

The Kings Before

*A Twelve Day Journey through
God's Hints of Christmas Before It Happened*



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Introduction

HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO HINT AT A GIFT you were going to give someone so he or she could be prepared for it when it actually came? Perhaps you knew your friend might go shopping for something and, without spoiling the surprise, you wanted to say just enough to forestall the purchase?

Over the Twelve Days of Christmas, we will be looking at one of the Old Testament kings who, either in his successes or failures, gave a “hint of the gift to come.” God knew we needed preparation to understand His plan and a nudge away from the other solutions we’re tempted to shop for.

Preparation is something I love about this season. We’re so busy preparing for the frenzy of Christmas ahead of December 25 that we often can’t prepare to actually respond to the miracle over the days after. But the slower period from Christmas to Epiphany (January 6) is perfect to prepare for a new year focused on what actually matters to our God and what He does for us.

Going on this journey together is a blessing to me every year and I hope this year’s journey is a blessing to you, too.

Timothy Butler
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Part I



The Early Promise

Christmas Day: Melchizedek

“Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine—since he was priest of God Most High — and he blessed Abram and said: ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’” – Genesis 14:18-20

The mysterious king of Salem who encounters Abraham after a battle. He is not only a king, he is a priest of the Lord, we are told. He shows up out of the blue, like that unexpected package just before Christmas that you’re confused whether you should open or not. Is it a present? Should you open it?

Melchizedek, whose name means “King of Righteousness,” is king and priest of a city whose name means “peace.” That righteous king comes and blesses Abraham, almost enacting an early Christmas pageant. After all, Jesus will be *the* righteous king, and, as Scripture itself calls him, the Prince of Peace. He will also be our priest – our connection as imperfect people to our Holy God (Heb. 4:14).

Abraham, for his part, seems to recognize God is working in this man and responds by giving a tithe to him. Did he know that Melchizedek was representing how a distant decedent of Abraham would bring peace to us? Surely not. How could he have known that Melchizedek would become a model for what kind of priest and king Jesus would be? But, he did know God was working and His promise was sure.

Today, we have the Christmas story and the entire life of the true righteous king laid out for us in God’s Word. Yet, there are plenty of times we are like Abraham confronted with a part of God’s plan we don’t understand yet. We too can respond, for the King of Righteousness was born and lived and died for us and His plans ahead for us are good, even when we don’t fully understand them.

PRAYER: Father, we don’t always understand how you are working, but Christmas reminds us that your gifts are always good and you always come through with your promises. Help us to hold onto that truth not just on Christmas, but every day. We pray this in Jesus’s name. Amen.

Day 2: Saul

“So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ‘Look,’ they said, ‘you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king to judge us like all the other nations.’” – 1 Samuel 8:4-5

When we follow Jesus along the unexpected paths of His plan, we may wonder if we’re really headed anywhere at all. The Bible doesn’t tell us if Mary had such doubts, but as a human being, she surely had to wonder. All of us know that nagging feeling as we keep trudging forward but feel like there are no clear identifying marks to tell us that we have avoided wandering off into a painful doom or disappointment not yet revealed.

That wondering can lead to paralysis from acting on what God has called us to do. Even when we continue to trudge forward, it can be with a gloominess, feeling isolated from the warm, comfortable life we thought we had before us.

The willingness to walk along the path Jesus has for us allows for another joy, though. For Mary, it comes when she visits her cousin Elizabeth. Not only does she find that Elizabeth herself is expecting a child with a divinely appointed future, Elizabeth and her unborn baby recognize the unborn Jesus and celebrate who He is.

Mary takes this in and offers her famous song of praise to God as a response. She gets a further glimpse at just what Jesus will do and the heavy curtains of isolation get pulled back.

The joy of God making it clear we aren’t lost after all isn’t one just for Biblical times. When we stay in His Word and with His people, He takes those interactions and uses them to show us how He is working within the places we feel the weight of uncertainty and fear, too. May we be ready to take those interactions and respond in joy.

PRAYER: Father, when I get glimpses at what you are doing, help me to be a person of praise. Instead of simply moving on, let my heart rejoice and do so in ways that can point others to you. I pray this in the precious name of the Savior. Amen.

Day 3: David

“When David saw the angel striking down the people, he said to the LORD, ‘Surely I, the shepherd, have sinned and acted wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please, let Your hand fall upon me and my father’s house.’” – 2 Samuel 24:17

There’s a lot to occupy our celebrations at Christmas time, but perhaps no carol captures the true heart of the Christmas miracle better than what Isaac Watts wrote in “Joy to the World:”

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.*

A millennium before Jesus came into the world to free us from that curse, *the* Messiah was foreshadowed in the anointed one – messiah – that started the royal line headed to the Savior. As David was anointed by Samuel at the command of the Lord, he prepared us for a future king who loves his people and the Father.

