

Jesus Christ: The Branch of the LORD

Isaiah 4:2

Introduction:

- The prophet Isaiah lived and ministered in Judah from about 760 to 700 B.C. He ministered from the time of King Uzziah to the time of King Hezekiah.

Isaiah 1:1

- Isaiah prophesied of the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and Second Coming of the Messiah so much, that many people have called him “the fifth evangelist” (along with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). The theme of redemption and the grace of God, as well as God’s plan of salvation for the Gentiles through the Messiah, run throughout the book of Isaiah.
- It is estimated that there are more than 400 citations of references from the book of Isaiah in the New Testament!¹ Furthermore, sections of 47 of the 66 books of Isaiah are quoted or cited in the New Testament.² The only book of the Old Testament that is quoted in the New Testament more than Isaiah is the book of Psalms.³ Most of these citations of Isaiah in the New Testament point to the Person and work of the Messiah.
- The Messiah is pictured in many ways in the book of Isaiah. He is portrayed as King; as God; as Suffering Servant of Jehovah; as Anointed Conqueror; as the Foundation Stone; and as the Teacher. And, as we shall see in this lesson, He is also called by the beautiful name “the Branch of Jehovah.”

Isaiah 4:2

I. The meaning of “the Branch” metaphor

- In order to understand this name for the Messiah, it is important to understand how the word “branch” is used in Hebrew. Unlike our English word “branch,” which refers strictly to the bough of a tree (and not to the trunk), the Hebrew word for “branch” (*tsemach*) has a broader range of meaning. It means “sprout, shoot, branch, bud, that which grew (upon).” In other words, it can refer to a bough of a tree (whether large or small), or to a whole tree.
- Since any seed-producing section of a tree can grow into another tree if cropped off and put in the ground, the Hebrew language refers to a branch, twig, or bough with just one word—*tsemach*. Another Hebrew word for “branch,” *netser*, also has the broad idea of a “shoot” or “sprout.” Figuratively, these Hebrew words for “branch” are often used to refer to a person, since every person is a descendant (an “offshoot”) of a human progenitor.

¹ Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 155.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

- This is one reason why the Messiah is called “the Branch”—to emphasise that Jesus would, indeed, be fully Man—a descendant of Adam.

1 Corinthians 15:45-47

- Another reason why Christ is called “the Branch” is that He is destined to be the King of all the earth, in the future 1,000-year Kingdom. Under Christ’s righteous rule, all people of the earth will receive shelter, protection, and physical and spiritual food. Just as a tree provides shelter, food, shade, and lodging for birds and beasts, so Christ, as King of all the earth, will provide for all the people of earth.
- Actually, the Messiah is not the only Person in Scripture who is referred to figuratively as a “tree.” Several other human kings and governments are portrayed in this way, as well. A perfect example is Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon.

Daniel 4:1-27

- With these Scriptures in mind, we have a clearer picture of why Jesus Christ is spoken of in prophecy as “the Branch.”

II. Comparison of Isaiah 4:2 to other “Branch” passages

- **Isaiah 4:2** is not the only Scripture where Jesus is called “the Branch.” Several other Old Testament passages refer to the Messiah as “the Branch” (or “tree,” or “young twig”). There are, in fact, four variations of the title “the Branch.” Each one emphasises a different truth about the Person and character of the Messiah.

A. “The Branch of David”

- As we have seen in past lessons, God made a special covenant with David, in which He promised David that the Messiah would be born from his lineage, and would rule over all the earth—forever!

Psalms 89:19-37

- Because the Messiah is the Son of David, several prophecies mention the fact that “the Branch” would be a descendant of David.

Jeremiah 23:5-6 (By the way, notice that the “the Branch” is also called “The LORD our Righteousness.” Because our own righteousness is not sufficient for God to accept us, God sent His Son to become a Man, so that He could *be* our Righteousness in our stead. To receive Him as Saviour is to have His perfect righteousness stamped on your own moral account, so that God may accept you!)

Jeremiah 33:15 (Once again, “the Branch” is called not only a descendant of David, but the *righteous* Branch.)

Ezekiel 17:1-4

- In the above Scripture, the LORD uses a parable to remind Israel of His judgment upon Jechoniah (also called Jehoiakin), the king of Judah. Jechoniah (a descendant of David) was wicked and idolatrous; thus, God allowed Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, to take him away as a captive to Babylon in 597 B.C.

