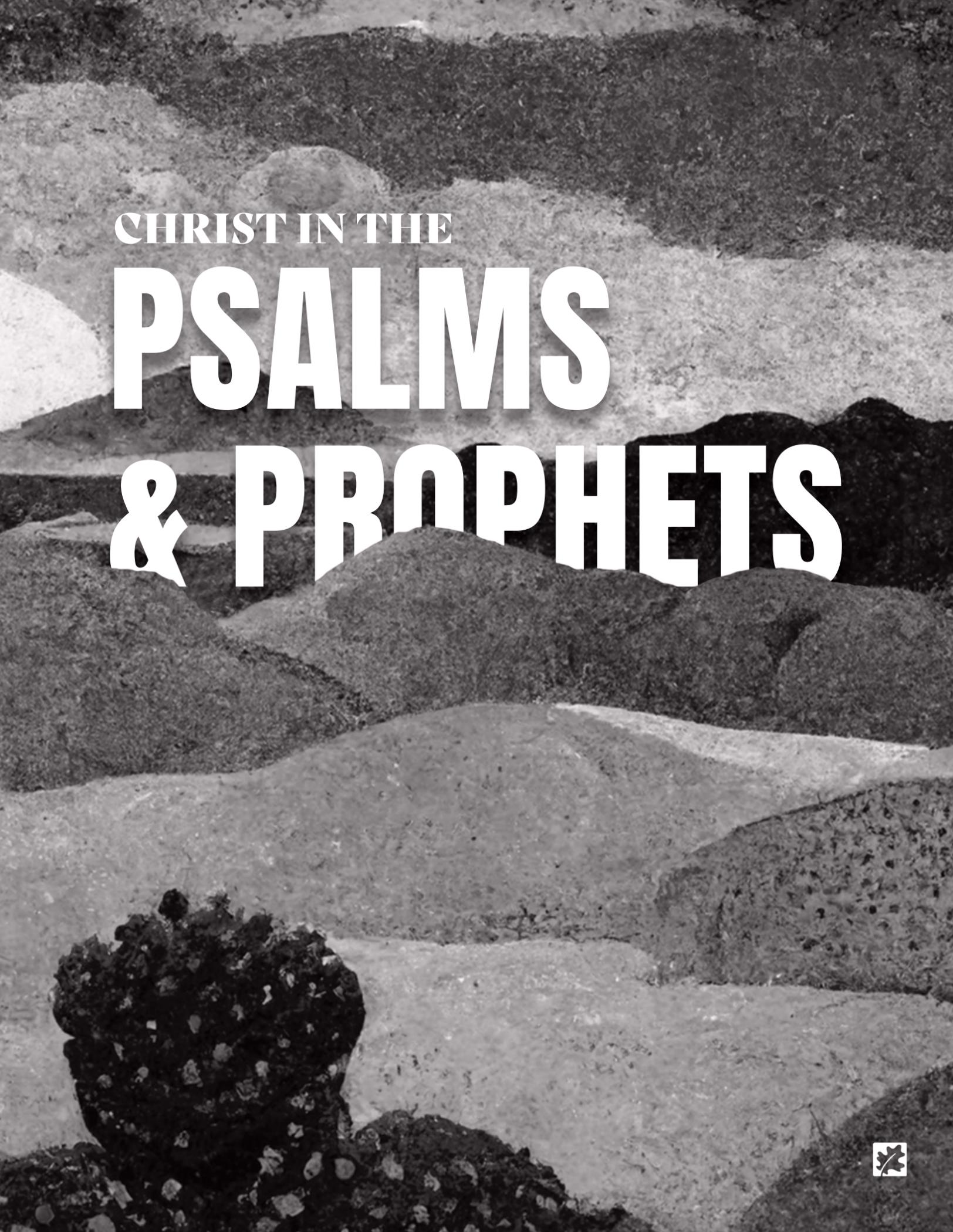
An abstract painting of a landscape with rolling hills in shades of orange, yellow, and purple. The sky is a mix of blue and yellow. In the foreground, there are dark, textured shapes that look like rocks or bushes.

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS & PROPHETS





CHRIST IN THE
PSALMS
& PROPHETS





BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

In the Bible, God reveals His truth about how to have eternal life by becoming a believer in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The believer is a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, a true child of God, and one who has been saved by God according to God's grace (undeserved favor). "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

How does one become a Christian?

- The Bible, God's word, says that eternal life (salvation) is a free gift of God which cannot be earned or deserved (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- However, we also find in God's word that all people are born sinners and cannot save themselves from the penalty of sin, which is eternal death and separation from God. God's requirement is perfection and no one is perfect (Isaiah 53:6; Romans 3:3-23; Ephesians 2:1-4).
- God tells us in His word that He is holy, meaning that He is perfect and that He is also just, meaning that He gives to sinners what is deserved, and because of His holiness and justice He must punish sinners. But thankfully, the Bible also says that God is loving and merciful and does not take pleasure in punishing sinners (Exodus 34:6-7; Ephesians 2:4-5).
- God has mercy on sinners by not giving them what they deserve. This is only possible because He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, the God-man, to be the substitute for sinners bearing the penalty for their sin and satisfying God's justice (John 1:1,14; Isaiah 53:6; Romans 5:8).
- Jesus said that in order for anyone to have eternal life there must be repentance of sins and faith placed in His substitutionary death on the cross to pay for the penalty of one's sins. This faith must be in Jesus Christ alone, not depending on anything else including "good works" (Mark 1:15b; Acts 20:21; Ephesians 2:8-9).