David, like his predecessor Saul, was a flawed man. His sins are infamous. But, David recognized his place before God – as one who needed mercy and forgiveness. For David, his place before *his* King was more important than his place before humanity. When he failed God’s calling and calamity fell upon the people, we find his reflection above: he should protect his people, not bring harm to them.

David did harm his people with his actions and he didn’t always keep his focus on the Lord first. But, he received mercy as he asked for in Psalm 51 through his descendent, Jesus.

At Christmas, we are challenged to follow David’s example and to seek mercy from the same gift-giver. As we do, may we also remember to show shepherding care to those around us, just as David did as He looked to our Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, you came to protect us as our shepherd. As we celebrate the miracle of Christmas, help us to remember our need for mercy and in response show care and concern for those around us. We pray this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Day 4: Solomon

“Therefore give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people and to discern between good and evil. For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?” – 1 Kings 3:9

“In the beginning was the Word,” John writes in that familiar opening to his Gospel. Like someone eagerly describing the details of the Christmas gift she’s given you, John’s Gospel starts with the grandness of the gift God gave us.

Jesus isn’t just special. He’s the Word, or, put another way, Wisdom. Fittingly one of his ancestors was known as the wisest man of his time (1 Kings 4:30).

Early in Solomon’s reign, God had offered to give the king a gift and he asked for and received incredible wisdom. Solomon may not have known to truly encounter God’s Wisdom is to encounter the Son, but he knew it was wise to ask for God’s understanding.

Having a head full of wisdom didn’t save Solomon from acting in deeply unwise ways, however. Yes, he was the wisest man on earth, but a full head is not a protection against flailing if we lose sight of the Living Word. Solomon describes as much in Ecclesiastes.

Solomon demanded too much of the people, forgetting his stewardship of God’s people and straying from God’s laws. He married an ever growing set of non-believing wives and started to follow his wives’ gods. Solomon could offer wisdom to the world, but he also could fall far short of God’s wisdom.

We need someone who is wise *and* consistently so. Jesus wasn’t just someone who had God’s wisdom, He *is* the incarnate wisdom of God.

In Jesus we see what living a truly wise life looks like: faithfulness to the Father and loving care to those around Him. At Christmastime we can ask for something better than just having some of God’s wisdom, we can ask for that ultimate Christmas gift: Wisdom Himself to dwell in us.

PRAYER: Father, as we go about the end of this year and look to the next, help us to seek not just some know-how, some ideas to hold in our heads, but your Wisdom Himself to be in our hearts. Guide us in this new year with your wisdom as we seek to follow your Son. We pray this in His name. Amen.

Part II



The Broken Kingdom

Day 5: Abijah

“And Abijah walked in all the sins that his father before him had committed, and his heart was not as fully devoted to the LORD his God as the heart of David his forefather had been.

Nevertheless, for the sake of David, the LORD his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him and to make Jerusalem strong.” – 1 Kings 15:3-5

What was the biggest gift you’ve ever given? We see lots of extravagant gifts in commercials and the recipients’ picturesque delight upon opening them. As we pick out gifts, we hope to see someone excitedly and gratefully treasure what we gave.

No matter how generous we may be (or wish we could be), God is more so, time and again. Relatively early in Scripture, God took his people and gave them a truly incredible gift: an entire land to be their own. Yet, the people gave the opposite of that idyllic response. They were ungrateful and careless. By the time of King David’s grandson, it was torn in two by civil war.

David’s great-grandson, Abijah, followed that theme. He snubbed the best gift – a relationship with his God – and focused on what was not to be his, the part of the kingdom his father had lost, rather than being grateful God had not entirely rejected him.

God was gracious to Abijah despite his failings. We see two glimmers of God’s continued incredible gift giving. First, he is faithful to His promise that would ultimately lead to the best gift, the Messiah. God shows His care to the less than faithful – be it faithless Abijah or us in our failures today – because *He* is faithful.

The only notable point of Abijah’s rule was that ill-advised attempt to reunify the kingdom. But even in his prideful effort, we see a hint of the Messiah’s mission.

Abijah didn’t have the ability to bring about unity and feeding his pride was a horrible reason to seek it. But on one matter, he was right: God’s people aren’t meant to be torn apart.