2 Kings 24:6-16

- It is easy to understand the meaning of this parable. The cedar tree is the royal family of King David. The eagle is Nebuchadnezzar. The “young twig” on the top of the tree, which the eagle “cropped off” (removed from power), is one particular member of David’s family—Jechoniah. With this in mind, let’s look at the rest of the parable.

Ezekiel 17:22-24

- Jechoniah was “cropped off” (removed from power) by Nebuchadnezzar, and was “transplanted” in Babylon in disgrace. In stark contrast, God will, in the future, “crop off” another “young twig” from the royal “cedar tree” of the family of David, and will plant Him in “the mountain of the height of Israel,” where He will become a tree that will provide protection and nourishment for the whole world. This “young twig” is the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will one day be planted upon Mount Zion, as King of the whole earth.

Isaiah 11:1-2

- In the above Scripture, Isaiah prophesied that there would one day arise a “rod” (literally, a “sapling tree”) out of the “stem” (literally, the “tree stump”) of Jesse. In other words, there would, in the future, arise an important descendant from the family of Jesse (the line of King David, who was the son of Jesse). Even though the royal dynasty of David had been “cut down” like a tree 597 years before Christ was born, Jesus, the descendant of David, would grow up like a *new* sapling tree right in the middle of the rotting “tree stump” of the fallen house of David. He is the rightful King of Israel; and He will one day sit down upon the throne of David forever. As **verse 2** says, the Holy Spirit rests upon “the Branch” without measure.

B. “My (Jehovah’s) Servant, the Branch”

Zechariah 3:8-9

- In this verse, the Lord was speaking to Joshua—the first high priest of the re-built Temple, after the Jews had returned from Babylon. (Joshua himself is a type of the Messiah, as we will see in a future lesson.) The Lord informs Joshua that the Messiah is coming, and that He will “remove the iniquity” of Israel in “one day.” (Christ will forgive and restore the whole *nation* of Israel when He returns to earth at the end of the Tribulation. **Romans 11:26-27.**) But notice the name that the Lord gives to the Messiah: “My servant, the Branch.”

- This name particularly emphasises the fact that Christ came to be the *Servant* of the LORD. Furthermore, He came to be the suffering Servant of the LORD. As a Servant, He was “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

Philippians 2:5-8

- Another passage in **Isaiah** refers to the Messiah as a “tender plant” (once again using the “tree” analogy). In this passage, Christ is called “my (Jehovah’s) servant”; and His awful death for our sins is prophesied.

Isaiah 52:13-53:5

C. “The Man whose name is the Branch”

Zechariah 6:12-13

- In this passage, the Messiah is once again called “the Branch”; but this time, He is called “the man whose name is the branch.” We are informed that He will one day rebuild the Temple (upon His return to earth), and that He will sit on the throne as both King and Priest. But before all this happens, He first had to “grow up” out of His place. In other words...the Messiah is a Man, like us. He grew up from childhood, just as we do! Jesus is not only God; He is also truly Man.

Luke 2:41-52

D. “The Branch of the LORD”

Isaiah 4:2

- Whereas the previous three “Branch” titles deal with some aspect of Jesus’ humanity, this title emphasises Jesus’ deity. As the Branch, He is “of” (comes forth from) God. He is of the Godhead.

John 1:18 / 16:28

- Thus, we see four portraits of the “the Branch.” He is the Son of David; He is the Suffering Servant of the LORD; He is fully Man; and He is fully God. Interestingly, these are the very truths about Jesus that are emphasised in the four Gospels (the first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). This is *not* a coincidence!

1. **Matthew**, more than anything else, portrays Jesus as the Son of David, and thus, the King of Israel. The Gospel of Matthew records more of Jesus’ words concerning the future Kingdom Age than the other four Gospels do.

Matthew 1:1 / 5:2-3 / 22:41-46 / 25:1,14

The Gospel of Matthew is the New Testament record of Jesus, “The Branch of David.”

2. **Mark** emphasises that Jesus is the suffering Servant of Jehovah. Mark lays particular emphasis on Christ's meek service to God and man, and on His miracles.

Mark 10:45

The Gospel of Mark is the New Testament record of Jesus, who is "Jehovah's Servant, the Branch."

3. **Luke** emphasises that Jesus is the Son of Man. Jesus repeatedly called Himself "the Son of Man"; and Luke, more than any other of the Gospel writers, recorded Jesus' use of this name for Himself. Luke emphasised that Jesus is, indeed, fully Man.

