

# CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

December 4, 2022 | Seeing Jesus and His Mission

## 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

How does faith in Christ influence your life day-to-day?

Read Isaiah 61:1–6.

Pray this lesson will help you see Jesus's renewing work in your life.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The message and work of the Messiah is renewal.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

We are often satisfied with far less than what is ours in Christ Jesus.

### MEDITATE

*"But you shall be called the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast" (Isaiah 61:6).*

## GETTING STARTED

+Jesus quoted Isaiah 61:1–2 and applied these verses to His ministry (Luke 4:18–19). We are supposed to realize that all of Isaiah 61:1–6 describes the ministry of Jesus.

♀: *Have you ever returned to your hometown after significant time away? What was returning like? How did people receive you?*

♀: *How would you respond if someone told you they were going to become a famous athlete, movie star, or politician?*

Going home again after you have been away for a while can be an odd experience. You have changed, but the people you knew growing up do not know how. Imagine how Jesus felt when He returned to Nazareth (Luke 4:16–30). John the Baptist had declared Him to be “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). He had been baptized by John, had received the Holy Spirit, and had been spoken to by God and declared to be His beloved Son (Luke 3:21–22). He had been tempted by Satan and endured (Luke 4:1–13). And He showed up with an entourage of a dozen disciples.

To top everything off, He read from Isaiah 61:1–2, which was regarded as a messianic text, and declared that this text was being fulfilled in His ministry. What?! Imagine the reaction of those who remembered Jesus as a teenager or of the people who bought one of the carpentry works He made in His twenties. It would have been a lot for them to take in. Isaiah 61:1–6 foretells wonderful news. The question is whether they would believe it was fulfilled in Jesus.

♀: *Jesus was more than anyone in His hometown ever anticipated. Do you think Jesus could be more than anticipated?*

♀: *How do people make less of Jesus today than He deserves?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – We may have much more in common with the people of Jesus’s hometown than we realize. We did not see Jesus grow from a boy into manhood, but many of us have been familiar with Jesus all our lives. Even if you are new to the Christian faith, you have probably heard stories about Jesus from people who have known Him a long time, much like newcomers to Nazareth. We think we know what Jesus is all about, but

when He shows up and we take a deeper look, we discover that we have made Him far less than He claimed to be in this passage. Jesus is more than the one who can help you through your day or a challenging situation. He is the Messiah. He is the one who will bring restoration to God's people and to God's creation. The goal of this lesson is to help you embrace the whole of what Jesus came to do. You do not want to settle for less from Jesus than what He claimed when He quoted Isaiah 61:1–2.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1–6. This lesson will examine this text to understand Jesus and His ministry. The text can be divided into the Messiah's message (Isaiah 61:1–3) and the Messiah's people (Isaiah 61:4–6).

1. THE MESSIAH'S MESSAGE
2. THE MESSIAH'S PEOPLE

### GOING DEEPER

*+This section will examine the two parts of Isaiah 61:1–6. Several connections to the gospel as well as to other points in Isaiah will be considered.*

## 1. THE MESSIAH'S MESSAGE

### ■ ISAIAH 61:1–3

**Q:** *How does the speaker describe himself in Isaiah 61:1?*

**Q:** *Why is it easy for Jesus to assume the voice of the speaker in Isaiah 61:1–2?*

Isaiah 61:1–6 is a direct address from an unknown speaker. The text has little connection to what comes before and after, so there is not much context with which to identify the speaker. The speaker's own words, however, offer the attentive reader of Isaiah a clue to his identity. He claimed the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. Throughout Isaiah, the Spirit rested on specific individuals called to do God's work. In Isaiah 11:1–2, the Spirit rested on a branch from the stump of Jesse, referring to an expected royal figure who would emerge from David's line. In Isaiah 42:1, God

put His Spirit on the servant who would establish justice in the land. In Isaiah 48:15–16, God put His Spirit upon the one He called. If we follow the cues the book of Isaiah gives us, we will recognize the speaker in Isaiah 61 is the Spirit-anointed king and Spirit-anointed servant mentioned throughout the book.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament, “Spirit filling” and “anointing” are used only in royal contexts (1 Samuel 10:1–7; 16:13; 2 Samuel 23:1–7). This further strengthens the tie of the speaker in Isaiah 61:1–6 to the previous Spirit-filled royal figures in the book (Isaiah 9:1–7; Isaiah 11:1–9). It is with good reason that Jesus took up the voice of the speaker in Isaiah 61:1–6. It is the Spirit-filled, anointed servant king who was speaking.

❓: *Why is it important to identify the speaker in Isaiah 61:1–6?*

❓: *How is the Trinity apparent in the Isaiah 61:1?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Christians should not fail to notice all three members of the Trinity at work in Isaiah 61:1. The (Holy) Spirit fills the One (the Son) who is anointed by the Lord (the Father). It is not necessary for the Old Testament writers to have had a comprehensive understanding of the Trinity. It is unlikely they did, but it is remarkable that the Old Testament is consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity and at times even subtly alludes to it. This gives Christians great confidence in the one voice underlying the entirety of Scripture. The Bible truly is the Word of God.

