

6 Christ fulfilling the Prophets

Why do the Prophets of the Old Testament matter to us? Can't we just have Jesus, and that's enough?

That's not how the New Testament presents Jesus. It quotes the Old more than 400 times. And most of those quotations are given to demonstrate how the Christ fulfils everything God promised in the Law and the Prophets.

We'll focus on just three words tonight: the **Christ**, the **gospel**, and the **end**. We'll show how these words have their roots in the Old Testament. The gospel proclaims the Christ who fulfils the Prophets in the end. Without the Prophets, we're missing the framework to understand the Christ, the gospel, and the end.

The backstory is that God established Israel as his kingdom among the nations, to demonstrate to the nations how earth was meant to be under heaven's reign. But like the nations, Israel refused to live under God's leadership, so they progressively fell to the nations. God sent prophets to call his people back to his leadership:

- 1) The **kingdom split**, so God sent Elijah, Elisha, Hosea and Amos—calling Israel back to himself and his anointed.
- 2) **Israel fell**, so God sent Isaiah, Micah, Joel, Zephaniah, Habbakuk, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—calling Judah back to himself.
- 3) **Exiled**, they lived under foreign rule, so God sent Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi—calling his people to return and his leadership would return to them.

The restoration of the kingdom is not a side issue in the Prophets. It's the main problem across the centuries. So the big question is:

How and when did God fulfil this promise, saving his people from oppression, restoring his reign over them?

That's why we've chosen these three keywords tonight:

- In the **end**, the prophets are fulfilled in Christ.
- The **gospel** is God's good news proclamation of his Christ as our Lord.
- The **Christ** is the heaven-anointed king who restores God's reign to the earth.

Let's look at each of these words in turn.

6.1 The Christ

Christ is the main word for Jesus in the New Testament. Forty times he's called *son of God*. Eighty times he calls himself *son of man*. More than 500 times, he's called *Christ*! It must be important. What does it mean?

Christ is not an English word. Χριστός (pronounced *christos*) is a Greek word meaning "anointed." We should have translated it as *Anointed*, but we just borrowed it. And since we treat it as a word that applies only to Jesus, we would never say "David was the LORD's Christ," even though we'd be happy to refer to David as "*the LORD's anointed*." We don't understand **Christ** = **anointed**. The meaning got lost in translation.



Chi (Χ) and *Rho* (ρ) are the first letters of the Greek word Χριστός (*christos*). The intertwined *Chi-Rho* is an early Christian symbol.

The Bible does speak of David as God's *anointed*. Whenever a descendant of David was enthroned as king, he became God's anointed. The Hebrew word was *māšîaḥ* (pronounced *messiah*). When that was translated into Greek a couple of centuries before Jesus, they used the word *christos* in the Septuagint.

For example, **Psalm 2:2** speaks of the reign of *the LORD and his anointed*. That's *māšîaḥ* in Hebrew, *christos* in Greek. The kingdom of Judah was ruled by *the LORD and his christos*. David was the LORD's christ (i.e. the Lord's anointed). Solomon was the LORD's christ, and so on.

It would be so much easier if we did not import foreign words like *māšîaḥ* and *christos*. "Anointed" is a perfectly good English word that conveys the meaning. Instead of calling Jesus the *Christ*, why not simply call him the *Anointed*?

Take the NIV for example. Most often it imports the Greek word into English as "Christ." About a quarter of the time, the NIV translates *christos* with the Hebrew word "Messiah" (Matthew 1:16, 17, 18; 2:4 etc). Only once does it actually translate the word into English (Acts 4:26). Couldn't we just use *Anointed*, and avoid the confusion?

The Prophets use *māšîaḥ* in ways that don't make sense if we don't translate it. We use *Messiah* only for Jesus, but Isaiah uses it for a Persian king:

Isaiah 44:24–45:4 (NIV)

²⁴ This is what the LORD says—your Redeemer ... ²⁸ who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid."'

45 ¹ This is what the LORD says to **his anointed** [*māšîaḥ*], to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut ...

