chronology, the famous Christmas stories, the angels that were declaring the truth of his birth, the dreams and all the things associated with but today I want us to just kind of contemplate, in fact, today is going to feel more like Bible study

than it does a sermon. Why Christmas? Not why we celebrate it, we understand that, but why was Christmas so critical? Why was it so important? And what we're about to see from the book of Jeremiah 22 is this, that Christmas is important because there's a problem that has arisen, it's an apparent problem that rises to the surface here in Jeremiah 22, then we're going to go back in the book of Genesis and find out that all along even though this problem has arisen, that God has had a well-established plan, and finally we're going to wrap it up in the New Testament and realize that Christmas isn't just about the decorations, it's not just about what's happening out there, it's a very personal issue that we personally must ask the why question to.

In Jeremiah 22, allow me to set the stage. Things are not good. In fact, there's a king that has arisen by the name of Jeconiah, he is the 19th and the final king of Judah before the Babylonian exile. I mean, you are on the cusp of everything going sideways. For hundreds of years the prophets have told the Israelites, "If you do not repent of your sins, then you're going to go into exile." Even though the northern kingdom had already fallen into the trap with Assyria, the southern kingdom, Judah, didn't listen. They were self-sufficient. They were reliant on their history, on their present and in the future that they had already written out for themselves. Here in chapter 22, the 19th of the kings, the one who will literally be taken into Babylon as the king of Judah, or the southern kingdom, the Lord comes to him, he declares through the prophet Jeremiah beginning in verse 24 what is about to befall him and when we get to verse 30, you may not realize it but Christmas is going to be referenced. It says,

24 As I live, saith the LORD, though Coniah [or Jeconiah] the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence; 25 And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. 26 And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die. 27 But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return. 28 Is this man Coniah [or Jeconiah] a despised broken idol? is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? 29 O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD. 30 Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.

Do you see the problem? There's this proclamation that's made there in verse 30 that says that this man Jeconiah, the 19th of the kings from the lineage not only of the ruling of Solomon and David and Saul but of the seed of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. What is the proclamation? It's over. You know, I know we all have these moments in our lives that's called breaking points where we're done. It doesn't matter what the subject matter is, it may not matter what the issue is but we've all been there. Some of these issues are somewhat trite and some of them are significant. Has there ever been a time in your life

where you've just looked at a situation and say, "I'm out. I'm no longer gonna deal with this anymore." That's exactly what God is proclaiming.

And I want you to think about the history here. For hundreds and literally thousands of years, God has invested in humanity, he has beckoned their obedience, he has shared with them the blessings that will come from doing so, and yet what does humanity continue to do? To rebel. Even the kings whether it was Saul or David and Solomon, Rehoboam, whoever it was, you see this pattern of rebellion until we get to Jeremiah 22. He says, "I'm done. No longer will a seed, a child, a descendant of this man sit on the throne of David."

Now why is that proclamation an apparent problem? Because there's a prophecy that was made several years back, in fact, 18 kings back, by a man by the name of David. We know David best from the Psalms that the Lord has given us through his writing. We know his life story. We know everything from the battle of Goliath to his fall with Bathsheba. We know that he extended the kingdom of Israel as far as anyone would ever do so. In fact, today you go to the Holy Land and they still call it the city of David. And yet in Psalm 110:1, when questioning his authority, when questioning his right to rule, he makes an interesting statement, he says, "The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until your enemies become a footstool." Now why is this an apparent problem? Because God said, "From this point on I'm done. I'm not doing this anymore." What did David say back in Psalm 110:1? "That someone from my lineage, one of my descendants will sit on this throne and he will never be removed."

How significant is this prophecy? You may say, "Well, did we just kind of misunderstand it? Did we not quite grasp it?" If you were to go to the New Testament and you begin to categorize all of the Old Testament passages that are either referred to or quoted, Psalm 110:1 is the most quoted verse from the Old Testament. Now do you see a problem? The one even in the New Testament that we refer to all the time, when we talk about, "He shall reign forevermore, the king of Israel, the King of kings, the Lord of lords," this prophecy said that it would happen through the lineage yet the problem as proclaimed is God said, "I'm done." You see, it even compounds more than that when you begin to look at the pedigree. As you well know, they go into captivity, they come back 70 years later, and then for about 450 years they're kind of in this, shall we say, mundane existence until we know about the Christmas season, the birth of the Christ child, the fulfillment of the prophecy. And this is where it gets interesting because in Matthew 1:11, we have this chapter in the Bible that most of us when it comes to a Bible reading plan, let's be honest, we either skip over it or we go so fast we don't pay attention, "So-and-so begat So-and-so who begat So-and-so who begat So-and-so," and we're like, "Okay, can we get to the good stuff? Let's get to Christmas." What happens there in verse 11? Jeconiah shows up. Well, isn't that interesting? Here's the man that God said I'm done with, David said it would come from his seed or his lineage, and he shows up right there in the midst of the genealogy of Jesus Christ?