❓: *What is the context of Luke 4:18–19? Why is the placing of the story significant?*

❓: *How is Luke 7:22 related to Isaiah 61:1?*

The speaker outlined a remarkable ministry for Himself. He would bring good news to the poor, bind up the broken hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, open the prisons, proclaim God’s favor, and comfort all who mourn. By quoting Isaiah 61:1–2, Jesus made this the outline of His ministry (Luke 4:17–19). In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus’s teaching in Nazareth appears at the beginning of His ministry, immediately after His baptism and temptation. Luke’s placement of this passage is remarkable because it is clearly out of chronology. Matthew (13:54–58) and Mark (6:1–6) each place this story well into Jesus’s ministry. Luke’s departure from chronology places this Isaiah quotation at the outset of Jesus’s ministry. Luke was setting the stage for what was to come.

In addition to this story's placement, Luke also expanded it well beyond what is recorded in Matthew and Mark, further emphasizing the importance he placed on Jesus's message in Nazareth.

Jesus also used Isaiah 61:1–6 to form part of His response when John the Baptist questioned whether He was the Messiah. He told John's disciples to report the things they had seen as evidence of who He was. One of the things they were to report was that “the poor have good news preached to them” (Luke 7:22). This is the very thing Jesus promised to do in Luke 4:18 and that appears in Isaiah 61:1.

Q: *How would you describe the speaker's message? Is it highly theological or practical?*

Q: *Why is the speaker of this message as important as the message itself?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – You may think that if Isaiah were to encapsulate the message of the Messiah into a few statements, he would focus on a crucial theological point. But Isaiah focused on the practical ministry the Messiah came to do. Jesus's ministry had real implications for normal people and for those who were in need. This is important for Christians to remember as we seek to minister to a lost world. We can get so wrapped up in making people think right that we forget to show them how the gospel makes all the difference in their day-to-day lives.

Q: *What exchanges take place because of the speaker's ministry in Isaiah 61:3?*

Q: *What is the meaning of the “oaks of righteousness” in this verse?*

After describing the target of His ministry, the speaker described three great exchanges His ministry would create. Instead of mourning in ashes, the people would celebrate with an adorned headdress. Instead of being consumed with mourning, they would be glad. Instead of a doubting, tired spirit, they would resound with praise to God.

The people who receive the speaker's ministry would ultimately be given a new name. They would be called “oaks of righteousness.” The oak tree symbolizes strength and stability. The mention of these oaks calls the

attentive reader's attention to the oaks in Isaiah 1:29–31. These withered oaks symbolize unrepentant Israel (Isaiah 1:30), but the speaker's ministry would restore them to life.

❓: *What sorrows would you like to exchange?*

❓: *How does your life in Christ exhibit strength and stability?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Paul instructed the church to “rejoice always.” This is a natural implication of the speaker's ministry. The things that would cause us sorrow have been removed by the ministry of the Messiah and replaced with elements of joy. Thus, Christians are able to follow Paul's command to rejoice always.

## 2. THE MESSIAH'S PEOPLE

### ■ ISAIAH 61:4–6

❓: *What are the ancient ruins mentioned in Isaiah 61:4?*

❓: *Why would the speaker's ministry include rebuilding ancient ruins?*

At verse 4, the speaker shifted from describing His ministry to what His ministry would empower the people to do. He began by describing the rebuilding of ancient ruins and repair of ruined cities. Since the prophecies from this section of Isaiah are typically taken to have the return from exile in view, it would seem the ruins of Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah are indicated. This is affirmed by the ministry of the people described in verse 6. The non-descript nature of verse 4 suggests that the focus is the act of rebuilding rather than the location. God, through the ministry of the speaker mediated to the people, would restore what had been ruined. This conclusion is affirmed by the restoration of the people to the office of priest in verse 6. The buildings of Jerusalem would be destroyed again and again, but the speaker's ministry would initiate a renewal among God's people that would endure.

Q: *How is this renewal evident within the body of Christ?*

Q: *How does the concept of renewal reveal God's commitment to His people?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – God created humanity in His image and to fulfill His purposes on earth. But sin has wrecked humanity, both corporately and individually. God has not given up on you. The ministry of Jesus brings renewal to your life and enables you to achieve the purpose for which God created you.

Q: *How does the context of return from exile inform us about how to read verse 5?*

Q: *What would Israel's defeat at the hands of the nations have signified concerning God, at least in the minds of those nations?*

Verse 5 must likewise be understood within the context of Israel's exile and return. Apart from this context, it could seem as though these strangers and foreigners would become Israel's slaves, tending their flocks and fields. This was certainly not the case, however. Before, Israel was defeated and oppressed by foreign nations. They were exiled across the ancient Near East. But because of the ministry of the speaker, Israel would no longer be oppressed by foreign nations. Instead, those formerly in power would serve those previously oppressed. As will be evident in verse six, verse five does not simply allude to a role reversal.

There is another dynamic underlying verse 5. In the polytheistic ancient Near East, when one nation conquered another, it was a sign that their gods were stronger than the gods of the falling nation. This was not the outlook of the Old Testament. The God of Israel raised up other nations as judgment against His people (Jeremiah 25:8–9; Habakkuk 1:6). God is in ultimate control of the nations. When the strangers and foreigners served the people of Israel returned from exile, this point would be obvious for all to see.