⁴ For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge me.

The Davidic kingship had fallen. God had handed his people over to Babylon. That means God had put Nebuchadnezzar in charge of his people.

Then God gave Babylon over to Persia, so Persia was reigning over his people. The Persian king Cyrus was therefore God's *anointed*, God's *messiah*, God's *christ* for his people at that time.

It's in this role as the servant of the LORD that Cyrus saves God's people. Mixed in with all the people of other nations who had also been exiled to Babylon, the Jews were in danger of losing their identity as the people of YHWH. But Cyrus put out an edict that the exiles from all the nations were to return to their homeland, rebuild their cities, worship their gods, and live according to their own culture and law. He even helped to fund the return and rebuilding.

Cyrus doesn't even know God (45:4). Cyrus is God's unwitting accomplice, the saviour provided by God to preserve his people and give them a future. In this oppressive setting, Cyrus is functioning as the LORD's anointed, the LORD's christ.

Isaiah's point is that if this gentile ruler could function as God's anointed and save God's people from extinction, the one who rules heaven and earth knows how to save his people completely.

God will send his Redeemer to Zion (Isaiah 58:20). The Davidic king will say, *the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor* (61:1). Literally, the Septuagint reads, "He has christed me to gospel the poor" (ἐχρίσέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς).

Are you making sense of this as the meaning of *christ*?

So, is the New Testament making that claim when it calls Jesus the *Christ*? Is it saying he is the heaven-appointed ruler who restores earth as a kingdom of heaven?

Translate *christos* as "Anointed," and it becomes blindingly obvious that announcing Jesus as our heaven-anointed ruler is the main message of the New Testament:

- *The anointed son of David* is the opening statement (Matthew 1:1).
- *The good news about Jesus the anointed is the gospel* (Mark 1:1).
- Heaven announces this son of David as *the anointed lord* (Luke 2:11).
- John explains that *christos* means the same as *messiah* (John 1:41).
- Peter's gospel is: *God made this Jesus both lord and anointed* (Acts 2:36)
- Paul's gospel is: *This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the anointed* (Acts 17:3). That's why Paul gets arrested: he's announcing *another king* (verse 7).
- Paul's letters proclaim *Jesus the anointed ... on the basis of the prophetic writings*, so the nations will give him trusting obedience (Romans 16:25-27).
- The *anointed* being *crucified* is an oxymoron to *the rulers of this world whose power is coming to nothing* (1 Corinthians 1:1-6).

We can't pursue all 500+ references to the Anointed. If you want to do that, read: Joshua Jipp, *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 2020).

The last book of the New Testament presents *Jesus the anointed as ruler of the kings of the earth* (Revelation 1:5). The gospel that heaven announces is *the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, restored in the authority of his anointed* (Revelation 12:10).

Is that how you understand the claim that *Jesus is the Christ*?

"Jesus Christ is a claim, not a name."⁵

⁵ Matthew W. Bates, *Why the Gospel? Living the Good News of King Jesus with Purpose* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2023), 9.

6.2 The gospel

Gospel in the New Testament is *euangelion* (noun) or *euangelizō* (verb). It meant to make a big good-news announcement for the whole community. Picture a herald running back from battle shouting, "Good news! The battle is over! We won!"

So where did the word come from? You guessed it: the Prophets. The Septuagint used *euangelizō* here:

Isaiah 40:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ You who **bring good news** to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who **bring good news to Jerusalem**,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!"
¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.



So what was the gospel according to Isaiah? What good news was he announcing?

After they'd been so long under foreign rule, the good news was that God was back to reign over them. For the people who returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem, this was the news they were yearning to hear. "Get ready!" Isaiah said. "The Sovereign LORD is here in power, to rule us with his mighty strength!" (verse 10).

Isaiah pictures a runner arriving to announce God's reign, the end of oppression:

Isaiah 52:7 (NIV)

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who
bring good news, who proclaim peace, who **bring good tidings**,
who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!"