Now why is this critical? Because if Jesus Christ is the prophesied one, if he is the Messiah that today we have sung about and we proclaim, we've got a problem on our

hands. How can God be done, how can the prophecy be quoted and why does he show up in Matthew 1 as being a part of the lineage of the Christ child? You see, Jeremiah 22:30 has everything to do with Christmas because we've got to make sure we've got the right guy, we've got to make sure that all the songs that we sing, all the Bible studies we do, all the prayers that we offer, isn't it pretty important we make sure that this is the right person? Notice I called it an apparent problem. Why is it an apparent problem? Because we're about to look at the established plan that God put into place all the way back in Genesis 3 and we're going to discover that what looks like a problem on the surface, when we dig down deep isn't near as troublesome or problematic as we may have thought.

All the way back in the book of Genesis 3, we know this story best for humanity's "first failure." This is the time where we listened to the "wisdom of the serpent," this is a time where humanity made a conscious decision that we knew more than God did, that even though he told us if we ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil we would surely die, in fact, he says you will die twice, we ignored him, we said, "No, no, no, it looks good to the eye, it's going to taste good, it will make us wise as the gods." Again, we fell into this trap of, "Hey, guys, watch this." We fall and then we are eventually banished from what we know as the garden of Eden. You know, when we talk about the story of chapter 3 of Genesis, we focus on Adam and Eve, rightfully so, we focus on the fact of the statements about pain and childbirth and the thorns of the ground, but verse 15 of Genesis 3 is very critical to what you and I know as the Christmas story because as soon as we have fallen, as soon as we have eaten the forbidden fruit, as soon as humanity realized according to the Bible that they were naked before God, what we know as the consequences began to be distributed and the Lord begins with the serpent. He begins with the one who initiated this whole mess. He begins with the one who began to question did God really mean what God really said.

Now I want to read for you verse 15 of Genesis 3 and I want you to see the proclamation that the Lord makes in light of our sin. He says, "And I will put enmity," now remember this is to the serpent, "between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This verse is so important to biblical studies that we call it the very first gospel, or what we might formally call the protoevangelium, but can I state for the record today this is the first Christmas story. You say, "Christmas? We understand a Messiah, we understand the answer to our sin problem, but Christmas in Genesis 3:15?" Let me read it again, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed," listen to this next phrase, "and her seed." Now I find that interesting. I wasn't a biology major in college but I passed the course, and last time I checked when it comes to humanity, when it comes to the animal kingdom, when it comes to anything that has the ability to produce its own descendants, what we know as the "seed" is not from the woman, it's from the man.

Do you see what God is proclaiming? All the way back in the garden of Eden, he's telling us from the very beginning that unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, the government shall be upon his shoulders but he will not come from natural means, he will not come just through the lineage of humanity as we would naturally expect it. When he

makes this statement or the proclamation "her seed," God is declaring what you and I know as the Christmas birth, what you and I formally call the "virgin birth." It's being spoken of there in Genesis 3:15 because her seed is not a normal birth. Her seed is not a natural birth so that when humanity continues to do what we do and go sideways with life, God has made a plan and he has proclaimed, "Don't worry, I got this and I'm going to do it my way. I'm going to do it the supernatural way." You see, what we celebrate as Christmas, what we celebrate the story of a young woman who's with child of the Holy Ghost, that didn't just start in the gospels, it didn't just start in the prophets of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Do you know what's neat about Genesis 3? I don't know the exact chronology, the Bible doesn't give us a stopwatch, I've got a funny feeling this statement was made within the hour, as soon as we ate of the forbidden fruit it was proclaimed that her seed, a supernatural seed would come.

You know, it's interesting as you read through the next couple of chapters of the book of Genesis, I get the idea like most parents that Adam and Eve got their hopes up because in chapter 4 Cain was born and Eve makes an interesting statement, "For a manchild has been given to me." Don't you think down deep they thought maybe this is the one who will get us back in the garden? And then Abel was born, and maybe there was hope there, after all, he presented a good sacrifice, the problem was Cain took care of that problem in a very natural sinful way. Chapter 5, we get Seth, the third child that we have named in Scripture born to Adam and Eve. The lineages begin but the problems just compound themselves. In fact, if you'll turn a few pages to the right in chapter 6, I want to talk about the prophecy that the Lord states. Again much like Genesis 3, we typically focus on the rain, 40 days and 40 nights, this is Noah's flood, this is the event that has probably been discussed as many as any other event in the Bible outside of Jonah being in the whale for three days and three nights. Could it happen the way the Bible said? Is it really realistic to look at this literally as the Bible has written? But I want to look at it from a Christmas perspective, actually a prophetic perspective.

