

CHRIST, THE BRANCH

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INTRODUCTION

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins (Isaiah 11:1-5).

THE WORD "BRANCH"

The word "branch" is used in the Bible both in a literal and in a figurative sense. It can be used as a literal shoot from a vine or tree that puts forth a branch. It is also used in the sense of a descendant. The Word of God figuratively uses this word to describe the prosperity of putting one's faith in God; "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch" (Proverbs 11:28). It is used to describe God's people as they came out of Egypt and were planted as a vine in the land of Canaan (cf. Psalm 80:7-12). Christ states that He is the vine and His disciples are the branches (John 15:1-ff), illustrating how disciples must have fruit in Him or be cut off. (Interestingly, some think that the word "Nazarene" is from the root of the Hebrew word "*hetser*" translated branch in Isaiah 11:1.ⁱ)

But this word also describes the Christ that was to come into the world. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah all speak of Christ as "the Branch" (see Isaiah 11:1, Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15, Zechariah 3:8, 6:12-13).

WHY IS CHRIST CALLED THE BRANCH?

There can be no doubt that the branch is a reference to Christ, because Paul, in Romans 15:12, quotes Isaiah 11 and applies it to the Gentiles coming into Christ. "And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust" (Romans 15:12).

When a New Testament writer quotes an Old Testament prophesy and shows its fulfillment, that is the end of the matter. Isaiah is speaking about Christ!

As seen in our text the background of Isaiah 11:1 goes back to Jesse. He (Isaiah) said that a rod (or "shoot" ASV), would come forth out of Jesse and a "Branch" would grow out of his roots. Jesse is the father of David, (Ruth 4:17) and God had made a promise to David that out of his seed would come a king who would establish His kingdom.

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever (II Samuel 7:12-13).

At times the house of Israel would become very small. It looked like it might even be destroyed. In Isaiah chapter 10, God is showing the destruction of Assyria (Israel's enemy), yet there would be a remnant of Israel that would be spared. These would put their trust in the Lord.

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness (Isaiah 10:20-22).

Although the forest of Assyria would be destroyed, there would come forth a shoot out of the stem of Jesse and a Branch shall grow out of His roots (cf. Isaiah 11:1). God's spirit would rest upon Him and would rule with righteousness and equity.

Because of the sins of Israel, she would lose her power. In fact the earthly kingdom of Israel would end with Coniah. Jeremiah in his writings speaks of this.

Is this man Coniah 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? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD. 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 (Jeremiah 22:28-30).

Note carefully that the Lord said Coniah would be childless, and that he would not prosper in his days. He then makes this prophecy: "for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah." Thus the earthly kingdom of Judah comes to a close.

Keep in mind, however, that God promised to King David, that one from his seed (a descendant), would live and set up a kingdom. How could this be if the earthly kingdom of Judah came to a close with Coniah?

Interestingly, Jesus Christ is of the lineage of Coniah (cf. Matthew 1:12 "Jechonias" is the same as "Coniah"). One must remember that Jeremiah stated that no one of Coniah's seed would prosper, sitting upon the throne of David and ruling any more **in Judah** (emp. mine B.B.) Jesus Christ, descendant of Coniah is not ruling in Judah, He reigns from heaven, where He sits on the right hand of God.

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he

would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:25-36).

Although Judah and Israel had been reduced to seemingly nothing because of sin, God would spare a remnant through whom the Branch would grow and bless His people. Amos, God's courageous prophet, speaks of this in his book.

In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this (Amos 9:11-12).

This prophecy is quoted by James in Acts 15:16-17 and is applied to the New Testament age and in particular to the system set up by Jesus Christ, (i.e. Christianity). James then makes this remarkable and thought provoking statement: "**Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world**" (Acts 15:18).

Isaiah, the messianic prophet, shows that out of the remnant of God's people, there would come a "shoot" out of Jesse and a "branch" would grow out of his roots. He would bless the world and give us peace. This peace is described by the figurative usage of the wolf dwelling with the lamb, the leopard lying down with the kid (goat), etc. The vicious animals would be tamed and their diets changed from carnivorous to being strictly vegetarian (cf. Isaiah 11:6-9). This peace which the Messiah would bring is fulfilled in Christ. Paul spoke of this peace in Ephesians 2:13-17.

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made

both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh (Ephesians 2:13-17).

When Jesus was born, an angelic host appeared to shepherds abiding in a field and sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14). This peace is fulfilled in Christ.