Isaiah's word became our main message. The **gospel** is that God's reign has returned to earth in God's anointed (his Christ).⁶

Today, we use *evangelize* to mean signing people up to the faith, getting them across the line by praying for forgiveness. That's not the gospel as heaven proclaims it.

Here's how an **angel** evangelizes:

Luke 2:10-12 (NIV)

¹⁰ The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news** that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

The angel literally said, "I evangelize [*euangelizō*] you." The good news was David's descendant in David's town! God's *anointed* is our *Lord*! Now, that is good news for a world under all the wrong rulers (Luke 1:5; 2:1-2; 3:1, 19). The gospel is the proclamation of God's *anointed* as our *Lord*. That's *good news of great joy for all the people*.

⁶ See this Bible Project video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmFPS0f-kzs>

What's the *sign* that Jesus is the heaven-anointed ruler? He doesn't look anything like the rulers of this age. You find him not as a regal warrior in a luxury palace, but as a baby in torn rags, in a box prepared for animals (verse 12). That is heaven's gospel.

John the Baptist's gospel was Isaiah's gospel. In wild places far from the seats of power, John called people to prepare for God's reign (Luke 3:3-6, 18).

Jesus' gospel was Isaiah's gospel:

Luke 4:16-21 (NIV)

¹⁶ He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has **anointed** me to proclaim **good news** to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." [quoting Isaiah 61:1-2] ...

²¹ "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The arrival of God's anointed was *good news* for those who'd missed out (*the poor*), recovery of sight for those who had lost their vision (the blind), freedom for people in captivity (*prisoners*). God's benevolent sovereignty (favour) was returning as he provided his anointed for his people.

That's the gospel Jesus proclaimed: "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*" **Jesus' gospel** was the good news God proclaimed—*God's gospel*:

Mark 1:14-15 (my translation)

¹⁴ After John was handed over [to Herod] Jesus came to Galilee announcing **God's gospel**: ¹⁵ "The time has reached fulfilment. God's reign [kingdom] has come close. Turn and trust in the good news."

God's gospel is the good news of heaven's reign arriving on earth in his Christ. The response God expects to his gospel is that we turn from the world's rebellion against God's authority, giving our allegiance to his heaven-appointed leader (the Christ).

Since the gospel is God's proclamation of his Christ as our Lord, the gospel is the announcement of God's kingdom. It's the liberating news that God's reign is arriving in his Anointed.

Here's how Matthew summarizes Jesus' gospel:

Matthew 4:23 (NIV)

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the **good news of the kingdom**, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.

Matthew 9:35 (NIV)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the **good news of the kingdom** and healing every disease and sickness.

Matthew 24:14 (NIV)

This **gospel of the kingdom** will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

God's gospel. The angel's gospel. Jesus' gospel. John's gospel. The gospel in the Gospels is: heaven's reign is returning to earth in God's Anointed, as the Prophets said.

What gospel did the apostles proclaim in **Acts**? Pursue that for yourself (or your group):

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2020/04/06/the-apostles-gospel/>

(Hint: a link towards the end provides answers.)

Paul's gospel was God's gospel arriving in the Davidic Son who fulfils the Prophets:

Romans 1:2-4 (NIV)

... the gospel of God— ² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures ³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

Peter's gospel was the good news that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, that heaven's anointed had come as our ruler reigning in power, the very thing the Prophets yearned to see:

2 Peter 1:16-21 (NIV)

¹⁶ We did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. ...

²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Everything the Prophets said ultimately finds fulfilment in Christ. It was all about the glorious reign of God becoming reality on earth in God's Anointed:

2 Corinthians 1:20 (NIV)

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

That's how the Prophets are being fulfilled: in the Christ. God's "yes" to the world arrives in Christ. Our "yes" to him forms us into the community under his leadership, where the glorious reign of God is known on earth.

What a privilege. What an identity. What a challenge. It's who we are in Christ.

Is this something you would like to discuss further?

6.3 The end

The prophets yearned to see how the story would end. Sometimes it felt like it was all over, like when Ezekiel said: *The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land!* (7:2).