You see, God's already proclaimed that a child is going to come from a woman in a supernatural means. You get into chapter 6 of Genesis, Cain wasn't the answer, Abel wasn't the answer, Seth wasn't the answer, none of their descendants were the answer. In fact, the Bible says there in verse 1 and 2 that they had lived such a lifestyle that every thought they had was wicked. They had completely, if you allow me to say, they'd gone off the cliff when it comes to the relationship or lack thereof with God. What does God say? Look at verse 7, "the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them." Do you see the problem here? You see, God proclaimed a Messiah is coming. God pronounced that the seed of the woman will one day show up. What does he say in verse 7? He says, "I'm done. I am going to erase humanity off the face of the planet." I know many of you have heard this before such just endure me. Aren't you grateful for the next word in verse 8, "But"? That word's important in the Bible, trust me. Verse 8, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of God." What is grace? Grace is receiving that which you do not deserve.

Now the Bible tells us in Hebrews 11 that he was a preacher of righteousness, a preacher of righteousness. Read chapter 9 and you'll discover he wasn't quite the lifestyle of righteousness. In fact, when Noah gets off the boat, it's not pretty. His behavior, his words aren't good, his descendants are... It's not a pretty sight and so when I speak about the prophecy that's involved here, don't think that one of his children, don't think that he, himself, was the answer to the proclamation, "But Noah found grace in the eyes of God." What is the prophecy here? He's protecting and providing for his proclamation. You see, God said it's gonna come through a woman, right? Well, if we don't have anybody left, how can it continue?

And so he has proclaimed that this special seed will come, he has proclaimed this Messiah will descend upon humanity, and he prophesies here in Genesis 6:8 that what we know as the human race will not fall into extinction before the fulfillment thereof. Here's what God is saying: if it's all wickedness in Genesis 6, he's saying no matter how bad it gets, he's saying no matter what it looks like, there will still be a means and a vessel for the proclamation that I gave you all the way back in chapter 3, which leads us a few pages to the right to chapter 12. I mentioned that it doesn't go well after Noah's flood. God tells Noah's children to go to the ends of the earth and they decide that it would be smarter just to stay where they are and build a tower into the heavens and say, "We know what we're doing, God." Consistent pattern again of humanity whether in the garden of Eden, whether in the field with Cain and Abel, whether out there with the tower of Babel, but in chapter 12 of the book of Genesis something happens, a pedigree is established. The Lord comes to a man by the name of Abram. Now he won't be Abraham until his son of promise by the name of Isaac is born, but I want you to hear what it says in Genesis 12:1-3. It says, "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." What's the pedigree that God is establishing here? He's saying, "Oh, it's going to come from a woman, I've already pronounced that. It's been prophesied that I'm going to protect, there's at least going to be a vessel left of humanity to fulfill this promise." But then it gets specific, he says, "If you want to know the exact family, when you begin to look at what's going to happen over time, just look to the descendants of Abraham, whom we know as the child of promise, Isaac, and eventually Jacob."

Can we all just know those of us who have any type of biblical background, things were not very good in those days. Isaac was not actually the first child that Abraham gave birth to, or at least his wife did, in fact, it was Hagar, his mistress woman, by the name of Ishmael. The Lord said, "No, no, no, not so much. Isaac is the child of promise." Then we know Jacob and he and his brother Esau had all kinds of issues with each other. By the time we get to the 12 tribes, they have such a love for one another they take their youngest brother and they sell him off eventually to the Egyptians. The pattern continues but what did the Lord say? "You've got to look all the way back to Abraham." You've got to look back to Isaac and Jacob and eventually what we know as the tribe of Judah, the smallest of the tribes that would produce the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Now why is this important? Because God's established plan flips the script on the apparent problem that we've got. When we look at it from the surface, we've got a king being punished for his sinful behavior, we've got a prophecy that says it can't happen that way and then he shows up in the lineage, but what happens? When we begin to take a step back and we look at the whole picture, we realize that in spite of our rebellion, in spite of our sinful behavior God had this all along. He said from the very beginning it's going to be supernatural. From the very beginning it's going to come from a woman. From the very beginning it's going to come from the lineage of Abraham. When you get to Jeremiah 22 and we discover that none of his lineage will ever sit on the throne of God, we have confirmation that what he said in Genesis 3 is going to come to fruition. It is going to be supernatural. It is not going to be by the means that humanity would expect it.