Luke 9:22 / 23:47

The Gospel of Luke is the New Testament record of Jesus, "the Man whose name is the Branch."

4. **John** emphasises that Jesus is the Son of God. He particularly emphasised Jesus' deity (Godhead). The name "Branch of the LORD" implies that "the Branch" would actually come forth from the LORD; and John repeatedly records Jesus' claim to have come forth from the Father.

John 1:1,14 / 20:31

The Gospel of John is the New Testament record of Jesus, "the Branch of the LORD."

III. Descriptions of the Branch in Isaiah 4:2

- Though **Isaiah 4** is a small chapter, it is packed with important truth about the Messiah. In these verses, we see several things:
 - A. The purpose of the Branch: To cleanse Israel from their sin.
 - In **Isaiah 1:1-24**, and **2:6 - 4:1**, the prophet Isaiah enumerates the sins of Israel; declares that their whole "head is sick, and the whole heart faint" (**Isaiah 1:5-6**); and predicts judgment upon them. The judgments predicted are not only the judgments that would happen in 586 B.C., when Jerusalem would be destroyed, but also the judgments of the future "Day of the LORD" (the Tribulation period). (For example, see **Isaiah 2:12-21** and compare to **Revelation 6:12-17**.)
 - Cleansing from sin is possible only through the blood of Christ. Christ's blood was shed on the cross 2,000 years ago; and everyone who believes on Jesus is promised cleansing from all sin (**Matthew 26:28; Romans 3:24-25**). However, the "blood of the New Testament (Covenant)" was made *nationally* with Israel, and not merely with individuals. God's intention in sending His Son to die was not only to save

individuals from their sin, but to redeem the whole nation of Israel, so that they, as a nation, could serve Him again.

- Since Israel is still rejecting Christ, the national redemption of Israel has not happened yet. But it *will* happen after Israel has gone through the fires of judgment in the Tribulation period, and many have believed on Him. When Christ returns to earth, He will judge those of the Jewish nation who still reject Him, and will slay them (**Zechariah 13:8-9; Luke 19:11-15, 26-27**). As **Isaiah 4:3** says, those who are “left” in Zion (the remnant of Jewish believers who survive the Tribulation and enter into the 1,000-year Kingdom) will be called “holy.” They will then be able to serve God in the rebuilt Temple (the “tabernacle”).

B. The origins of the Branch

- We know that “the Branch of the LORD” is a figurative reference to the Messiah. The same is true of the second half of **Isaiah 4:2**, where we are told that “the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel.” Isaiah is not talking about literal fruit (although God *will* restore the productivity of the land). He is talking about the Messiah Himself.
- The Hebrew word for “earth” is *eret*; but this word also means “land.” The Messiah is called “the fruit of the earth (or “land”)” because, as a Man, He was born and reared in the land of Israel. He was a descendant of Judah; He was born and raised in Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, until He was two years old; and He grew up, for most of the rest of His life, in Galilee (in northern Israel). He is not an “outsider” to the Jewish people; He is one of them.

Hebrews 7:14 (Notice that “springing up” analogy—like a tree.)

C. The character of the Branch

1. He is “excellent.”

- The Hebrew word for “excellent” can also be translated as “beautiful.” Christ’s holy character is truly beautiful and excellent to all who behold Him. Those who read the pages of Scripture see in them a portrait of an absolutely sinless Man. No sinful man, trying to make up a story of a messiah, could have “invented” the Jesus of Scripture. He is without a flaw.

1 Peter 1:18-19

2. He is “comely.”

- Jesus is also “comely,” or “glorious.” None of us have any right to “glory” (or boast) in ourselves. The only Man in whom we should glory is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The Jewish believers who enter into the Kingdom will, like us, find their

Messiah to be comely and glorious; and all their boasting will be in Him, and in what He did for all of us.

Galatians 6:14

Conclusion: “The Branch” titles for the Messiah have deep meaning. They teach that Jesus is a true Member of the human family (and of the family of Israel); that He is the Descendant of David (and King of Israel); that He is the LORD’s Servant; and that He is the Son of God. “The Branch” title also implies that He will, just like a mighty cedar tree, provide shelter, protection, and nourishment for all the families of mankind, when He sits down on His throne in Mount Zion. Jesus Christ is truly “excellent” and “comely”; and all our glorying should be in Him. As Isaac Watts wrote:

“Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God;
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood.”