It felt like that when Babylon invaded, destroying the capital where God reigned, cutting off the Davidic kingship, terminating Israel as a nation. God's kingdom was subsumed into Babylon.



But that was not the end of Ezekiel's prophecy. Thirty chapters later he's still going, and God asks him if the dry bones could live. God declares he will breathe his life into Jacob's deceased descendants. Both the northern tribes that fell to Assyria and the tribe that fell to Babylon will be raised to life, unified in the reign of the David king:

Ezekiel 37:22-24 (NIV)

²² I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. ²³ ... They will be my people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd.

The *end* for Ezekiel is not a destroyed world where Babylon wins and God loses. The end is a restored world where all God's people live under God's anointed, so they're known among the nations for this: *The LORD is there* (Ezekiel 48:35).

Jeremiah spent his life warning that Jerusalem would fall. It's a tragic historical reality, recounted in the final chapter (Jeremiah 52). But that was not Jeremiah's last word. His final oracle was *the word the LORD spoke through Jeremiah concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians* (50:1):

Jeremiah 51:13 (NIV)

¹³ You who live by many waters and are rich in treasures, your *end* has come, the time for you to be destroyed.

When *the words of Jeremiah end* (51:64), Babylon falls. Jeremiah calls God's people to *flee out of Babylon* (50:8), God promises, *I will bring Israel back to their own pasture* (50:19). Their future is the LORD's reign, not Babylon's:

Jeremiah 51:49-50 (NIV)

⁴⁹ "Babylon must fall because of Israel's slain, just as the slain in all the earth have fallen because of Babylon. ⁵⁰ You who have escaped the sword, leave and do not linger! Remember the LORD in a distant land, and call to mind Jerusalem."

It ends as Jeremiah promised earlier: a new covenant (31:31-33) restoring God's reign in the Branch from David's fallen family tree (23:5; 33:15).

Isaiah also promised the anointed Branch from David's family (Isaiah 11-12). Babylon falls (13-14), and a new Jerusalem is radiant with God's glory (60-62).

The end for Isaiah is not the destruction of everything. It's the restoration of everything God created: *a new heavens and a new earth* (65:17).

When God cleanses everything, all nations come under his kingship:

Isaiah 66:18 (NIV)

¹⁸ I ... am about to come and gather the people of all nations and languages, and they will come and see my glory.

The **Minor Prophets** also envisage an end where:

- *David's fallen tent* is raised (Amos 9:11)
- *the LORD dwells in Zion* (Joel 3:21)
- the LORD's authority extends to all creation (Jonah 4:10-11).
- the LORD's promises are fulfilled (Micah 7:20)
- *the LORD, the King of Israel is present* (Zephaniah 3:15)
- the son of David receives God's signet ring to reign (Haggai 2:23)
- *the LORD reigns over the whole earth* (Zechariah 14:9)

The end = the restoration of God's reign in his Anointed.

Eschatology is the study of how it all ends (literally *last things*). Christians argue about how to glue different Scriptures together. Are there seven years of tribulation, or three and a half? Does Christ sit on a literal throne for 1000 years, or is that figurative? Does God give us resurrection bodies to live in a new heavens and new earth, or do we float off to a bodiless existence in heaven while this creation is destroyed?

Whatever commitment you hold to particular views of end times, what's important is that we trust Christ to save us—not merely as individuals but as the community under his leadership (the kingdom of God).

Growing up in the nuclear age, we live in fear of destroying ourselves. We're inundated with images of a dystopian future, an apocalyptic disaster where artificial intelligence enslaves us or nuclear fallout makes the world uninhabitable.

In this culture of fear, we have a *gospel* to announce. It's the *good news* of the restoration of God's reign over all the *nations* of the world, in his anointed ruler.

This is *the end* Jesus envisaged:

Matthew 24:14 (NIV)

This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the **end** will come.

The end is not disaster. It's the goal God has in mind. It includes both Jerusalem and the nations under divine kingship (the kingdom of God). The good-news proclamation of God's anointed is the means that brings the end (the goal).

