

Lifeline

December 2013

A Message of Life Newsletter

Have a Blessed Christmas and New Year

Thank you for your faithfulness in prayers and support for 2013. Have a wonderful and safe Christmas and New Year.

In our politically-correct age, speech police want no one to say Merry Christmas. Some have ceased advocating freedom *of* religion (liberty to be religious or not to be). They now promote freedom *from* religion. Those advocating the latter want believers to say nothing about Christianity. The censors live in fear—fear that someone might find Christianity attractive and believe in Christ. If we reflect on this, Christ left the eleven—and us—on planet earth (John 17:20) to proclaim Him to a hostile world. Jesus and the apostles boldly but graciously preached Him to a world that did not welcome the message of life. So should we.

So, keep a stock of *Living Waters* to give away. The message of God's gift—everlasting life—makes a wonderful gift. A man with whom we ministered in Australia (Tracy) had many creative ways of sharing *Living Waters*. One day he put a little gift-wrapped package on his barber's counter, starting a conversation:

Barber: "What is it?"

Tracy: "It's your Christmas gift."

Barber: "Well, what is it?"

Tracy: "It's a book."

Barber: "What's it about?"

Tracy: "It's about the Forever Club. I'd like for you to be part of that."

If we are alert for open doors, we can share a priceless gift. Many are thankful at Christmas for the baby in the manger without knowing that everlasting life is a gift from Jesus. So many people falsely surmise that everlasting life is only for good little boys and girls and for nice grown-ups. Not so, it is a gift. No one is good enough to merit it, but even naughty people are eligible for a gift. Christendom has substituted a Santa Claus idea of meritorious gifts(!) for the real thing, a grace gift.



New Hope Church
Wahoo, NE



Water of Life Bible Study
Lakewood, CO



Chambers College
Greeley, CO

The Prophesied Messianic Line

by Dr. John Niemelä

Christmas is a time for reflecting on the birth of Christ. His incarnation was part of a long-term plan. He was born at the right moment in history, *the fullness of the time* (Galatians 4:4).

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law [All Scripture translations are the author's].

The Seed of Woman promise (Genesis 3:15) is the first OT prophecy of His birth:

*Now I will put enmity
Between you [the tempter] and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;
He shall strike your head,
And you shall strike His heel.*

It does not specify which woman was to carry that seed, nor does it mention a lineage. Genesis 4:1 shows Eve surmising that she was the prophesied woman. Her son's name (Cain: "Acquisition") plays on the word rendered: *I have acquired*. Eve hoped he would be *the seed of woman, the LORD*. Sadly for her, Cain did not fulfill that prophesy, but giving this name to him testifies that she, in fact, believed God's Genesis 3:15 promise. A corrected translation follows.

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man, the LORD."

Genesis 22:18 and 21:12 clarify that the Promised-One's lineage would be through Abraham. More specifically, it would be through his son, Isaac.

In your seed all nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you obeyed My voice¹ [Gen 22:18].

In Isaac your seed shall be called [Gen 21:12b].

This calling of seed became an issue when Isaac fathered twins. Which son would carry the Genesis 22:18 lineage? Clues appear in Genesis 25:22f, while Rebekah was still pregnant:

Then the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is so, why am I this way?" So she went to seek the LORD.

Then the LORD said to her:

*"Two **nations** are in your womb,
Two **peoples** shall be separated from your body;
One **people** shall be stronger than the other [**people**],
The [**people** of the] older shall serve the [**people** of the] younger."*

An important issue is often missed here, which appears in bold. God's words to Rebekah focused not on the two boys, but upon the nations they would father. Is this unexpected? No. In renaming Abram as

¹Some claim that Genesis 22:18b treats the Abrahamic Covenant as conditional. Not so. God promises even more here than in Genesis 12:3, because Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, By analogy, a father promised his son, "Next week, I will give you twenty-dollars as a gift." On the appointed day, he says, "Because you especially pleased me yesterday, here is fifty dollars, not twenty." A conditioned bonus does not negate the unconditionality of the original promise. The basic Abrahamic Covenant remains unconditional. God is free to add supplemental incentives for faithfulness, but not to abrogate the unconditional promise.