Q: *If Jesus came to give liberty to the oppressed, why does so much oppression*

*remain in the world today?*

**Q:** *In an age when so many people doubt God's power and even His existence, why does He not act to show His control over the world?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – These studies have focused on passages pertaining to Jesus's first coming. Since Jesus was fulfilling Isaiah 61:1–6 at the outset of His earthly ministry, this passage certainly fits within the scope of His first coming, but it is important to remember that the Old Testament writers rarely distinguish neatly between Jesus's first and second coming. Jesus began to fulfill Isaiah 61:1–6 during His earthly ministry. He did bring good news to the poor (Luke 6:20). He ministered to those suffering from broken hearts. He freed those who were captive to sin. These verses will not, however, be fully fulfilled until Jesus returns. The poor will remain until Christ returns. So will people with disabilities and the oppressed. When Jesus returns, He will bring His ministry to a conclusion. He will reveal God's rule to be uncontested.

**Q:** *What is the role of a priest?*

**Q:** *How do Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:9 show the trajectory of Isaiah 61:6?*

Isaiah says the people will be known as priest of the Lord (Isaiah 61:6). This is a return to their former role at the outset of the nation (Exodus 19:6). The primary role of a priest in the Old Testament is to serve God. The nation of Israel would be God's servants again. Isaiah's prophecy is ultimately fulfilled in the church. First Peter 2:9 calls the church a royal priesthood. Although Jesus did not continue to quote Isaiah 61:6, His ministry accomplished the fulfillment of these verses as well.

**Q:** *The role of a priest is to serve God. How can you serve God today?*

**Q:** *How will our role as priest look different than the role of priest in the old covenant?*



**APPLICATION POINT** – In the Old Testament, the priests performed a variety of tasks in the service of God and in the temple. Today, Christians do not have a physical temple in which we carry out rituals for God. Instead, we join Christ in His mission by making disciples for Him (Matthew 28:19–20). In this manner, we fulfill our role as priest by serving God. Disciple-making looks different for everyone one of us, but Jesus commissions us to be actively involved in making disciples of Him.

## NEXT STEPS

Isaiah 61:1–6 previews Jesus’s ministry. His ministry continues into the present and will continue until it is completely fulfilled by Him in the future. As Jesus’s followers, we are called to participate in His ministry until He returns. Write down how you are participating in each element outlined in Isaiah 61:1–2. In what ways is your participation in Jesus’s ministry lacking? How can you participate in Jesus’s ministry more fully? Write down your plan.

## PRAY

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

*God, you are at work through your Son to bring renewal to a lost and dying world. Thank you for what you are doing. We do not deserve your grace.*

*Lord Jesus, help me participate in your ministry as fully as I am able. Keep me from making your ministry about me and what I am accomplishing.*

*Father, you have made us priests to serve you. By your grace, keep me faithful in service to you.*

*Jesus, part of what you came to do was to warn those who resist you of the coming day of God’s vengeance. This makes the world angry and me uncomfortable, but I dare not back down from this truth.*



# CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

December 11, 2022 | Christ, The Sign of Our Deliverance

## 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

What Scripture passages do you most often hear at Christmas (think Old and New Testament)?

Read Isaiah 7:1–16.

Ask God to help you see when you are exchanging His deliverance for something less.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God is a surer source of deliverance than anything this world can provide.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

God has provided deliverance from sin through His Son, Jesus Christ.

### MEDITATE

*“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).*

## GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the main idea of the lesson and the passage's connection to Christ.

Q: *Why are Christians more cognizant of the Old Testament's witness to Christ at Christmas than at other times of the year?*

Q: *Can you describe a time when you were saved by either a person, a device, or a circumstance?*

Christmas is a time when Christians celebrate the birth of Christ. More so than during the rest of the year, we are aware of the Old Testament's witness concerning His coming because our minds are drawn to the verses that anticipate His birth. One verse we frequently encounter is Isaiah 7:14 because it is quoted in Matthew 1:23. In this verse, Matthew declared that Jesus's birth fulfilled Isaiah 7:14 because He was born of a virgin, and His coming meant God was now with His people. But Isaiah 7:14 is not an isolated verse that floated around until Matthew applied it to the birth of Jesus. These words are part of an amazing message promising God's deliverance of His people. Understanding the entire message that Isaiah 7:14 is a part of will help us appreciate what Matthew was doing when he applied this verse to the birth of Jesus.

As we explore Isaiah 7:1–16, we will see that the main idea of this passage is “trusting God over other forms of deliverance.” This was a crucial theme during the times of Isaiah and Matthew. It is a crucial theme for our time as well.

Q: *What do you need to be delivered from?*

Q: *How is your need for deliverance different but similar to that of the audiences of Isaiah and Matthew?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Isaiah 7:1–16 and Matthew 1:23 anticipate God's deliverance of His people. Their audiences needed deliverance from foreign powers and their own covenantal failures. It is unlikely that we share their need for deliverance from a foreign power, but we do need deliverance from our own sins against God. Romans 3:23 declares that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. This means everyone—regardless of social, economic, or any other status—needs to be delivered from the grip of sin. Isaiah speaks to us from his

own time to tell us to look to God for deliverance. Our temptation is to look for deliverance somewhere other than God, but as was the case for Isaiah's audience, this will never work.

## ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This passage begins with a sketch of the historical situation in which the prophecy was given (Isaiah 7:1–2) followed by God's instructions to Isaiah (Isaiah 7:3–9). The Lord, presumably using Isaiah as His mouthpiece, then declared the sign of Immanuel to the king (Isaiah 7:10–16). This lesson will consider the historical situation and God's instructions to Isaiah together and then consider the sign of Immanuel.