He wouldn’t be able to fix this, but in his failed effort he showed another point of yearning only the Messiah could address. Abijah needed to look to the One who had so richly given to him rather than to his own perceived strength.

Only Jesus could heal Israel’s rift and go far beyond it. Everyone from Wise Men from afar to Jews to Samaritans to Romans could all come together, given the gift of peace by the newborn King. May we all open and truly treasure that gift.

Prayer: Father, we still see so many divisions today. Sometimes we add to them and sometimes we try to resolve them. But we're reminded that the only one who can bring true and lasting unity and peace is your Son. We can't give it of ourselves, but use us to give others His peace and unity this Christmastime. We pray in His mighty name. Amen.

Day 6: Asa

“And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done. [...] The high places were not removed, but Asa’s heart was fully devoted to the LORD all his days.” - 1 Kings 15:11, 14

For someone living in Judea at the time of Jesus’s birth, the circumstances certainly would have looked pretty hopeless. While the region had some level of self-rule, it was under a corrupt king, Herod, who could only pretend to be the rightful king of the Jews. How could a good king rise up *now*?

So too, one might have doubted the opportunity for a good king to arise after Abijah. The slow spiral from David down to his great-grandson gave little reason for hope.

But God remained faithful to the promise He gave to David that there would be a king in his line forever. That was reason for hope enough, but He also fostered good kings along that promised path to the Messiah. Asa is the first of the later “good kings” and in his reign we see a man who genuinely loved his God.

Asa inheriting the throne was a testament to how God keeps His promises. Even though he seemed to recognize that, he still was susceptible to the nagging fears that overpower us all. Facing threats to his kingdom, where did Asa turn? Neighboring, non-believing King Ben-hadad (1 Kings 15:18). The choice accomplished its geo-political aim, but at the cost of giving away the treasures stored up in the temple for the worship of the Lord.

Despite God’s faithfulness, we readily make the same sort of faithless choices. Yes, Christmas speaks of how deep and dependable God’s love is, but pillaging the blessings of God for worldly security can feel more trustworthy in the moment.

On Christmas Day perhaps God’s hope does feel tangible, at least for a moment. As we go into the next year, though, we need to make the effort not to lose that tangible sense. Jesus’s birth and subsequent life are evergreen reminders to us we don’t need to go searching for a Ben-hadad to help us out.

God already has, is and will always be our source of hope, no matter the season. When our situation feels like the one in the first century, with little reason for hope, God’s Word reminds us that simply isn’t so. Today, as then, He is here to save us.

Prayer: Lord, forgive us when we say we want to trust in you but instead trust in a multitude of other things. Help us in the coming new year to hold onto the hope of Christmas even when life discourages and overwhelms us. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Day 7: Jehoshaphat

“Ahab king of Israel asked Jehoshaphat king of Judah, ‘Will you go with me against Ramoth-gilead?’ And Jehoshaphat replied, ‘I am like you, and my people are your people; we will join you in the war.’” – 2 Chronicles 18:3

Ahead of Christmas, I heard a lot of ads for a company that digitizes old photos and videos. The pitch was that all of our physical recordings can be lost or destroyed, but a digital version is a gift of security for a loved one’s memories.

We all want security and it is even good to seek it. Following in the footsteps of his father, King Jehoshaphat made many righteous decisions to protect the land entrusted to him.

He built up his kingdom’s defenses, standing for the true worship of God in opposition to his compromised northern neighbor, Israel. That Northern Kingdom may have been composed of the other tribes of the Chosen People, but idol worship had long taken hold.

At the same time, Jehoshaphat had limits. He never succeeded in completely purifying his own kingdom of false worship. Did self-recognition of this weakness lead him to follow the path of his father in seeking outside protection against external threats?

We aren’t told, but his choice is disturbing: he ultimately allied himself with the idolatrous Israel. Aligning with a completely detached outside group was bad during Asa’s reign, but Israel brought a toxic blend of idolatry and worship of the Lord. The half-true worship could far more easily seep into Judah.

Compromising as Jehoshaphat did backfired. He did the wrong homework: he looked at who was strong rather than who was faithful. He fell to the temptation for earthly security and it threatened his ability to lead well.

We wouldn’t trust treasured photos to just anyone. We would look up companies’ reviews to make sure they did everything possible to ensure the photos arrived and were transferred safely. And we shouldn’t trust our life’s security to just anyone either.