Abraham, God had already declared him father of a multitude of nations:

*I [say], “Behold, My covenant is with you, and you have become a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you father of **a multitude of nations**. I will make you abundantly fruitful; and I have made **nations** of you, and kings shall come from you” [Gen 17:4-6].*

Abraham’s status as father of a multitude of nations (headed by kings) would be true not only through the lineages of Ishmael (Gen 25:13-16) and of the sons of Keturah (Gen 25:1-4), but also through the lineage of Esau (Gen 36).

Within Genesis (and Romans 9) what is the focus of God choosing Jacob, not Esau? The answer appears earlier in Genesis. God had promised only one Seed of Woman (Gen 3:15); He had only promised one lineage, the line of Isaac—through which all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 21:12). So, with the birth of Isaac’s twins, only one of the nations Jacob fathered would be chosen to carry the Messianic line—Israel.

[Excursus: many imagine that passages speaking of God choosing Jacob, not Esau, refer to the eternal destinies of two men (e.g., heaven or hell), but context makes no such point. No OT passage (rightly understood) portrays Esau as an unbeliever. Furthermore, Hebrews 12:15f warns believers against throwing away their reward, as Esau did. Hebrews regards Esau as a believer, albeit one who discarded reward].

With the choice of Jacob’s line as the Messianic one, Israel became the national entity through which the Messiah would be born. In that regard, Isaac pronounces Jacob and his seed (not Esau) as the one who would inherit the land (Gen 28:4):

*And [may El Shaddai²] give you the blessing of Abraham,
To you and your seed with you,
That you may inherit the land of your sojournings,
Which God gave to Abraham.*

No longer was the promised deliverer just Seed of Woman, nor just Abraham’s seed (called through Isaac). Now He was to be Abraham’s seed (called through both Isaac and Jacob).

All of Jacob’s children constituted one nation: Israel. By contrast, each son of Abraham and Isaac represented a distinct nation. That did not mean that each tribe of Israel would have its own Messiah. Genesis 48:10 points to the Messiah coming from the tribe of Judah.

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor one who decrees from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And He will have the obedience of the peoples.*

The oracle promises a ruling dynasty, culminated by One who can be described by Shiloh. How does it speak of a dynastic lineage? The second stanza describes procreation in polite terms. Generation after generation of those issuing decrees (e.g., kings) will hold the ruling scepter until Shiloh comes. So, who is He?

Shiloh is a compound form. The first part (*še*) means “whose.” The ending is *lô* (meaning “to him”). A smoothed-out translation would be: “whose it [is].” Every king who preceded Christ on David’s throne merely held the scepter, but the scepter actually belongs to Christ. Shiloh will not merely have the obedience of Israel, but *the obedience of the peoples* [Gentiles] as He rules with a rod [or scepter] of iron.

2 Samuel 7:12-16 amplifies Gen 49:10. Specifically, God promises David (descended from Judah) that He would establish forever a Davidic royal dynasty and establish his throne forever. Indeed, David’s successors to the

² The bracketted words are implicit, drawn from verse 3.

throne were all from his lineage until Babylon subjugated Judah in 586 B.C.

This, of course, raises questions about Gen 49 and 2 Sam 7. How did Judah's (and David's) royal lineage continue through millennia in which no king ruled Israel? The passages did not promise that Davidic kings would continually reign over Israel, since many passages (e.g., Genesis 15:13, which predates the Genesis 49 oracle) predict national exile. Rather, the passage guarantees continued existence of the royal lineage that would culminate in the Seed, through whom all nations of the world would be blessed.

Consider Jeremiah 22:30's famous curse on Jehoiachin [Jeconiah/Coniah], the last member of David's dynasty to rule Judah in OT times:

Thus says the LORD:

*“Write this man [Jehoiachin] down as childless,
A man who shall not prosper in his days;
For none of his seed shall prosper,
Sitting on the throne of David,
And ruling anymore in Judah” [Jeremiah 22:30].*

He was written down as though childless, though he had sons.³ The third and fourth stanzas explain. None of his physical descendants would ever sit on David's throne. In that sense, it was as if he were childless. However, someone qualified to sit on the throne always existed within David's royal line.