### 1. ISAIAH'S SITUATION

### 2. ISAIAH'S SIGN

## GOING DEEPER

*+This section will discuss the meaning of Isaiah 7:1–9 and 7:10–16 and draw applications from it for our times.*

### 1. ISAIAH'S SITUATION

#### ■ ISAIAH 7:1–9 AND 2 KINGS 16

**Q:** *What kind of king [good or evil] was Ahaz?*

**Q:** *Where did Ahaz seek deliverance from the Syria-Ephraim alliance?*

The context of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy is the Syria-Ephraim alliance's threat to the nation of Judah. Syria, located to the northwest of Israel, was a frequent adversary to Israel and Judah during the eighth and ninth centuries B.C. Ephraim is another name for the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the nation split. Where the Southern Kingdom of Judah was occasionally faithful to God, Ephraim was never faithful to the covenant with God, even despite frequent prophetic activity. During Isaiah's time, the king of Ephraim, Pekahiah, was assassinated by

one of his captains, Pekah, who then became king of Ephraim (2 Kings 15:23–26). Pekah formed an alliance with Syria in order to withstand the threat of Assyria, which was the superpower of the ancient Near East at the time. The Syria-Ephraim alliance attempted to gather other nearby nations, including Judah, to help them stand against Assyria, but when Ahaz, king of Judah, refused to join them, they attacked Judah with the intent of replacing Ahaz with a king who would bow to their wishes (Isaiah 7:6).

Ahaz realized Judah was overmatched against the Syria-Ephraim alliance. Isaiah says Ahaz’s heart shook as a tree in the wind (Isaiah 7:2). To find deliverance from this alliance, Ahaz went to Assyria, the nation Syria and Ephraim were afraid of, to beg for help (2 Kings 16:5–9). Isaiah opposed his plan. Although the need for deliverance was obvious, Isaiah believed Judah must look to God for deliverance rather than Assyria. Consorting with Assyria would only increase the nation’s spiritual decay.

- ❓ *Why is it more appealing to find our own solutions to our problems than trust in God?*
- ❓ *Can you describe a time when your solution to a problem only made things worse?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –When we encounter challenges and need deliverance, we often think like Ahaz did. Our first instinct is to scheme to find our own way of deliverance. The problem when we rely on ourselves is that our sinful hearts often lead to sinful decisions that make matters worse for us, not better. Our instinct is to solve unrighteousness with unrighteousness. We justify our own unrighteousness by thinking it was needed to solve the problems we were facing. Isaiah’s message for us would be the same as it was for Ahaz. Do not look within yourself for deliverance. Do not trust in others for deliverance. Our only hope is to look to God for the deliverance we need. He should be our first instinct when we need to be delivered from any situation or out of any sin.

- ❓ *Who did God tell Isaiah to take with him when he confronted Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3)?*
- ❓ *What does Isaiah’s son’s name mean?*

Before turning to the sign of Immanuel, a few more details concerning Isaiah’s confrontation with Ahaz will be helpful to discuss. God instructed Isaiah to take his son Shear-jashub with him to confront Ahab (Isaiah 7:3).

Shear-jashub is not mentioned in the remainder of the narrative. It does not seem as though he had an active role in the encounter. Why did God tell Isaiah to bring him? The key is the meaning of the boy's name. "Shear-jashub" means "a remnant shall return," an allusion to the exile of Judah. A remnant of Judah would return from exile. There are two sides of his name. Knowing a remnant would return from exile would provide hope for a people facing or in the midst of exile, but before the exile took place, the name would also be a warning or condemnation to all who knew the boy. Isaiah proclaimed God's willingness to deliver Judah from the Syrian-Ephraim alliance (though Ahaz did not listen), but Shear-jashub's presence would have warned Ahaz of the limits of God's deliverance. God would work in their favor this time, but they should not assume this would always be the case. There would be a time in the future when God would work against the sinful nation. They needed to repent while God continued to look on them with favor.

❏: *Why do we often assume current prosperity indicates God's pleasure with us?*

❏: *Why would God deliver Judah in this situation even though He planned to exile them in the future? What does this reveal about God's character?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – It would be natural to assume that God's deliverance from a situation implies His approval, but Isaiah's confrontation with Ahaz reveals this is not the case. God was willing to deliver Ahaz from the Syria-Ephraim alliance, but He certainly did not approve of Ahaz. Ahaz was an extremely wicked king. His wickedness and the wickedness of several kings after him is what would lead to Judah's exile. God is gracious to be patient with us to repent, but there will come a time when the opportunity for repentance is over. We should never make the mistake of thinking our deliverance out of a situation or a life of relative ease is a sign of our righteousness. Our righteousness is not determined by our circumstances but by our obedience to God.

❏: *What did God say would come of the Syria-Ephraim alliance?*

❏: *What warning did Isaiah give Ahaz after he said the alliance would not stand?*

God declared through Isaiah that the Syria-Ephraim alliance would not stand because both nations would be defeated and abolished within sixty-five years. The duration of sixty-five years would not mean much to Ahaz or the rest of the royal family in the moment. That was plenty of time for the alliance to gain victory over them. But God's declaration implied that the alliance posed no real threat to Judah. Even though the odds seemed insurmountable, the danger would not last, just as the nations would not last. There would be no real threat to

Judah if Ahaz would trust in God. This is a remarkable revelation of God's providence. Although the kings of Syria and Ephraim thought they were gaining control of their own fates by forming this alliance, nothing they could do would stop their downfall because God had ordained it.