Jehoshaphat looked at the flashy ad, ignored the problems and found himself compromised. Thankfully, His descendant Jesus refused such compromises. Satan offered Him security for compromise and the Savior refused (Matthew 4:10). Instead, He faced the unimaginable – bearing our sin – in order to give us true, eternal security.

In Jesus, we find the One who can deliver and always does.

Prayer: Father, help us when we feel uncertain and decide that “small” compromises might get the “big” reward we want. Help us instead to trust our lives to the only one who can truly deliver us: your Son. It is in His name we pray. Amen.

Day 8: Uzziah

“They took their stand against King Uzziah and said, ‘Uzziah, you have no right to offer incense to the LORD. Only the priests, the descendants of Aaron, are consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have acted unfaithfully; you will not receive honor from the LORD God.’”
– 2 Chronicles 26:18

The gift receipt is a rather novel invention of the last decade or so. We often receive gifts that, for whatever reason, don't quite work out, but how do we solve the problem when the shirt doesn't fit? We could try to return it on our own, but will likely get back only a partial refund. We could go back to whomever gave it to us, but we fear hurting the person's feelings. The gift receipt, though, is an invitation from the gift giver: “it's ok to solve the problem, I'll help you.”

With Melchizedek, we saw the beautiful picture of a king who was also a priest. That meant he could lead, but he could also represent God to people. We've already considered that Saul wanted that role, but the Lord said, “no.” In Uzziah, another king falls to the temptation.

Having our leader and our invitation to come before God be the same figure feels like how it *ought* to be. Uzziah surely sensed that and in his pride, thought he could be that. He decided to go it alone and like returning a present without a receipt, he came up short.

Instead of being able to draw himself and his people close to God, he could only place the focus on himself. We can't make up our own gift receipt, it has to be given to us. Uzziah was punished for his arrogance and, ironically, found himself not closer to his people or God, but excluded by his skin disease in entering the temple or being with his people (v. 21).

But, his desire was still tied to a good impulse: the unity of priest and king was meant to be, just not yet. Jesus would be the one to do that. Today, our sense of how it ought to be is also how it is. We can come to Him and find our king and also our priest who advocates for us (Heb. 7:26-28). Who takes our ill-fitting deeds and replaces them with His righteousness. No gift receipt needed.

Prayer: Father, when we want to go it on our own like Uzziah, help us to see that in your Son, we already find one who is both our perfect champion and advocate. Help us to trust in Him more each day and to turn to Him, and not our own pride, in every challenge we face. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.

Day 9: Hezekiah

“He removed the high places, shattered the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He also demolished the bronze snake called Nehushtan that Moses had made, for up to that time the Israelites had burned incense to it.” - 2 Kings 18:4

Sometimes something goes awry at a family gathering and the attempts to work around the spoiled food or messed up game become, in themselves, a tradition. This can be lighthearted, but if a can of peaches replaced spoiled cranberry salad, we aren't necessarily better off if the cranberries get permanently demoted off of the Christmas menu.

When during the Exodus the people of Israel were unfaithful and God sent a judgment of venomous snakes, He also gave them a way to demonstrate their trust in Him: they could look to a bronze snake on a stake and God would heal them.

But, like the holiday tradition that wasn't supposed to be, they tried to keep going back to that bronze snake instead of understanding it as being tied to a special circumstance. They started to worship the snake rather than the One the snake pointed to.

King Hezekiah took a bold stand and destroyed the snake and other forms of false worship. In doing so, he gave a small glimpse at what Jesus would do when He came. Hundreds of years after Hezekiah, people would continue to pervert things God gave, worshipping them rather than their source.

The people turned law-keeping into the end in itself. The religious leaders became so fixated on keeping their authority, they did not rush out in excitement at the prospect of the Messiah's arrival, but joined Herod in being troubled (John 11:47-48).

The people had become contented enough with a canned replacement that they no longer sought God's always fresh promises.

When Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, He compared Himself to that bronze snake. As Moses had lifted that symbol years before, the Savior would be lifted up to die that those who look to Him would live (John 3:14). There may not have been venomous snakes biting at the people's heels again, but sin certainly was.

Then and now, there is a choice: do we look to God's fresh promises and join Hezekiah in rejecting canned falsehoods? Or does the temptation of a familiar, but unhelpful, tradition prove too comfortable to skip?

Prayer: Father, we know we need healing. We can't even get a couple of days into a new year without collecting a host of ways we've fallen short of your will. But we look to your Son for salvation and ask for forgiveness through what He has done for us. Help us to trust in Him and accept no substitutes. We pray this in His name. Amen.