This would seem an insoluble dilemma. Genesis 40:10 and 2 Samuel 7 assert that someone qualified to rule would always exist, but Jeremiah 22:30 denies that any descendant of Jeconiah would ever sit on David's throne.

This issue makes Jesus' virgin birth vitally important. Joseph, a descendant of Jeconiah (cf. Matthew 3:11-16) was humanly qualified for ruling, but came under the curse of Jeconiah. However, Jesus (as Joseph's adopted son) has the legal right to ascend to David's throne. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-17) shows Jesus' right to be king through Joseph, his adoptive father. Luke 3:23-38 traces the genealogy of Mary, who was also a descendant of David through Nathan, so Jesus descended physically from David.

The OT points to Seed of Woman as a son of Judah, of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of David; but not of Jeconiah. OT genealogies of the Messianic line look forward. God must protect that line. This explains Matthew 2:15's citation of Hosea 11:1 about the Exodus (look at Hosea 11:1-5 in context). That is, God twice called His Son out of Egypt: the second time as Jesus was young. The first was by sparing His ancestors in Moses' day through the Exodus. Moses led the whole nation out of Egypt to spare God's Son, Seed of Woman.

When Adam's sin plunged humanity into sin and death, God promised Seed of Woman. Declarations made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David further clarify the promise. Titus 1:2 asserts that God promised everlasting life prior to the fall (reinforced by Genesis 3:22). It says:

In expectation of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the times began.

That promise is realized through the guarantee of Jesus, our crucified Messiah: Whoever believes in Him has everlasting life (John 6:47). What a comfort it is that God has so worked through history that:

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law [Galatians 4:4].

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift, one that He promised before the times began: Life everlasting for believers in Jesus Christ.

³ 1 Chronicles 3:17f lists his offspring.

Travel

We have been close to home since our last newsletter. We have two trips scheduled to Southern California (December and April), one to Texas (April), and one to the Pacific Northwest (May). Scheduled speaking for the December trip includes:

Dec 20: Teaching a men's-group breakfast for Coast Bible Church, San Juan Capistrano, CA.

Dec 22: Preaching at Church of Hope, Laguna Hills, CA.

We will also visit friends and family over Christmas and distribute *Living Waters*.

Prayer Requests

- 1) For continued opportunity to clarify the message of life to believers and unbelievers alike.
- 2) For our website to benefit even more people than it currently does.
- 3) To complete projects in a timely fashion and prepare them for publication.
- 4) For opportunity to distribute *Living Waters*.
- 5) For health and safety.
- 6) For godly wisdom in the nation's capital, so that we may freely proclaim the message of life without official harassment.
- 7) For Israel's security.
- 8) For the Lord's support for Message of Life.



Message of Life Team
Bennett, CO

Projects

The Arabic *Living Water* (described in the last *Lifeline*) will soon be in print. Many people in Egypt can benefit from seeing the Gospel of John in their own language. May God use His word mightily.

A major project has been the expansion of my GES paper on John 8:30-33. I have been for two months working in Excel on the Greek text of Matthew-Acts. At a couple of points my spreadsheets had about 260,000 lines of data. That has narrowed to about 1,700 target sentences, each having less than ten target words: subject, verb, direct object, and indirect object. We are still in the throes of the research, but are optimistic about submitting proposals to present papers at two conferences for 2014. A manuscript for publication should also come out of this.

We are working with the Denver Rescue Mission to prepare a basics course from the book of Matthew. We pray that the Lord will open doors for translating the notes of the *Living Water* into other languages.

The notes for our planned commentary on John's Gospel are edited, so we can start preparing a manuscript. I have also completed a preliminary translation of John and have started checking it for internal consistency.

The work in Excel for a revision of my dissertation for publication is complete. It will require much work to prepare a manuscript, but the supporting evidence is in a workable form.

2014 should be a productive year for writing, because preliminary research on several projects is well along. High fuel prices have reduced our travel schedule. Though we love to get out, staying near home is conducive to research and writing.

We are finishing a semester at Rocky Mountain Bible College and Seminary. I taught an evangelism course and exegetical methods. Next semester it will be exegesis of the Thessalonian Epistles and Evangelism.

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