♀: *How does God's providence give us confidence regarding His deliverance of us?*

♀: *How does God's providence underline the insufficiency of our attempts to find deliverance on our own?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Life happens to us moment by moment. We can plan for the future, but even the most strategic plans often come to nothing. That is why we are so bad at trying to deliver ourselves. We need a surer hope of deliverance, and God's providence provides us with that hope. Nothing takes God by surprise. No matter what challenges we face or what circumstances arise, we can have confidence knowing God is in control. If He ordains our deliverance from a situation, nothing can override His will.

## 2. ISAIAH'S SIGN

### ☐ ISAIAH 7:10–16, MATTHEW 1:18–25

♀: *How did Ahaz respond when he was told to ask for a sign from God?*

♀: *Do you think Ahaz was being pious or disobedient in his response?*

The Lord directed Ahaz, again presumably through the mouth of Isaiah, to ask for a sign. Before getting to the details of this sign and how it is related to the first coming of Christ, it is important to consider Ahaz's response. Ahaz refused to ask for a sign because he would not put God to the test (Isaiah 7:12). At first glance, his refusal seems pious. He was alluding to Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." But even a cursory consideration of the context exposes his piety as completely false. He was a wicked, idolatrous king (2 Kings 16:1–4). He did not want a sign from God because he did not want any reason to trust God. He wanted to trust Assyria instead. Furthermore, it is God who demanded he ask for a sign. Refusing to do so would seemingly test God more than following His command. Finally, God lamented Ahaz's refusal as wearisome (Isaiah 7:13). His



refusal to ask God for a sign was false piety at its worst.

♀: *Why do people think they can get away with false piety?*

♀: *How does false piety multiply one sin with another?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –False piety reveals a lot about what a person thinks about God. It emerges either from a heart seeking to impress others rather than God or from thinking God will not know the difference. In the first instance, the person denies God’s worthiness of such devotion and idolizes the opinion of others. In the second, the person denies God’s ability to truly examine the human heart. God will not allow either attitude to remain long. You may fool others, but you will not fool God. He can see through false piety. Oddly, false piety multiplies transgressions because not only are you not pious, but you are also adding sin by trying to appear pious. If you struggle with false piety, the key is to follow Jesus’s suggestion in Matthew 6:6, the practice of prayer and Bible reading in private.

♀: *How does the birth of the child correspond to God’s deliverance of Judah from the Syria-Ephraim alliance?*

♀: *In what ways were the circumstances surrounding Jesus’s birth like the circumstances surrounding the Syria-Ephraim alliance?*

The sign Isaiah gave Ahaz is the birth of a child (Isaiah 7:14). Before the child learned right from wrong (Isaiah 7:15), the threat would be over and the two kingdoms would be no more. Even though Ahaz refused to trust God, Isaiah’s prophecy came to pass. The kingdoms of Syria and Ephraim lasted only twelve to fifteen more years before they were conquered and dispersed by Assyria. Isaiah 7:14 has often been taken as a prediction of the birth of Christ. This interpretation stems from a quotation of this verse in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 1:22–23 says, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.” Since Matthew said the birth of Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s words, Isaiah must have been predicting the birth of Christ.

There are difficulties with this interpretation, however, that may lead us away from this explanation of Isaiah 7:14. First, taking Isaiah 7:14 as a prediction of Christ’s birth does not fit well with the context of Isaiah 7:1–16. This

passage is about the Syria-Ephraim alliance and how Ahaz would respond. The birth of the child mentioned in Isaiah 7:14 was supposed to be a sign to Ahaz to trust God for deliverance from the alliance rather than relying on help from Assyria. Isaiah did not seem to think he was making a prediction of the birth of Christ that would occur hundreds of years later. Instead, he seemed to be giving a tangible sign of God's faithfulness to Ahaz. Second, the birth of this child appears to coincide with the downfall of Syria and Ephraim and the deliverance God promised for Judah (Isaiah 7:16). This would not be the case if these words were a prediction of the birth of Jesus hundreds of years later. Finally, the key for identifying Isaiah 7:14 with Jesus is the word "virgin." Who else could possibly fit this criterion except Christ, who was born of the virgin Mary? The problem is that the Hebrew term *almah*, which underlies the translation "virgin," does not emphasize a girl's virginity. Instead, the term emphasizes that a girl had reached child-bearing age. It refers to a young woman who was capable of bearing a child. Thus, "virgin" is not really a suitable translation. Even if an *almah* was a virgin, it would have been understood she was no longer a virgin once she gave birth to the child Isaiah predicted.

If Isaiah 7:14 was not a prediction of Christ's birth, why does Matthew say Christ's birth fulfills Isaiah 7:14? The key to understanding Matthew is understanding what he meant by "fulfillment." The word "fulfill" does not have to refer only to prophetic predictions coming to fruition. "Fulfill" can also refer to an event or person that follows a previously established pattern. This is typological fulfillment. And it appears that in his account of Jesus's birth, Matthew was mostly concerned with showing how Jesus fulfilled types and patterns found in the Old Testament. Matthew's concern for typological fulfillment in the birth narrative is most clearly seen in Matthew 2:18, which says the slaughter of baby boys around Bethlehem at King Herod's command fulfilled Jeremiah 31:15. Jeremiah 31:15 is not a predictive prophecy at all but rather a lamentation of the destruction of Israel. Matthew saw a pattern that began with the death of Jewish children during the exile and was then fulfilled by the death of Jewish children at the time of Jesus.

