

The Road to Christmas

Arrival in Bethlehem



What About the Promise?

The Old Testament ends with Israel still looking for the promised Messiah. The New Testament begins with these words: *“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1, NIV)*. Around 6-4 BC, a baby was born in the town of Bethlehem (*Luke 2:4-7; cf. Micah 5:2*). He was given the name “Jesus.”

- Is Jesus the fulfillment of God’s promise?


The New Covenant

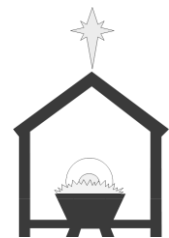
About 600 years before Jesus’ birth, God promised a “new covenant” (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). In Hebrews 8:6, Jesus is called the mediator of the new covenant. Jesus proclaimed the beginning of the new covenant when he celebrated the last supper with his disciples before his crucifixion. He *“took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me’ (1 Corinthians 11:25, NIV)*.

- The “new covenant” is fulfilled in Jesus. It is “in Jesus” that we can have God’s law written on our hearts, a personal relationship with God, and forgiveness of sins.¹

The Promise to David

About 1000 years before Jesus’ birth, God made a promise to David (see 2 Samuel 7:11-16). When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would have a baby, he said...


 *“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:31-33, NIV)*



- Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise to David.

The Promise to Abraham

Almost 2100 years before Jesus’ birth, God made a promise to Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-3). The apostle Paul wrote, *“So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you’ (Galatians 3:6-8, NIV)*.

 *“So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise’ (Galatians 3:26-29, NIV)*.

- Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. It is “in Jesus” that all the peoples of the earth can be blessed.

¹ Jesus died for our sins, providing the way of forgiveness. He arose from the dead, providing the way of eternal life.


The New People of God

In the Old Testament, the “road to Christmas” primarily involves Israel, called “God’s people” (e.g. *Exodus 3:10; 19:5-6*). Jesus was a Jew (a descendant of Israel). He came to the Jewish people. He said his mission was directed toward the “lost sheep of Israel” (*Matthew 15:24*). However, the majority of Jews rejected Jesus. Still a significant number did respond in faith, and they became his disciples – a believing “remnant” (portion) within Israel (*Romans 9:6*).

Everyone who followed Jesus was called a disciple, but Jesus chose twelve men to be especially close to him, and he focused his teaching and training on them. In *Matthew 16:13-18*, Jesus tells the twelve disciples, “I will build my church”² (*Matthew 16:18*). Those who identify with Jesus Christ through faith become part of his Church – the community of believers (body of believers, Christians).



Later (in AD 64-65), Peter wrote a letter to Christians (probably mostly Gentiles³), and he told them...

 “you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (*1 Peter 2:9-10, NIV*)⁴

The Kingdom of God: Present & Future

Christmas celebrates the coming of the Messiah (the Christ) – the ideal king. But where is the “kingdom?” Is it entirely future? With his arrival, Jesus indicated that the kingdom has come in some way (*Matthew 12:28; Luke 17:20-21*).⁵ But Jesus also said things that indicated that the kingdom was future. When Jesus was eating the last supper with his disciples, “he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes’” (*Luke 22:17-18, NIV*).⁶

Our Relation to the Kingdom

According to the Bible, the kingdom of God has come, but it is also future. How can this be?

² ‘church’ (ἐκκλησία, *ekklesia*) – assembly of people. The ‘church’ refers to the community of believers in Christ.

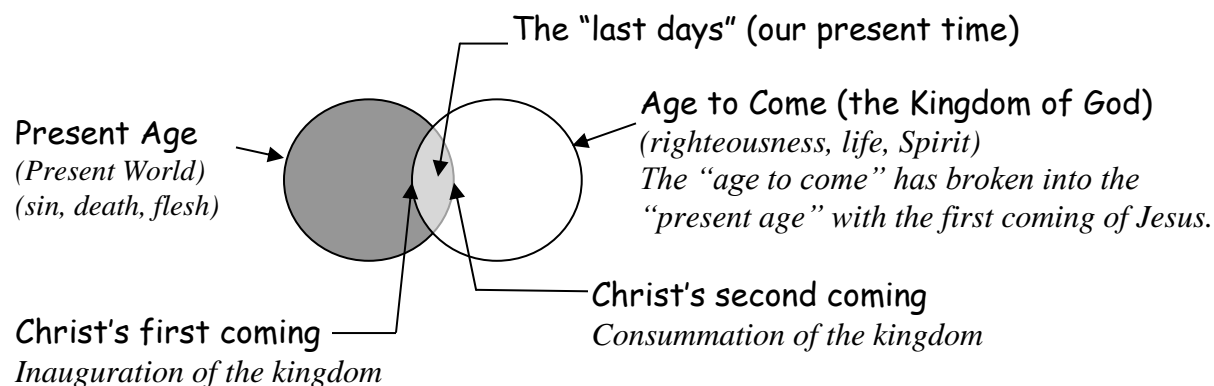
³ ‘Gentile’ – any person who is not a descendant of Israel