Jeremiah speaks of Jesus being "the righteous branch" that would grow up unto David (Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15). Zechariah, likewise, speaks prophetically of Christ, as "the Branch" in Zechariah 3:8 and 6:12-13. When this branch would come, God would remove the iniquity of that land in one day, "And speak unto him, saying, Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is The BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD: Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

To understand this passage, one should know something of its background. Israel, because of her sins, had been carried into Assyrian captivity. Judah, the lower two tribes, did not learn from the mistake of Israel, and continued in her sins. Because of her sins, she likewise was carried into Babylonian captivity. Her first carrying away was in 606 B.C., then again in 597 B.C., then finally in 586 Babylon destroyed the temple and completed taking Judah into her captivity. After Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 B.C., Babylon had a series of weak rulers. In 549 B.C. Cyrus, a Persian, had defeated the Medes and united the Medes and Persians. In 539 B.C. Cyrus entered into Babylon and took the city. Isaiah had earlier prophesied that Cyrus would

allow the Jews to return to their homeland (cf. Isaiah 44:24-45:7). Upon their return in 536 B.C., the Jews restored the altar and laid the foundation of the temple, which had been earlier destroyed. However, the work ceased for a period of sixteen years and God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to stir up the hearts of the people for the purpose of encouraging them to complete their work. Haggai asked the question, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Haggai 1:4). Zechariah, who was contemporary with Haggai, prophesied of a temple that would be built by "the Branch." God's people and purpose would endure and "the Branch" would grow up out of His place.

Zechariah mentions at least six things regarding "the Branch."

1) The Branch would grow up out of His place (v 12). Isaiah had prophesied, "For He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). Here Christ is compared to "a tender plant" and as a "root out of a dry ground." Attention is here given to the fact that He would grow out of a "dry ground." There was nothing about the surroundings of Christ that added to His greatness. In fact, Israel was not a world power but was herself under subjection to Rome. Yet out of this dry ground, the Christ would come. There have been times when a person thought that a plant was dead and would start to uproot the plant only to discover there was a "shoot" coming from this plant which might grow into a mighty tree. Christ is the mighty branch that came up out of His place.

2) He shall build the temple of the Lord (v 12). Solomon's temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. Under Zerubbabel's leadership the Jews had returned from the Babylonian captivity to rebuild this temple. Zechariah stirs up the hearts of the people to complete this work.

Zechariah foretells that the Branch will also build the temple of the Lord. This temple which the Lord would build is the church of Christ. Writing to the church of God in Corinth Paul states: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (I Corinthians 3:16-17).

In his second epistle to them, he shows how the temple is to be kept holy and separate from idols.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (II Corinthians 6:14-18).

This same apostle will write to the Ephesians, impressing upon their minds that they are the temple of God.

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:20-22).

The temple under the Old Testament foreshadowed and gave way to the temple of the Lord in the New Testament. Other institutions fade in comparison to the glorious temple of the Lord. Interestingly, Paul doesn't even mention to the Ephesians the temple of Diana, though it came to be one of the seven wonders of the world. It cannot compare to God's holy temple. We are to remember that "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands" (Acts 17:24).

3) He shall bear the glory (v 13). Jesus Christ is the builder of this temple and He

likewise bears its glory.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27).

The church of Christ is indeed a glorious church and will be presented as such to Christ upon His second coming. It is in the church of our Lord that we glorify God. "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Ephesians 3:20-21). Notice is here given that one is to glorify God "in the church," and not out of the church. It is sad that many do not see the true greatness of the church.

Denominations have so confused the minds of the mass, that they think one is saved and glorifies God out of the church as easily and scripturally as one glorifies God in the church.

The church glorifies God in that it shows His manifold wisdom. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:" (Ephesians 3:10-11).

Jesus Christ, the Branch, is the head of a great body, called the church. "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

4) He shall sit and rule upon His throne (v 13). One notices that this "BRANCH" is a king. In fact, he is the only Potentate, the king of kings and Lord of Lords (I Timothy 6:16). He, today, sits and rules upon His throne. The Hebrew writer presents Him presently as king. "Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things

by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;" (Hebrews 1:3). He has His throne and rules with a sceptre of righteousness. "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (Hebrews 1:8).

Sadly, some would like to dethrone the Christ and have Him reigning on some future date as an earthly king. They think that He is now on the Lord's throne but will one day come back and occupy David's throne. The simple truth is, David's throne is the Lord's throne. A comparison of I Kings 2:12 with I Chronicles 29:23 will reveal that while Solomon sat on David's throne, he was sitting upon the Lord's throne. They are one and the same.

Jesus Christ was promised to sit upon the throne of David and this has been fulfilled. In the context of II Samuel 12, David was assured; "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee: Thy throne shall be established forever" (v 16). This promise was reverberated in Luke 1:32-33. "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

All of this was fulfilled at the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Again, Peter settles this in Acts 2:30-33.

Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

Daniel by inspiration of God, had foreseen this event.

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the

clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).

Jesus Christ does sit and rule upon His throne today. May all willingly submit to His rule.

5) He shall be a priest upon His throne. Under the Old Testament system, people made sacrifices through a separate priesthood known as the Levitical priesthood. Over the priesthood of that day was a high priest. Today Christians comprise a "royal priesthood," and thus there is no separate priesthood. Jesus Christ serves as the Christian's High Priest.

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:24-25).

Zechariah informs us that Christ has a double function or office. He is a priest while He is on His throne. Thus Jesus is prophet, priest, and king. This is the greatness of the one called "the Branch."