What pattern did Matthew see in Isaiah 7:14 that was fulfilled by Jesus's birth? In Isaiah's day, God's people were being threatened by a foreign power (the Syria-Ephraim alliance). To make matters worse, they were ruled by a wicked king (Ahaz) who refused to receive God's word. Isaiah foresaw their deliverance and tied their deliverance to the birth of a son from a young woman. This woman's son would be a sign of God's faithful presence with the people, and thus he would be called Immanuel. In Jesus's day, God's people were being threatened by a foreign power (Rome) and ruled by a wicked king (Herod) who refused to listen to God's word. Just as in Isaiah's day, God would deliver His people, and His deliverance would be tied to the birth of a son from a young woman. The birth of this son was a sign of God's deliverance and His presence with His people, and He could thus be known as Immanuel. Unlike Isaiah's day, however, the child born would not be a sign of God's deliverance; instead, He would be the means by which God would bring deliverance. Furthermore, unlike Isaiah's day, the child born would not just be a sign of God's presence but, as Jesus is the Son of God, He would be God's presence with His people. Finally, Matthew affirmed that Christ was born from a virgin (Matthew 1:18–25), which was not the case for Isaiah. Remarkably, the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Matthew used, translated *almah* with the Greek word *parthenos*, which does mean "virgin." Thus, Matthew had a translation of

Isaiah 7:14 that highlighted the typological correspondence he was seeking.

Matthew saw that Christ fulfilled a pattern that began in the Old Testament in a new and more meaningful way. Christ's story does not begin in the New Testament. It can be traced back to the Old. Matthew's audience could trust the deliverance Jesus provided just as Isaiah's audience could trust the deliverance the child was a sign of.

**Q:** *How might a typological fulfillment between Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23 offer us a more meaningful application than a prediction fulfillment?*

**Q:** *How does Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 further highlight the emphasis on God's providence in Isaiah 7:1-16?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – In Isaiah's time, the king should have trusted God to deliver him from the foreign alliance seeking to destroy him. In a similar way, Matthew wanted his audience to know that the ultimate deliverance they needed could be found in Jesus Christ. They did not need to look anywhere else for deliverance from sin and death. This is a crucial point for people today to understand. We should never look inside of ourselves for deliverance or to any other false savior the world offers. Our hope must be found in Christ Jesus. Just as God was faithful to deliver His people during the time of Isaiah, He will be faithful to deliver everyone who seeks deliverance from sin and death in Jesus Christ. Do not look anywhere else for salvation. Do not reject the Savior God has given us.

## NEXT STEPS

Ahaz wanted to secure his own deliverance rather than trusting in God. Today, we are tempted to replace the deliverance offered to us in Jesus Christ with other worldly things. Some people think money will deliver them from life's trials. Others seek thrills or throw themselves into work. How are you tempted to replace the deliverance offered in Christ? Sometimes, we are blind to how we do this. It may be helpful to have this conversation with a trusted friend.



## PRAY

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

God, thank you for being a constant source of deliverance in my life.

Jesus, all of history revolves around you. Help me to understand my story in relation to you.

Father, forgive me for the times I have failed to trust you for salvation. Help me to trust in your deliverance in the future.

# CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

December 18, 2022 | *The Birth of the Messiah*

## 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

Why do Christians pay so much attention to Jesus's birth? Isn't it His death and resurrection that is important?

Read Isaiah 9:1–7.

Ask God to help you find peace in the Prince of Peace.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Isaiah foresaw the birth of a messianic king who would end the nation's suffering.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Jesus is God's answer for the problems we face.

### MEDITATE

*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+This section will consider the New Testament's use of Isaiah 9:1–7 and affirm the main point of this lesson, that Isaiah foresaw the birth of the messianic king.*

- ❓ *Which of the verses in Isaiah 9:1–7 would you most expect to find quoted in the New Testament?*
- ❓ *Isaiah 9:1–2 is quoted in Matthew 4:15–16. What is the significance of this time in Jesus's ministry?*

Isaiah 9:1–7 is one of the clearest prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, His ministry, and His divine nature. Given the clarity of this prophecy, especially in verses 6–7, its rare usage in the New Testament is surprising. Matthew 4:15–16 is a quotation of Isaiah 9:1–2. At first, this may seem rather mundane. Matthew 4:12–17 is merely describing the early movements of Jesus's ministry. But Matthew was surely making a significant point. The events of this passage occur immediately after Jesus's baptism (Matthew 3:13–17) and His temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11). It is the beginning of His ministry. By tying Jesus's ministry to Isaiah 9:1–7 from the outset, Matthew was identifying it with the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1–7 (Matthew 4:14).

Surprisingly, Isaiah 9:6–7, the heart of this messianic prophecy, is not quoted in the New Testament. The closest allusion to Isaiah 9:6 comes in the angel's announcement to the shepherds in Luke 2:11. This hesitancy to quote Isaiah 9:6–7 may reflect the practice of Jesus's early teaching. Although Jesus's ministry was controversial from the start, during His early ministry He often guarded the nature of His identity as the Messiah. He focused more on building an effective teaching ministry and calling attention to what God was going to do for His people. Rather than shouting from the rooftops that He was the Messiah, Jesus hinted at His identity before finally confirming it to His followers and the world. By quoting Isaiah 9:1–2, Matthew surely intended to hint that the one who fulfilled these verses would also be the fulfillment of the rest of Isaiah 9:1–7.

