

issue of his genealogy – though he was typically called “Jesus of Nazareth,” not “Jesus of Bethlehem” – but “Is this the Messiah?”

Peter’s affirmation when they were in the seclusion of Caesarea-Philippi was staggering, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (16.16). In Jesus all the promises of God to the nation are at last fulfilled. But above that, as the Old Testament hints also made clear, the Messiah is more than a human being – he is divine.

The Palm Sunday crowd shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” (21.9) In the debate with the Jewish leaders, Jesus posed the question about whose son the Messiah would be. Their answer, “The son of David.” Yet, as Jesus went on to point out, David calls him “Lord” (22.41-45). There is far more to Jesus than his human genealogy.

Throughout his ministry Jesus chose to call himself by the less obvious title of “Son of Man” – possibly after the heavenly being in Daniel 7.13.

Taken before the Sanhedrin, the high priest says to Jesus, “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God” (26.63). Pilate was nettling them when he asked, “What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” (27.22) – also when he insisted on putting up the sign over Jesus’ head, “THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS” (27.37).

After the resurrection, we find the disciples with the old question, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1.6) In other words, we really believe you are the Messiah, so when are you setting up the kingdom?

w While the act of anointing was a human act, it was seen in Israel to be a response to God’s appointment. In what ways do people today look for “messianic” figures – with a personality and mission that is larger than the merely human?

w Reflect on Peter’s affirmation, “You are the Christ (Messiah) the Son of the living God.” What are the implications for the rest of our life in making such an affirmation?

## Study 2. Immanuel, God with us. Isaiah 7.14; Matthew 1.23



Four studies on Christmas by Peter J Blackburn

# 1. Son of David / Messiah

In recent times there have been a number of dictators who have claimed the title, “President for life.” They have been arrogant leaders of repressive regimes. On the rare occasions when they have elections, no other options are given. People are obliged to vote in favour and to show suitable rejoicing in and affirmation of their leadership. The rest of the world looks on with scepticism at the figures of high voter turnout and the obvious support of the people for their leader.

The character of Jesus stands out in striking contrast to such leaders.

“He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

“He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never travelled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness.

“He was only thirty-three when the tide of public opinion turned against him. He was turned over to his enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave.

“Nineteen centuries have come and gone, and today he is central figure of the human race and leader of mankind’s progress.

“All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the kings that ever reigned have not affected the life of man as much as that One Solitary Life.”

*Author Unknown*

w Reflect for a moment. What sort of leader are the people of our day really looking for?

w In what ways might Jesus be the fulfilment of their hopes?

## Son of David

When we reflect on the personality of Jesus, we soon realise that the issue goes far beyond a comparison of qualities. What is his identity? Who is he, really? Through the Old Testament, we can trace many threads of prophecy. Some of them

had a fairly immediate reference, and yet – there was much more still to come. There were lots of “loose ends” waiting for fulfilment.

### Read 2 Samuel 7.4-17.

We hear the words of Nathan the prophet that “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever” (v. 16). David repeats this promise to Solomon with an important condition – “If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel” (1 Kings 2.4).

The sons of David – even Solomon, for all his wisdom – turned out to be a somewhat patchy lot. Nevertheless, the promise wasn’t forgotten. Psalm 89 was written by “Ethan the Ezrahite” – a wise man from Solomon’s time. He reaffirms the covenant with David in these terms – “Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness – and I will not lie to David – that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky” (vv. 35-37). We hear it in later Psalms also – as in 132.11-12. This latter concludes with the promise, “Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one. I will clothe his enemies with shame, but the crown on his head will be resplendent” (vv. 17,18). Also in Jeremiah 33.17.

After Solomon the kingdom was divided between Judah in the south and Israel in the north. In general the southern kings didn’t stray as far the their northern counterparts.

Later in the Old Testament we hear the promise coming through in a different form – “In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it – one from the house of David – one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness” (Isaiah 6.5).

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness” (Jeremiah 23.5-6). When the yoke of oppression is lifted, “they will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them” (30.9).

“I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken” (Ezekiel 34.23-24). My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They

and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people” (37.24-27).

Hosea records that “the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol. Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days” (Hosea 3.4-5).

- w Why were the Jews looking for a king like David?
  
- w To what extent are people of our day seeking someone they can look up to? In what ways do they endeavour to satisfy their search?

### Messiah

The Hebrew word “Messiah” (“Christ” in Greek) simply means “anointed.” In many cultures, monarchs have been anointed with oil to signify that they are specially chosen and set apart for their important office in the land. In Israelite society priests were also anointed. I recall in my youth seeing the movie of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in Westminster Abbey. During the ceremony, the Archbishop of Canterbury poured some oil on her head.

Already in the passages above we see the hope for a future king like David – this time not just any king, but **the** anointed one, **the** Messiah. This expectation kept strong during dark days of unsuitable and unfaithful kings, and especially when they had to live under foreign domination. In fact, the messianic hope is still alive and well in modern Israel, many Jews still looking for the Messiah to come, but some seeing the prophecies in a general national, rather than personal, sense.

Coming into the New Testament, the hope for the Son of David, the Messiah, is clear.

Matthew brings the two terms together by speaking of “Jesus Christ (Messiah) the son of David” (1.1). The wise men were looking for “the one who has been born king of the Jews” (2.2). Herod at once recognised they were looking for the Messiah (v. 4). The chief priests and teachers of the law pointed them to Bethlehem, David’s town, quoting Micah 5.2.

Two blind men called out to Jesus, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!” (9.27; see also 15.22; 20.30). When Jesus healed the demon-possessed man, all the people were astonished and said, “Could this be the Son of David?” (12.23) It wasn’t an