Day 10: Manasseh

“And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.” – 2 Chronicles 33:12

You know that unexpected prize of a cookie at a Christmas gathering? The one that isn't perfectly shaped and looks generally unappetizing, but for some reason you picked it anyway and – wow! – it was really tasty?

The best moments along the journey from the promise of the Messiah to His appearance might be those times the imperfect forerunners repented. David's repentance, captured in his own beautiful words of Psalm 51, is most familiar, but the generally deplorable king Manasseh serves as another, fascinating example.

Despite leading the people into terrible evil (v. 9), Manasseh came to his senses when the Assyrians captured him. He prayed to God and found the mercy the one at the end of his line would purchase by blood for us: forgiveness is available even to the most wicked.

God in His faithfulness, not only preserved the line of the Messiah through Manasseh, He also heard the wicked king's cry and forgave him. With forgiveness, God also gives us a renewed sense of purpose. The reformed king would be empowered to clean Judah up.

Manasseh was definitely one of those misshapen cookies and, if we really closely examine our lives, we find that we are too. All of us appear less than appetizing on the cookie tray of life when measured by God's righteousness.

The good news is that Jesus isn't willing to simply save us from being rejected from the platter. He is determined to make our lives worth savoring.

When he came into this world, He lived the perfect life for us, that we could repent and be saved. When we trust in our Savior, He answers “come, follow me,” just as He did with his first disciples (Matthew 4:19). When we fail and repent again, He does the same, just as He did with Peter (John 21:19).

Our lives may never look like the pick of the cookie tray, but Manasseh is a beautiful testimony of God's restoring power. Today is always the perfect day to either start or restart following Jesus.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, we want to follow you and follow you more faithfully than ever before. Wherever our lives are heading away from your will, turn us towards the path you want us on. Help us

to answer your call to follow you and to trust that you will use us to your glory. We pray this in your precious name. Amen.

Day 11: Josiah

“O altar, altar, thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah by name, and he shall sacrifice on you the priests of the high places who make offerings on you, and human bones shall be burned on you.’” – 1 Kings 13:2

Sometimes the best gifts are those we don’t even know we need when we get them. We might even wonder: “Why did I get *this*?” Outside, we might feign appreciation, but inside we just don’t get it.

When the kingdoms of Israel and Judah split, Israel’s king built new, idolatrous places of worship so he could have more control over people’s religious practices, rather than them going to God’s authorized temple. To those in the North fed up with David’s descendants and their demands, those altars might have felt like the perfect gift.

The prophetic promise that a later King Josiah would destroy those altars surely felt like a far less perfectly chosen gift. But God knows what we need better than we do, every single time.

He would end the life destroying false worship those altars were used for by preserving David’s family all the way to Josiah. That promised king would fulfill the providential moment when his staff would find God’s law, thereby setting him on a course to purify the land and direct it towards the Lord.

Most of those who saw what Josiah did with that altar probably didn’t get what was going on. We have the benefit of long distance hindsight. In that one act, God authenticated a prophecy (showing He fulfills His promises) and that He brings about action (shutting down false worship).

In the time since Jesus came, we continue to build our own altars and distort how we approach God. But if we ask for His help, He is even better at taking down our “high places” than the earlier king ever was.

Jesus redirects us to Himself, so we can find the source of eternal life. Sometimes those redirections take us away from the gifts we think we want. But if we trust in His goodness, we’ll eventually realize, “No, His gifts are so much better.”

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to set aside the things we think we want that draw us away from you. Tear down our high places and instead show your Word anew to us in this New Year, giving us the same sort of excitement Josiah had at the discovery of your Law. Help us to stand firm in your strength. We pray this in your name. Amen.

Day 12: Jehoiachin

“On the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month of the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Judah’s King Jehoiachin, in the year Evil-merodach became king of Babylon, he released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison. And he spoke kindly to Jehoiachin and set his throne above the thrones of the other kings who were with him in Babylon.” – 2 Kings 25:27-28

Christmas is the exclamation point on the Bible’s assurance that God doesn’t forget us, despite just how far short we fall. In a world that gets distracted and forgets promises all the time, God doesn’t.

When it feels like He does, it’s actually the fog of sin – our own and others – that obscures the steadfast faithfulness He never backs away from. King Jehoiachin, the second to last king of Judah before Babylon’s Nebuchadnezzar completely crushed the land in 587 B.C., he followed in the path of the bad kings and failed to follow the Lord. In return, he found himself in captivity in a far away land.