- ❓ *Isaiah gave this prophecy to a people in great need. Matthew applied it to Christ in a time of great need. How is Christ the answer to the problems we face today?*
- ❓ *Does the absence of a quotation of Isaiah 9:6–7 diminish its value as a messianic prophecy in your mind?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Isaiah gave this messianic prophecy to provide hope for the people during foreign oppression. By applying these verses to Jesus, Matthew pointed to Him as the bringer of that hope. Jesus is also the provider of our hope today. We look back to the hope He provided us on the cross. We look forward to the hope He will bring at His return. We have even more reason to find our hope in Christ.

## ❏ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Isaiah 9:1–7 can be divided into two parts. The first part describes the momentous change God will bring to His stricken people (Isaiah 9:1–5). The second part identifies how He will bring this change (Isaiah 9:6–7). The key word in the transition between the two passages is the word “for” beginning Isaiah 9:6.

1. THE CHANGE
2. THE CAUSE

### GOING DEEPER

*+The rest of this lesson will briefly describe the change taking place among God’s people before discussing verses 6 and 7 in more detail and offer several personal applications.*

## 1. THE CHANGE

### ❏ ISAIAH 9:1–5

- 🔍: *What metaphor did Isaiah use to describe the current condition of the people and their future hope [verse 2]? Where else does this metaphor appear?*
- 🔍: *What happened on the day of the battle against Midian [Judges 7:19–25]?*

At the outset of this passage, Isaiah envisioned a time of widespread distress and oppression. He certainly had in mind the Assyrian invasion referenced earlier (Isaiah 8:1–10) but also future times of foreign oppression. Isaiah described it as a time of darkness, but the darkness would not last. Light would come and dispel the darkness. This darkness/light metaphor appears throughout Scripture. It is perhaps most well-known from the Gospel of John

(John 1:8), but it is found at other points in the New Testament (Luke 1:79; Ephesians 5:8, 14) and in the Old (Isaiah 42:16; 60:1–3). Isaiah also spoke of the removal of oppression. Just as Gideon defeated Midian (Judges 7:19–25), the oppressors of God’s people would be broken. Their boots and garments would be burned (Isaiah 9:5). The end of oppression would coincide with great joy among the people.

**Q:** *Do you ever feel as though God does not know or understand the hardships you face or the injustice in the world?*

**Q:** *How is the joy Christ brings evident in your life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –When we encounter hardships or see injustice prevailing over others, it can often feel as though God does not know or does not care. These feelings can lead to questions about God’s existence or even feelings of animosity toward Him. The Bible, including Isaiah 9:1–5, consistently maintains that God does see our sorrows. He does see injustice in the world. And one day He will act decisively to judge all such deeds and comfort His people (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4).

## 2. THE CAUSE

### ■ ISAIAH 9:6-7

**Q:** *What is a counselor?*

**Q:** *How do you use the word “wonderful”? What limits do you place on using it?*

Isaiah tied the reversal of darkness and oppression to the birth of a messianic figure. He would rule over the people of God with justice and righteousness. Isaiah identified the Messiah by four titles. These titles explain the effectiveness of His rule and also hint His divine nature.

The first title is “Wonderful Counselor.” We use the word “wonderful” to describe things or circumstances we find extremely good or remarkable. The Messiah will certainly be extremely good and remarkable, but our typical usage of the word fails to capture an important dynamic of the underlying Hebrew word, *pele*. This Hebrew word is



usually reserved for contexts describing the actions of God (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 25:1; 29:14). The one place this connection is not immediately obvious, Lamentations 1:9, is likely meant to imply that God had a hand in Israel's downfall. This alone would suggest that the Messiah would give divine counsel for the people, but as these titles progress, there is certainly reason to wonder whether the counselor Himself might be divine. These two words, "Wonderful Counselor" are used to describe God Himself in Isaiah 28:29.

Q: *The figure in Isaiah 9:6-7 is royal in nature. What is the significance of calling him counselor?*

Q: *We often face situations in which we are uncertain what the best path forward is. How can Jesus help us navigate these times of uncertainty?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –For Jesus to be a “counselor” is quite remarkable. Considering His importance within the grand story God is unfolding within history, it would be perfectly understandable if Jesus did not have time for the specific concerns people face. But if we will place Him at the center of our lives, He will guide us to make decisions that honor Him and cause us to flourish.

Q: *Why would some scholars question whether the title “Mighty God” was intended to ascribe deity to the Messiah?*

Q: *How do verses like Deuteronomy 10:17; Isaiah 10:20-21; and Jeremiah 32:18 confirm that Isaiah recognized the divinity of the Messiah?*

If the first title hints at the Messiah's divinity, the second declares it explicitly. Many scholars who find it inconceivable for Isaiah to attribute deity to the Messiah argue for a non-literal meaning for the title “Mighty God.” They want to treat the word “God” as though it were an adjective and suggest that Isaiah meant “god-like” or “remarkable.” There is no warrant for this reading, however, especially when the word “God” is modified by an adjective, as it is in Isaiah 9:6, unless the reader has predetermined this could not be what Isaiah is saying.

God is often described as “mighty” in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalms 24:8; Zephaniah 3:17). The same title as it appears in Isaiah 9:6 is also found in Isaiah 10:20-21 (see also Deuteronomy 10:17 and Jeremiah 32:18), affirming the conclusion that Isaiah believed the Messiah to be divine.