Why Christmas? We need Christmas because in Jeremiah 22 we've got a problem that if we don't have God in flesh among us, then there's no solution for us. Why Christmas? Because God established a plan from the very beginning in the book of Genesis that when he came to redeem us, he would not do it through natural means nor through natural man, he would do it as only he can which leads to the final question of why Christmas? Because it's personal. Christmas isn't about the fact that at least Western civilization a couple hundred years ago we "resurrected" this celebration. It's not about the fact that about 1,700 years ago we did what we did back then, we overtook a very secular celebration and we just "stamped it with Christianity" on top of it. Christmas is personal. In fact, you go to the gospel of Luke and when Mary begins to declare that which is in her womb, she says, "my Savior." She doesn't declare him the Savior of the world, though he is, she makes it personal.

Why Christmas? Ladies and gentlemen, it's personal. Why? Because God's made a very clear proclamation, Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned." Now I'm gonna get real deep with you. You know what the Greek word for "all" is, right? All. That means you, that means me. "For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." And then later in Romans 6:23, he makes this statement, "For the wages of sin is death." That's not a good position to be in, is it? What do we discover? It doesn't matter how good we become, it doesn't matter how less bad we become, it doesn't matter how we try to fix this thing, because we've all sinned, because we've all missed the mark, because we've all transgressed, because we all have iniquity in us, we're going to experience death and when the Bible speaks of death, don't just think of breathing your last breath, think eternally, think of the fact of an eternity in a place that Bible calls hell dead. Not good, is it? But what did God proclaim? Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death," any guess on what the next word is? "But, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Can I tell you what that second half of Romans 6:23 is doing? It's taking us all the way back to Jeremiah, it's taking us all the way back to Genesis saying, "Guys, you couldn't do this on your own. You are rebellious by nature. You have a tendency to gravitate toward sin. My plan has been from the very beginning to give of myself."

But the gift of God. Isn't it interesting, what do we do at Christmas? We give gifts. The gift of God is eternal life not through our religiosity, not through our "giving," not through our serving but through Christ Jesus.

So what's the prophecy that he gives us? Romans 5:8 it says, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Now that "we" there is humanity in totality, not just you and I personally. When Abram went in to Hagar, he said, "Don't worry, the Messiah is coming." When David had his issue with Bathsheba, he said, "Don't worry, the Messiah is coming." When Solomon had his issues, when Jeconiah had his issues, when humanity in totality had their issues he said, "Don't worry," that even though we were sinners, Christ would die for us. You look back particularly through the Old Testament and you'll discover that there's some sordid folks in there, there's some individuals whose lifestyle are very far from the things of God, and yet even in their sin Christ died for them.

Romans 10:13 says, "So whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." It's an interesting prophecy, isn't it? It's saying that if you and I recognize that we've got the same problem as Adam and Eve, we've got the same problem of those in Genesis 6, we've got the same problem as Jeconiah, when we see for ourselves for who we are, if we'll just call on the Lord we will be saved. That's an incredible Christmas prophecy because if he was not born for us and if he did not live for us, and if he did not die for us, and if he did not raise for us, then why should we call on him? That's the prophecy, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. If we call on him, he will save us.

So what's the pedigree? Back in John 1, it's not the Christmas story, it's kind of really the whole story. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, the Word was God. Nothing was created or formed apart from him." You get down into verse 11 and 12 of John 1 it says that "Jesus Christ came unto his own but his own received him not." Verse 12, guess what the word is? "But to them who believed on him, they shall be called the sons of God." Romans 8 talks about when we believe on him, we can cry out "Abba, Father." We are adopted into his family.

You see, the Christmas season, it's a good time for many folks and not so good a time for others. Why? This is the time we celebrate our families and it's also the time we miss our families. It's a time we celebrate gathering and it's the time that we mourn for a lack of the ability thereof. Why is Christmas so important? Because the Christmas story as a part of the whole story allows us to become children of God, it allows us to no longer be estranged. According to Ephesians 2, we are no longer foreigners, we are no longer on the outside, we're now on the "inside." We now have Abba Father. We now have a personal relationship with the Lord through Jesus Christ. We are no longer strangers.

The question why Christmas, it's a different question than what, so if you start asking what about Christmas, people start talking about decorations and plans and gatherings and the frivolity of the season, you start talking about the when, well, we're going to do this on Monday night and what about that Thursday night, and we know we celebrate on the 25th and that's going to be this and that, but the why of Christmas is the most important part and God has been telling us about the why for thousands of years. It

started with the garden of Eden. It climaxed in Jeremiah 22 when the Lord said, "Hear me clearly, I'm going to do this my way because you cannot do it your way."

Here's the final question: has Christmas ever been personal to you or has it just been a season, just been a holiday, it's just been a gathering, it's all been about the calories or whatever it may be? or have you ever internalized it, that you're no different than Jeconiah, you're no different than Adam and Eve, you're no different than those in Noah's day, you've got the same sin problem they do and only Jesus Christ can solve it. With all of the decorations and with all the celebrations, you know, maybe today at the beginning of the season we actually understand the reason for the season.