Yet, in that captivity, he was ultimately shown a kindness. He wasn’t put to death, but ultimately invited to experience some level of favor from his captor. God allowed Jehoiachin to experience far better than he deserved and not just then, but in the time ahead as his name becomes one of the names in Jesus’s genealogy (Matthew 1:11).

Jehoiachin’s experience of undeserved blessing could serve as a reminder to the rest of his compatriots in the years ahead that even in the dark times, God shows favor in the midst of failure. Sometimes we wait a period in a captivity of our own making like Jehoiachin did. Sometimes there’s a centuries long gap as the people returned to the land but awaited the Messiah. Sometimes today we look at the cold starkness of winter past Christmas, facing our own challenges and wonder if God cares.

But Jehoiachin’s royal line did ultimately pass on to Jesus. God did come into the world as a human being to show us, flawed as we are, that His love is sure. And that same God will return again.

The little mercies in the midst hint of the great joy when we fully experience the ultimate Christmas present: entering God’s presence as His adopted sons and daughters (Romans 8:16-17). Whatever you face this coming year before Christmas returns again, know that present is there for you.

Prayer: Father, thank you for showing your care over the ages even to those who failed you. Thank you for showing your care to us even as we do. Please help us to see in the times of waiting just how faithful you are. Help us to follow you faithfully in those times and to share your hope with others who may find themselves in the dark. We pray this in Jesus’s name. Amen.

Ephiphany: Cyrus

“I will raise up Cyrus in righteousness, and I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild My city and set My exiles free, but not for payment or reward, says the LORD of Hosts.” – Isaiah

45:13

We end as we began: with a king who acts on the behalf of God but isn't part of God's chosen people. However, Cyrus was quite different from Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a king who was a priest of the Lord; Cyrus, for all we know, was hardly aware of who the Lord was.

Yet, in God's good plan, Cyrus was used to return the Jews to the promised land. In doing so, Cyrus teed up developments that would ultimately lead to the events in Bethlehem we celebrate each Christmas.

Cyrus was used by God's plan, but the perfect king was God executing His own plan. We've seen many of the kings who actually believed in the Lord still did horrible things. So, it isn't the king's perfection that made him an instrument used by God, it was God choosing to use Him.

Nonetheless, ultimately, we need a clearer more faithful king. How horrible it would be if our only hope was in some leader doing something good almost (or actually) in spite of himself?

In Jesus, everything comes together. Every good attribute we've seen in the different kings is in Him, while every shortcoming is absent. Just like Cyrus, Jesus transports His people to a promised land, but not this time a physical place, but the spiritual land of being in God's presence.

The journey to this better promised land has one significant difference from the one ordered by Cyrus's decree. This time, for all of us who trust in Jesus, we are returned not by an unwitting act, but the most willful one imaginable.

This is the truth at the heart of the miracle of Christmas. And though with Epiphany the “Christmas season” wraps up, the wonder and beauty of that miracle does not. May we treasure it all this year to come and in every year that follows beyond.

Prayer: Father, thank you for sending the perfect Anointed One. Not another king who simply does your will, but our God as King who brings us safely home not by happenstance but by genuine love that we can trust all the days of our lives. We pray this in Jesus's precious name. Amen.

Next Steps

Thank you for joining me on this devotional adventure over the Christmas season. If you are looking to explore the Scriptures further and experience some of that adopted family of God we discussed above, I would like to invite you to take advantage of the following opportunities to do just that from the two ministries I serve with.

Little Hills Church

We are a small church in St. Charles, Missouri and we would love to have you join us as we seek to share the love of our amazing God with our neighbors near and far. Launched in 2020, we have embraced being a “hybrid church,” seeking to use both online and in-person avenues to do ministry in our community and around the world.

Interested? Please visit us on the web at www.littlehills.church to find out more about how you can get involved. You can also follow us on social media @LittleHillsChurch (on Facebook, Mastodon/the Fediverse, YouTube and Instagram) and @LittleHillsC (on X).

FaithTree Christian Fellowship

FaithTree aims to connect believers from different churches for worship, prayer and thought-provoking conversations about faith, while making a welcoming space for people who are not yet sure what they believe. We are a ministry led by and rooted in local churches; you can learn more about our story at www.faithtreecf.org or on social media @FaithTreeCF. Please check out our calendar of events and join us soon!

Questions? Comments?

Are you wanting to know more about who Jesus is? Do you have a question about the Bible? Would you simply like to provide feedback on this devotional booklet? Please feel free to e-mail me at timothy.butler@faithtree.com. I am always happy to hear from you!