

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

November 13, 2022 | *Christ, Our Cornerstone*

SERIES PREVIEW

Last year, Oakwood small groups studied the life of Jesus. One of the things we learned was that Jesus's life was part of a larger story that began long before He was born and will continue until after He comes again. All of human history centers on the man we profess to be the savior of the world. It is not surprising that Christians following Christ's ascension continue to define our lives in terms of Jesus's story. What may be surprising to many is that the generations before Christ's birth looked forward to His coming. This series will examine eight Old Testament passages that anticipate the first coming of Christ. Each lesson will identify the main idea of the passage and give special consideration to how the passage points to the first coming of Christ. May this series prepare your heart to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ!

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

Can you think of a time when God did not do what you wanted or expected? How did you respond?

Read Habakkuk.

Ask God to use Habakkuk to help you respond in faith when He does not do what you want or expect.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The psalmist believed God would remain faithful to His promise to David by anointing a righteous leader over His people.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

The psalmist calls us to marvel in God's faithfulness.

MEDITATE

“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone” (Psalm 118:22).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the lesson by overviewing the main point of Psalm 118.

Q: What do you notice about the beginning and end of Psalm 118?

Q: How would you describe the change that occurs between verses 5–18 and verses 19–29?

The opening verses of Psalm 118 reveal the main theme. God’s steadfast (covenant) love will endure forever. The response the psalmist anticipated is found in the first and last verse of the psalm, “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Psalm 118:1, 29) Between these verses, the psalmist uses two scenes to illustrate God’s covenant love for His people. The first scene takes place on a battlefield (Psalm 118:5–18). The fighting was intense. The enemy was poised to gain the upper hand, surrounding the psalmist on all sides (Psalm 118:10–12). Just when all seemed lost, God intervened to help him (Psalm 118:13), and he rejoiced in God’s salvation (Psalm 118:14–16). His life had been spared (Psalm 118:17–18). These verses illustrate God’s covenantal love in a desperate situation. If God can be trusted on the battlefield, He can be trusted anywhere.

At verse 19, the psalmist switched scenes while retaining the same concern. The second scene takes place during a religious festival. The psalmist had to enter through the gates God would open for him (Psalm 118:19–20). Again, he was focused on God’s salvation (Psalm 118:21), but the circumstances of his salvation are unclear. Perhaps there was an attempt to overthrow his leadership (Psalm 118:22). Whatever the case, the psalmist had plenty to celebrate on this occasion. We follow his procession from the gates to the place of sacrifice (Psalm 118:26–27). God’s faithfulness warranted his praise (Psalm 118:28).

In the New Testament, Psalm 118 becomes an integral part of the story of Jesus. It is one of the most cited or alluded to chapters of the Old Testament. But Psalm 118 also resonates within the book of Psalms and other places in the Old Testament. This lesson will explore how Psalm 118 works with the rest of Scripture to help us understand Christ’s life and work.

Q: *The psalmist reflected on two situations in which God’s covenantal love was evident. How have you seen God’s love evident in your life? Think of a recent and distant example.*

Q: *What situation do you need to see God’s faithful covenant love in right now?*

APPLICATION POINT – The psalmist marveled at God’s faithful covenant love. This should also be our response when we witness God’s faithfulness in our lives. Take time this week to reflect on how you have seen God’s love in action in your life and in the lives of others. Then praise Him for His faithfulness.

▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson examines how Psalm 118 functions within the book of Psalms, the Old Testament, and the New Testament. At each stage, it will be evident how Psalm 118 anticipates the coming of Jesus, His work, and His enduring importance for the church today.

1. PSALM 118 AND THE MESSAGE OF THE PSALMS
2. PSALM 118 AND THE OLD TESTAMENT
3. PSALM 118 AND THE REJECTION OF JESUS
4. PSALM 118 AND JESUS AS THE FOUNDATION

GOING DEEPER

+This section will proceed through the four points noted above and draw personal applications for the reader to consider.

1. PSALM 118 AND THE MESSAGE OF THE PSALMS

▣ PSALMS 89, 107, AND 118

Q: *What would the message of Psalm 118 have meant for the Jews in exile?*

Q: *What are the major covenants in the Old Testament to which God promised to remain faithful?*

The previous two lessons have emphasized the intentional design of the Psalms, and this idea remains important for understanding Psalm 118. The Psalms are divided into five books. Although these books do not affect how we number the psalms, most modern translations retain these divisions, so you will notice them as you read through the Psalms. The first two books (Psalms 1–72) are dominated by David. Most contain superscriptions that identify him as the author. Some superscriptions preserve the historical context in which he wrote the psalm, which offers a poetic reflection on David's life. The key moment in David's life, at least for the purposes of putting together the Bible's overarching storyline, was the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17). In this covenant, God promised to preserve David's line so that a member of his house would rule over God's people forever (2 Samuel 7: 12, 16; 1 Chronicles 17:11–14).