- Q: *Why is it important that the divinity of Christ is confirmed in the Old Testament?*
- Q: *What theological difference would it make if Jesus were merely human and not divine?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – It is helpful for Christians to see the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. There are some matters that are not clearly revealed in the Old Testament. For example, Paul referred to a mystery that was revealed in the coming of Christ (Ephesians 3:1–13). From the Old Testament alone it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish between the first and second coming of Jesus and between the millennial reign of Christ and the final eschatological state. But when we see continuity between the Old and New Testaments, especially on something as essential to our faith as the deity of Christ, we can know that Christianity was not just invented by a fringe group of radical followers of Jesus. Our faith is confirmed by God.

- Q: *How could a newborn son also be called a father?*
- Q: *How does “everlasting” also support the divine nature of this messianic figure?*

The title “Everlasting Father” immediately dispels any lingering concern that the “Mighty God” would be aloof from His people. Kings in the ancient Near East were frequently depicted as “fathers” of their people. Thus, this newborn king can also be described as a “father.” The Messiah’s fatherhood is qualified by the word “eternal,” meaning His fatherhood would continue forever. Isaiah also applied “eternal” to God (Isaiah 57:15).

- Q: *In our system of government, officials are elected to office. How is this different than being under the rule of a father-type figure? Which is better?*
- Q: *Why is the perpetuity of the Messiah’s fatherhood important for us?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The fatherhood of the Messiah gains significance when it is recognized that we will share in His inheritance. When we decide to follow Christ, we become sons and daughters of the great king and share in His wonderful, perpetual inheritance. Our earthly fathers will one day pass away, as will their

inheritance, but when Christ becomes our everlasting Father, we receive a Father who will never pass away and whose inheritance will never be exhausted.

Q: *Why is peace important within the context of Isaiah 9:1-7?*

Q: *Given the need for deliverance from foreign oppressors (Isaiah 9:1-5), why is the emphasis on peace instead of victory over enemies?*

The title “Mighty God” generates the most discussion of the Messiah’s titles, but it is likely that Isaiah believed “Prince of Peace” to be the climatic title in the series. Isaiah emphasized peace throughout his prophecies (Isaiah 53:5; 57:19; 66:12). He yearned for a world at peace under the rule of God, and he recognized that the Messiah would be the one to bring that peace. This would have been immensely comforting for his audience, who faced the threat of Assyrian invasion.

Q: *Why has peace been so elusive throughout world history?*

Q: *What plans for peace do modern leaders create?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – A longing for peace unites modern readers with Isaiah’s first hearers, but peace continues to elude us as it eluded them. We have underestimated the problem and overestimated our own capacity to achieve peace. Lasting peace eludes the world today because sin has corrupted our hearts and removed God from the center of our lives. As we attempt to fill that center, our personal ideas and ambitions clash with others and conflict ensues. We fail to find peace because we fail to look to the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the only way for sins to be forgiven and the only solution to the conflicts that elude peace.

Q: *Some scholars propose that Isaiah 9:6-7 speaks of Ahaz, Hezekiah, or Josiah. How does Isaiah 9:7 make this idea unlikely?*

Q: *Why is the mention of David’s throne and kingdom significant?*

After identifying the king by his four titles (Isaiah 9:6), Isaiah describes his rule (Isaiah 9:7). He would rule on David's throne and over his kingdom. His reign would be eternal. These details allude to the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:8–17). God promised David that his kingdom would endure. Although the Davidic dynasty appeared to be floundering under Ahaz's leadership, Isaiah's prophecy revealed God's commitment to remain faithful to His promises to David. The Davidic covenant would be upheld by the arrival and reign of the Messiah.

Isaiah ended the prophecy by attributing its fulfillment to the Lord's zeal. The coming and success of the Messiah would not depend upon Ahaz or the people. God would bring the Messiah and His reign. God was the reason for the peace the people longed for. God was the reason for the people's hope.

Q: *Does God continue to be the source of your hope?*

Q: *Why is it comforting to know our fate is in God's hand?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Isaiah 9:7 claims that the birth of Christ was accomplished through God's zeal. Our fate does not rest in our own hands but in His. He is the one who sent the Son to die in our place. He is the one who will send the Son to judge the world. Although we may like the thought of being in control of our lives and our futures, we are in a much better place when we recognize our dependence on God.

## NEXT STEPS

Isaiah 9:1–7 encouraged the people to place their hope in the coming Messiah. This is also where our hope must reside, but we inevitably place our hope in other things. Take time this week to consider where you are seeking hope. Some people put their hope in a new job or a new relationship. Others place hope in a vacation or the latest gadget. Some people place hope in the Christmas season. These may bring temporary joy and relief, but only Christ can bring the eternal hope our souls desire. Furthermore, when we try to replace Christ with our hope in other things, we will eventually crush those things because they cannot bear the weight we have placed on them. As this year draws to a close, identify your false hopes and replace them with Christ. There is no greater gift you could give yourself or others.



## PRAY

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

God, you are not blind to the suffering and injustices I see. You answer every need in your Son, Christ Jesus. Keep my hope transfixed on Him.

Lord Jesus, your birth was foretold centuries beforehand. In the same way, your return was foretold centuries beforehand. Keep my hope focused upon you.

Father, help me this Christmas season to reflect on the meaning of the birth of your Son. Help me to think of what it means for God to take on human flesh.

God, as I look forward to a new year, help me to rewrite my goals and aspirations in light of your glory.

