

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

THE FEAST OF CHRIST THE KING – YEAR B

First Reading Daniel 7: 13–14

The Book of Daniel is named after its main character, not its author.

Daniel is described as living in Babylonia in the 6th century before Christ. However, almost all scholars agree that the book was written at a time of great tribulation for the Jews around 165 BC. It is therefore the most recent book of the Old Testament.

Daniel can be divided into two clear sections. Chapters 1–6 consist of stories about Daniel and his companions; while Chapters 7–12 offer four different visions of an apocalyptic nature. In fact, the Book of Daniel is the earliest book in the Bible to use this kind of writing: i.e. revelations received through visions. Apocalyptic literature was to become popular in the ancient world, and is found until about 200AD. Written in times of distress and difficulties, the main purpose of such visions was to encourage the Jews to keep their faith.

Chapter 7 marks the beginning of the series of ‘visions’ experienced by Daniel himself. In its opening verses, he sees four great beasts emerging from the chaotic abyss below (Daniel 7: 4–12). They are obviously connected with evil, whereas in the verses given today, the creature who appears comes from ‘the clouds of heaven’, a location traditionally linked with God.

It is the first time in Scripture that we come across the term ‘Son of Man’. In this context, despite coming from heaven, Daniel sees a ‘human being’, not a deity. This same expression is much employed in the New Testament, and Jesus uses it in Mark’s Gospel (see last week’s Gospel – Mark 13: 26).

Originally it may have been intended as a symbol of the sovereign of a kingdom where God would rule, but over the centuries a gradual shift took place leading Christians to see the ‘Son of Man’ as the Messiah King, the Christ.



Gospel John 18: 33–37

There is a real contrast between Jesus, the universal King we celebrate today, and the helpless baby born in Bethlehem – the one we welcome in a few weeks time.

The Praetorium

The Gospel this week relates part of Jesus’s trial by Pontius Pilate. It takes place inside the Praetorium, the official residence of the prefect. Normally, the prefect would reside in the capital of Palestine Caesarea, but on the occasion of major Jewish feasts, he took up residence in Jerusalem to be on hand in case of major law and order problems.

Pontius Pilate

He was prefect of Judea for ten years from AD 26–36. In St John’s Gospel he appears in the narrative without any explanation, so it is likely that he was a well known figure to this first-century audience.

Are you the King of the Jews?

What matters most to Pilate is to establish whether the person in front of him poses a real threat to the Roman Empire and risks disrupting law and order. Throughout his interrogation, Pilate does not disguise his enmity. His tone is hostile and confrontational. He is not interested in what Jesus might have done, but in who he is.

Trials of criminals would not normally have involved a high ranking official such as Pontius Pilate unless they were presumed guilty. The issue here is not about establishing guilt but determining punishment.

Mine is not a Kingdom of this world

Jesus establishes clearly the non-political and non-national nature of his Kingship. He is no threat to Rome. His reply uses arguments which Pilate could understand: he has no army of soldiers protecting him.

So you are a King?

Kingdom and Kingship are common themes throughout the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). Jesus is shown as the fulfilment of the long-awaited Messiah of the Old Testament. In John’s Gospel, however, the issue only becomes important in Chapter 18.

Yes, I am a King

Here Jesus defines the nature of his Kingship. The Kingdom ‘of this world’ and Jesus’s kingdom share the same space, but they differ in attitude and worldview. One is concerned with ruling with absolute power; the other with providing a leadership of service.

I was born to bear witness to the truth

The essence of Jesus’s kingship is to testify to the truth – that is, the absolute faithfulness of God.