The Davidic kings ruled in Judah for about four centuries before the kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians and the people were exiled. This was a remarkable dynasty, but God promised that David's house would endure forever. Had His faithfulness to the covenant failed? We can see the same trajectory in the book of Psalms. Books 1 and 2 follow the ups and downs of David's life but end with a hopeful note concerning the king from David's line (Psalm 72). In Book 3, this hope begins to fade as Judah wrestled with the reality of exile and the fall of David's line. Psalm 89, the concluding psalm of Book 3, begins by recounting God's sure promises to David (Psalm 89:1–37) but concludes by lamenting His renunciation of the covenant (Psalm 89:39). Book 4 emphasizes God as the nation's king but retains glimmers of hope for David's house. Book 5 emphasizes God's eternal covenantal faithfulness again.

When Books 4 and 5 are read in the context of Book 3, it becomes apparent that these psalms are addressing the concern found in Psalm 89. Psalms 107–118 form the first section of Book 5. Psalm 107 begins "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!" These are the same words that begin and conclude Psalm 118, creating an envelope effect around Psalms 107–118, all of which affirm God's steadfast covenantal love. The message could not be clearer. Although Psalm 89 questions God's commitment to the Davidic covenant, Psalm 118 serves as the capstone affirming God's commitment to His covenantal love. Since Jesus was the Davidic king who fulfilled the Davidic covenant, there can be little wonder that the New Testament looked at Psalm 118 and saw Jesus.

Q: *How would our faith be different if we served a shifting, wavering god?*

Q: *How does Psalm 118 and its relationship to Psalm 89 warn against drawing firm conclusions about God based on your current situation?*

2. PSALM 118 AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

■ PSALMS 118; ISAIAH 28:14–19; ZECHARIAH 10:3–5

Q: *How does Psalm 118 correspond to Isaiah 28:14–19 and Zechariah 10:3–5?*

Q: *How does the leadership God provides contrast with current leadership?*

In the New Testament, the stone imagery found in Psalm 118:22 is applied to Christ. This may seem like an odd comparison to modern readers. Why would a stone become a major metaphor for understanding Christ? The answer stems from other Old Testament passages that contain the same metaphor. Both Isaiah 28:14–19 and Zechariah 10:3–5 refer to a cornerstone that forms the foundation of a kingdom in which justice and righteousness will overcome falsehood. In both books, this kingdom would replace former kingdoms that opposed God’s rule. The attentive reader of Psalms will recognize that this theme corresponds to the two “ways” presented throughout the Psalter. The reader will follow the way of the wicked or the way of the righteous (Psalm 1); the way of the Anointed or the way of the rulers of the earth (Psalm 2). Psalm 118 adds an element to these ideas in Isaiah and Zechariah. The rulers and leadership reject the stone that will become the foundation of God’s kingdom, which has important implications as we turn to the New Testament.

Q: *What does the presence of corruption and falsehood referenced in Isaiah 28 and Zechariah 10 reveal about the world?*

Q: *Why must God start over with a new foundation for the kingdom He will build?
Why is it impossible for corruption and falsehood to be part of God's kingdom?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is natural to believe the generation you are a part of is the most wicked generation in the history of the earth. Each successive generation seems to create new avenues for wickedness not dared by the previous generations. But the words of Isaiah and Zechariah reveal there is nothing truly new about evil. The people of their time dealt with corruption and falsehood in their days as we do in ours. Their kings rebelled against God as do the leaders in our world. While we should mourn over the wickedness of our generation, we should never despair that we are beyond God's grace.

3. PSALM 118 AND THE REJECTION OF JESUS

■ **1 SAMUEL 17:45; PSALM 118; MATTHEW 21; ACTS 4:1-12**

Q: *Who were Jesus's opponents in Matthew 21-23 [21:23, 45; 22:23; 23:13]?*

Q: *Why were they contesting Him?*

Matthew 21–23 picks up two themes from Psalm 118 and ties them to the ministry and work of Jesus. The first theme centers on the phrase “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 21:9). This phrase, shouted by the people during the triumphal entry, is a quotation of Psalm 118:26. This exact phrase, the one who “comes in the name of the Lord,” appears only two times in the Old Testament. In addition to Psalm 118:26, it also appears in 1 Samuel 17:45, at the climax of David's confrontation with Goliath. This connection draws attention to the parallels between David's confrontation with Goliath and Jesus's work on our behalf. David came in the name of the Lord to deliver the people of God from an enemy they were powerless against. This initial episode in the life of David presented him as a model of the ideal king. David continued to fill this role throughout the Old Testament. He, of course, was not perfect. He was only a model of the king that Israel yearned for and that God would raise up. By applying this statement to Jesus, Matthew identified Jesus as the ideal king over the people of God.

The people's recognition of Jesus as their long-awaited king aroused the indignation of the Jewish leaders. Throughout Matthew 21–23, Jesus was confronted by different groups among the Jewish elite (Matthew 21:23; 21:45; 22:23; 23:13). Furthermore, He shared parables that painted them in a negative light. In the middle of these altercations,

Jesus evaluated the nature of the opposition against Him by quoting Psalm 118:22–23 (Matthew 21:42). The Jewish elites had rejected Jesus, but He would become the cornerstone of God’s marvelous act of salvation.