Jesus Christ is not an high priest after the lineage of Aaron, rather, He is an high priest after the order of Melchizedek. This had been foretold by the Psalmist in the long ago. "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalms 110:4). The Hebrew writer quotes the Psalmist and makes application to Christ. "As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6).

6) The counsel of peace shall be between them both (v 13). The Branch that would grow up out of His place and build the temple of the Lord and bear the glory and sit and rule upon His throne gives the counsel of peace between his priesthood and kingship.

The world is ever seeking for lasting peace. Some turn to drugs, worldly (sinful) pleasures, etc. looking for peace and happiness. Jesus Christ offers peace to a troubled world. He is termed as the "Prince of Peace."

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Again, note the connection between peace and the kingdom in the above passage.

Remember that Zechariah had stated that "the counsel of peace shall be between them both."

The book of Ephesians shows that true peace is to be found in only in Christ.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: (Ephesians 2:14-16).

If one is to have peace with God, he must be "in Christ." Jesus said; "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

THE PREMILLENNIALIST ABUSE OF THESE PASSAGES

Premillennialism teaches that the kingdom prophesied in the Old Testament has not yet

been established. In spite of the multitude of scriptures which show that the kingdom has been established (Matthew 16:18; Colossians 1:13-14; John 3:3-5; Hebrews 12:28, etc.), premillennialism states that when Jesus returns, He will establish a kingdom in the city of Jerusalem and reign a literal one thousand years.

But, if premillennialism is true (which it is not), why didn't Jesus set up His kingdom when He came the first time? The premillennialist answers, "the Jews rejected it." The kingdom then, according to them, had to be postponed.

In accordance with this speculative theory, Scofield says this chapter is a prophetic picture of the glory of the future kingdom. This is the kingdom announced by John the Baptist as "at hand." It was then rejected, but will be set up when David's son returns in glory.ⁱⁱ Note the impact of Scofield's comments. John announced this kingdom as at hand, but he was wrong! (That is according to the premillennialist).

In similar fashion, W.E. Blackstone says, "Surely nothing is more plainly stated in the scriptures" than that the Israelites are to be restored to Canaan, and Jerusalem rebuilt.ⁱⁱⁱ He uses (misuses B.B.) Isaiah 11:11 as one of his proof texts.^{iv}

The major problem for those writers (and other premillennialists), is that the inspired writers of the New Testament quote these very passages and show their fulfillment in Christ. Paul, in Romans 15:12 quotes Isaiah 11:10 and shows its fulfillment in Christ. The peace described in Isaiah 11:6-ff is fulfilled in Christ recorded in Ephesians 2:14-16. The nations mentioned in Isaiah 11:11 are mentioned in Acts 2:9-11.

Rather than establishing premillennialism, Zechariah 6:12-13 disproves its theories. Zechariah states that Jesus will be a priest while He is on His throne. Yet Hebrews 8:4 says He will not be a priest while on the earth (remember the priests came from the tribe of Levi and

Christ came from the tribe of Judah). If Christ will be a priest while on His throne, but will not be a priest on earth, then His throne will not be on the earth.

There are many other ways the prophets disprove man's theory of premillennialism, but that is the subject of another writer of this book. The above are simply offered to show how the system of premillennialism does not fit with the passages dealing with "the Branch."

LESSONS LEARNED

There are many valuable lessons for us from the writings of the prophets. Below a few of them are stated as related to the subject of "Christ, the Branch."

1) God is true to His promise. He promised that Christ would come through the lineage of David. (see II Samuel 7:12-13, Isaiah 11:1, Amos 9:11-12). God was true to His promise.

2) God's care for His people. Although God's people turned from Him, He still loved them and left a remnant. When man truly repented of his sins, God allowed him to come back into His fellowship.

3) The greatness of the church is seen in that it is the Lord's temple. "The Branch" that was to come would build the Lord's temple. This temple is the church of God (I Corinthians 1:1-2, 3:16-17).

4) Jesus Christ rules in righteousness. Jeremiah states: "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land" (Jeremiah 33:15). The Hebrew writer says He rules in righteousness. "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Hebrews 1:8-9). America, and all the world, need to love righteousness and hate iniquity.

5) Christ is exalted. Zechariah states that the Branch would bear the glory of the Lord's temple. May we glorify God in the church (Ephesians 3:20-21).

CONCLUSION

Although God's people had turned away from Him and gave in to idolatry and been

greatly reduced, a rod or shoot did come out of the stem of Jesse and a Branch did grow out of his roots. The world has been blessed by this Branch. Today, He offers salvation to all that come to Him. One day, He will return to receive the church unto Himself (Ephesians 5:25-27). May we love Him, honor Him, and obey Him.

ENDNOTES

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- i William Wilson, Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies; (Peabody, Hendrickson Publishers, N.D.), 48
- ii William Edward Biederwolf, The Millennium Bible, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1964), 59
- iii W.E. Blackstone, Jesus Is Coming, (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1932), 162
- iv Ibid, 167