⁴ The Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) says, ‘you (Israel) shall be to me (God) a royal priesthood and a holy nation’ (*Exodus 19:6*). Peter calls Christians in the New Testament what Israel was called in the Old Testament. So what happened to ethnic Israel? Is God finished with them? Paul says ‘no’ in *Romans 9-11*. For more information on this subject, see the lesson called ‘The New People of God’ under ‘God’s Promise to the Nations’ under Articles & Studies on the ICF website, or ask Jay directly.

⁵ He said the kingdom ‘has come’ (εφθασεν, *ephthasen*). It has arrived and is present. The kingdom ‘has come’ because the King (Messiah Jesus) has arrived. The kingdom, as ‘the dynamic reign of God,’ is not yet visible, but can be realized in the hearts of those who submit their lives to the King.

⁶ What is the future kingdom like? Read *Revelation 21:1-5*. The kingdom is totally new. Isaiah also spoke of a new heaven and a new earth (*Isaiah 65:17*). God will dwell with his people (see the new covenant, *Jeremiah 31:33-34*). The effects of sin (death, crying, pain) will be abolished (cf. *Isaiah 25:8; 1 Corinthians 15:54*). In *Revelation 22:1-5*, the flowing river symbolizes eternal life flowing from God. The ‘tree of life’ (*Genesis 2:9*) will provide fruit to eat continuously. The curse (due to sin) will be removed. They will ‘see his face,’ representing the ultimate relationship with God (*Matthew 5:8; 1 John 3:2*). God’s presence/glory will provide the light (cf. *Isaiah 60:19-20*). They will ‘reign forever’ (when God created the earth, he said, ‘let them rule over [the creation]’ (*Genesis 1:26*). The future kingdom will bring restoration of the harmony and purpose experienced in the Garden (*Genesis 1:31*), but it will be much better. It will last forever!

The "Already but Not Yet"



Our Own Journey

Through faith in Jesus Christ, we are united with him and become recipients of God's wondrous spiritual blessings! (*Eph. 1:3*). While we can enjoy many of God's blessings in this present life, the full realization of His blessing is future. Through faith in Christ, we are part of God's new creation! While we have a "new life" (*Rom. 6:4*), *complete* renewal is future. The road continues.

➤ Are you on that road? Do you need trust in Jesus?