Q: *In what ways are you guilty of rejecting Jesus?*

Q: *How does rejection of Jesus continue in the world today?*

APPLICATION POINT – The Jewish elites rejected Jesus as their king, but Psalm 118:22 is not exhausted by the unbelief of the Jewish elites. Jesus continues to be rejected today. Whenever someone, knowingly or unknowingly, rejects Jesus’s rule, they toss away the cornerstone of what God is doing on behalf of those who believe in Him. Their rejection of Christ does not, however, nullify what God continues to accomplish through Him.

Q: *How did Peter continue Jesus’s message in Acts 4:1–12?*

Q: *Why is the Jewish rejection of Jesus during Peter’s altercation more significant?*

Peter also referenced Psalm 118:22 in a confrontation with the Jewish elites. After being arrested for preaching the resurrection of Jesus in the temple, Peter and John were brought to testify before rulers, elders, scribes, and even the high priest (Acts 4:5). Before these Jewish elites, Peter identified Jesus as the stone they had rejected but who had become the cornerstone (Acts 4:11). Peter went on to tie Jesus’s work to God’s salvation (Acts 4:12). The rejection of Jesus by the Jewish elites on this occasion is even more significant because it occurred after the resurrection. They had all the evidence they needed to conclude that Jesus was from God, but they continued to reject Him.

Q: *Why would it have been understandable if Peter had been less confrontational in his speech?*

Q: *How will you respond to those who reject Jesus's lordship?*

APPLICATION POINT – Peter was in a precarious situation. He had been arrested and was testifying before the Jewish authorities, the same authorities who not long before had sentenced Jesus to death. It would have been understandable if Peter had chosen his words carefully. He did choose his words carefully but not in an effort to save himself. Rather, he confronted them with their unbelief. We will encounter people who have rejected Jesus as king. The temptation will be to save ourselves by being evasive about Him. Unlike Peter, most of us will be saving ourselves only from an awkward conversation. But without a witness like Peter's, those who reject Jesus now will have no hope of confessing faith in Him in the future. We need to follow Peter's example and witness boldly, because there is salvation in no one else.

4. PSALM 118 AND JESUS AS THE FOUNDATION

■ PSALM 118; EPHESIANS 2:19–22; 1 PETER 2:1–8

Q: *How did Paul use Psalm 118:22 to promote unity among the Ephesians?*

Q: *How did Peter use Psalm 118:22 to challenge believers to pursue unity?*

Psalm 118 takes center stage in explaining the ministry of Jesus, especially the Jewish rejection of Him. Paul and Peter extended the implications of Psalm 118 to the life of the church. In Ephesians 2:11–22, Paul revealed how the ministry of Jesus creates unity within the body of Christ, even among people of different nationalities and races. Christ's work on the cross demolished the old structures that previously had divided humanity (Ephesians 2:14). In their place, He is building a new household for God of which He is the cornerstone. This new household, the church, transcends the ethnic boundaries that previously divided them.

First Peter was written to encourage believers to pursue and maintain holy lives even in the face of persecution (1 Peter 1:14–16; 2:13–17). To encourage holiness among the readers, Peter described them as a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5), which we can presume to be a temple. As part of God's temple, the readers must live in holiness because Christ Himself is the cornerstone (1 Peter 2:6). Those who reject the cornerstone will not become a house but will stumble over the rock they reject (1 Peter 2:7–8).

Q: *How can you use the image of Christ as cornerstone to promote unity within your group and Oakwood?*

Q: *How can you use the image of Christ as cornerstone to encourage yourself and others toward personal holiness?*

APPLICATION POINT – What may have seemed like a very abstract and obscure passage has been shown to have unexpected practical implications for our lives and our churches. Unity and holiness are perhaps the two most essential marks of a healthy church. This also shows us that Christ is the foundation of a healthy church. You can focus on many things to grow a healthy church. Every church needs good leadership, facilities, covenants or by-laws, curriculum, and worship. Yet all these things are for nothing if Christ does not form the cornerstone of the church. This is a crucial point for members to remember when they are talking about Oakwood with others. Whatever else you say about your church, you need to lead with Christ as the centerpiece.


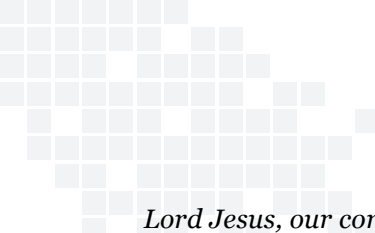
NEXT STEPS

Psalm 118:22–24 is remarkable for its simplicity and profundity. If you were to tell unbelievers that a verse discussing a stone and building decisions plays such a central role in the Bible, they would not believe you. This week, consider committing these verses to memory, along with the related references. These passages form a simple biblical theology of Christ, humanity, salvation, and the church. Learning this passage well will pay remarkable dividends.

PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, never let me deny your covenantal love. I have no other hope of goodness in this life or the next apart from the love you committed to me.



Lord Jesus, our cornerstone, you form the center of God's Word and our lives. May we never reject you. May we always proclaim you boldly.

Father, like the builders and the Jewish elite, I could have never recognized what you were doing in Christ apart from your grace in my life.