Jesus' vision for the end is the same as the Old Testament prophets. Even though everything fell—including God's anointed himself—God would shake the powers, and install the son of man with heaven's authority over the earth. This good news needs to be proclaimed to the nations, so *the end* God has always envisaged arrives for us all.

That's why **Paul** devoted his life to proclaiming the *good news* of the *Christ* (God's anointed ruler) to the *nations* (gentiles).

For Paul, *the end* is the demise of the rebellion, the restoration of God's reign in Christ:

1 Corinthians 15:24-26 (NIV)

²⁴ Then **the end** will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.

²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

God did not destroy his enemies to place his Christ on the throne. Consequently, his Christ must reign until all his enemies are under his authority. In the obedient human, God's reign is restored to humanity, as God decreed in the beginning.

Death was the ultimate enemy, capturing us when we disconnected from our life-source in the beginning. But even death is not the end. Christ conquered death when the Father raised him to life. The resurrection of the Anointed ruler is the evidence in the present that God will do this for all creation in the end. Isn't that what God promised for his people in the Prophets? (Ezekiel 37; Hosea 6:2)

Creation is restored as the servant king restores earth to heaven's governance.

Your thoughts? Anything else from the Old Testament Prophets you'd like to discuss?

6.4 Questions

Most Christians would agree that how we understand the Christ is crucial, and the gospel is our top priority message. This is important stuff, so:

1. How do you understand the *Christ*? Is that just another name for Jesus? Or does it mean the anointed ruler who saves the world from oppression and restores us as a kingdom of heaven, in fulfilment of all God's promises? Does it matter what *Christ* means? On a scale from "It's irrelevant" to "It changes everything," how important is this?
2. How do you understand the *gospel*? Is it a message about me, how I can gain personal forgiveness? Or is it God's declaration that his Christ is our Lord (by raising him from the dead), with the result that the earth is released from every form of evil (amnesty for the rebels who trust his leadership, and the ultimate release from every form of injustice)? In what ways does our understanding of the gospel shape the way we hear, respond to, and announce the gospel?
3. What will happen in the *end*? Will the world end badly? Or will God's good-news proclamation of his Christ as our Lord restore everything? What do you expect? How does this affect the way you do life now?

Do these questions matter? If so, meditate and discuss them further with your friends and connect group. What other questions would you add?

May the Holy Spirit who inspired the Prophets inspire us to live well under the leadership of God's anointed, forming us into the body of the Christ, the community that embodies the good news that God's anointed is our Lord and king.

6.5 Resources

On *gospel*, here's a study for your connect group to explore the content of the gospel the apostles proclaimed in the Book of Acts. (The second link gives the answers.)

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2020/04/06/the-apostles-gospel/>

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2020/04/08/the-apostles-gospel-explained/>

On *Christ*, this link contains more info, and quotes from others making this point. The second link covers how *Christ* is used in Ephesians, and what it means to be *in Christ*:

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2018/01/31/put-the-christ-back-in-christology/>

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2021/04/14/christ-in-ephesians-joshua-jipp/>

On how Christ received the kingship, Isaiah 53 is a favourite. This link sets that chapter in the context of Israel's role as God's suffering servant, God's response to their inability to deliver (becoming a servant to his servant), and so our role in Christ:

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2018/02/21/who-is-the-servant-of-the-lord/>

On *the end*,

<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/day-of-the-lord/>

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2021/02/10/the-end-where-are-we-headed/>

<https://allenbrowne.blog/2019/03/25/it-doesnt-end-with-armageddon/>

For further reading on the gospel of the Christ as our God-anointed king, see:

- N. T. Wright. *How God Became King: Getting to the heart of the Gospels* (SPCK, 2012)
- Scot McKnight. *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Zondervan, 2011)
- Matthew W. Bates. *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Baker Academic, 2017)
- Joshua Jipp. *The Messianic Theology of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 2020)
- Nijay K. Gupta et al. *Living the King Jesus Gospel: Discipleship and Ministry Then and Now* (Cascade, 2021)