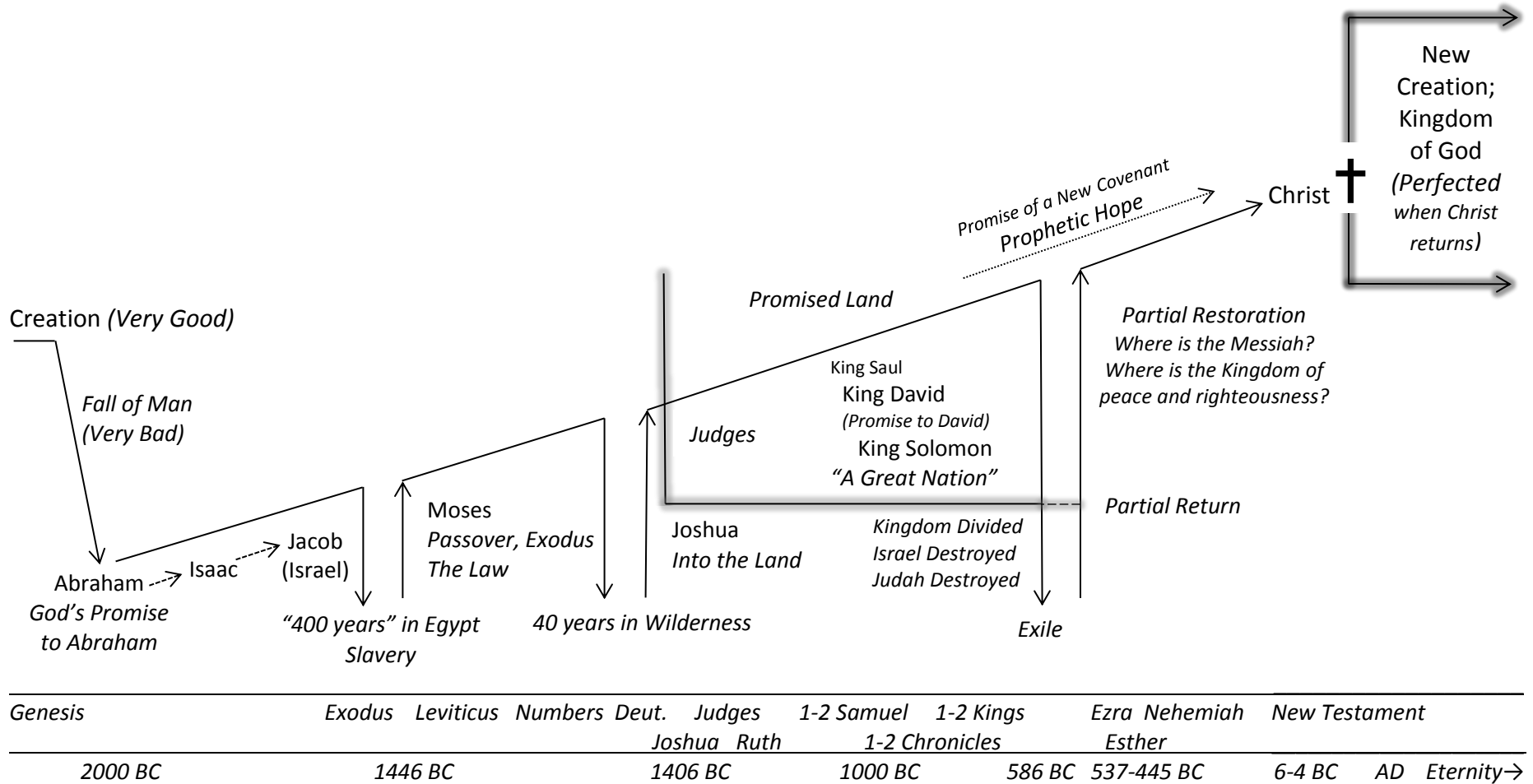
1. Since the believer has a new life in Christ, he/she is supposed to have new attitudes and behaviors. Read Colossians 3:1-4. As believers, what do we need to understand, and do?⁷
2. What does it mean to "set our hearts [and] minds on things above"?⁸ How do we do this?
3. The Christian needs to "put off" old, bad attitudes and behaviors, and "put on" new, good attitudes and behaviors. Read Colossians 3:5-17.⁹ In what practical ways can we apply these instructions to our daily lives? How can we do it?

➤ This week, read and re-read Colossians 3:1-17. Ask God to identify particular attitudes and behaviors that you need to "put off" or "put on." By the grace of God in Christ Jesus, seek to apply this passage to your daily life.

⁷ This 'new life' is a gracious gift of God received through faith in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the continuing renewal process is a work of the Holy Spirit. However, we still have a responsibility.

⁸ 'set your hearts' (*zēteite*, literally 'seek'); 'set your minds' (*phroneite*) – involving both the intellect and will. 'the things above' (*ta anō*) – the things of God in the new order, characterized by righteousness, eternal life, and harmony with God; 'earthly things' – the things of the old order, characterized by sin, death, and self-centeredness. Our thinking and acting should be oriented to heavenly values rather than worldly values.

⁹ For a detailed study of Colossians 3:1-17, see 'The New You' (Parts 1 and 2) under 'The Sufficiency of Christ' under Articles and Studies on the ICF website.



Road to Christmas - Big Picture

(Timeline Not to Scale)