What then is the response to these things if one desires to have eternal life and become a Christian?

1. Pray and ask God to forgive you. The Bible says that you must repent of your sins, being ashamed of them, genuinely regretting and grieving over them, and firmly deciding to make an about-face and turn away from sin and your old lifestyle (Acts 3:19-20).
2. Pray and tell God that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone to save you. The Bible says that for you to become a Christian, you must place your faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross to become your substitute and who took the penalty for your sin upon Himself once and for all (John 3:36).

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CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

October 30, 2022 | All Things Under His Feet

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

Genesis 1:26 says God gave dominion over His creation to humanity. In what ways do you see humanity ruling over creation? Does it ever seem as though creation is ruling over us?

Read Psalm 8.

Pray

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Psalm 8 anticipates the coming of the messiah who would fulfill the role humanity abandoned due to sin.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

We will only fulfill our God-ordained role in creation by submitting to the rule of Jesus.

MEDITATE

“You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (Psalm 8:6). without end—they stumble over the bodies!” (Nahum 3:3).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the lesson by considering how the New Testament authors applied this passage to Christ.

Q: *Why would a reader of Psalm 8 think the author was marveling about humanity’s place in God’s creation?*

Q: *The New Testament authors applied Psalm 8:6 to Christ. How does this challenge your intuition of the meaning of this psalm?*

Psalm 8 begins and ends by declaring how the earth reveals the majesty of God’s name (Psalm 8:1, 9). The same phrase is repeated, creating a frame for the psalm. Between these phrases, the psalmist reflects upon God’s creation, including humanity, and declares that God has made the son of man “a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (Psalm 8:5). Many interpreters reading Psalm 8 have concluded that the author was marveling about humanity’s place in God’s creation. Why should we be so fortunate to occupy an exalted place in the universe and among God’s creatures? When we reflect on our place in all God has made, we should be driven to the kind of praise that opens and closes this psalm.

Turning to the New Testament, however, may cause us to question this common interpretation. The New Testament authors drew different conclusions about the meaning of Psalm 8. They likely would not have objected to humanity praising God as we reflect upon our place in His creation, but as they read Psalm 8, they concluded that the author was speaking not of humanity in general but of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:27, Paul quoted Psalm 8:6 and applied it to Jesus, not humanity. Paul alluded to this verse in Ephesians 1:22 and again applied it to Christ. The author of Hebrews (Hebrews 2:6–8) quoted Psalm 8:4–6 and likewise applied these verses to Jesus. The other New Testament writers agree that creation is now under the authority of Jesus Christ, even if they do not quote or allude to Psalm 8 (Matthew 11:27; 28:18).

Applying Psalm 8:6 to Jesus in the New Testament should make us pause to reconsider the common interpretation of the psalm. Could Psalm 8 have been written about Christ? Many interpreters, including those who hold the Bible in the highest regard, have concluded the New Testament authors went beyond its original meaning in applying it to Christ. But if we read Psalm 8 trying to understand why the New Testament authors applied it to Christ, we may

find a way of interpreting the psalm that is consistent with the original meaning as well as the conclusions of the New Testament authors.

❓: *The New Testament authors applied Psalm 8:6—"all things under his feet"—to Christ. Did they think all things were under Christ's rule at that time (and now) or did they qualify this claim by limiting it to Jesus's second coming?*

❓: *How does Hebrews 2:8 argue that Christ is ruling over all things even when it does not appear that way now?*

APPLICATION POINT – The New Testament authors applied Psalm 8:6 to Christ. All things are under His feet or subjected to His rule. It can be difficult in a fallen world to understand how all things could be under Christ's rule because His rule is so often opposed. We may be tempted to think the New Testament authors were speaking of how things will be when Christ returns, but that is not the case. The New Testament writers spoke of all things being under Christ's rule now. Hebrews concedes we may not see how this is so at present (Hebrews 2:8), but the author did not back down from this claim. When Christ returns, we will see fully how all things are under His rule, but this will be a matter of us catching up to what is true even now. This is wonderful news for believers! Regardless of the challenges we face or sorrows we encounter in this life, we can do so knowing all things are under Christ's rule. Although we may only see His rule dimly now, we know that the one who rules over all things is working all things together for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson will try to convey how the New Testament authors read Psalm 8 in relation to Christ. In doing so, it will also consider how Psalm 8 utilized Genesis 1 to show how the Messiah would fulfill humanity's role in God's creation.

1. HUMANITY'S ROLE IN GOD'S CREATION
2. CROWNED WITH GLORY AND HONOR
3. ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET

GOING DEEPER

+This section will first examine the message of Psalm 8 by studying its relationship with Genesis 1–3 and then consider if there is any evidence suggesting the interpretation of the New Testament authors.

1. HUMANITY'S ROLE IN GOD'S CREATION

■ PSALM 8; GENESIS 1; GENESIS 3

Q: *How does Psalm 8:6 allude to Genesis 1:26–28?*

Q: *What other allusions to Genesis 1 can you see in Psalm 8?*

Psalm 8 is rooted in the author's understanding of creation. Nearly every verse contains an allusion to a theme in Genesis 1. The most significant of these allusions occurs at verse 6. The author said God has given man “dominion over the works of your hands,” alluding to Genesis 1:26 and 28. God commanded the newly created human couple to have dominion over what He had just created in verses 1–25. No qualifications are given. Nothing on earth was outside the rule of Adam and Eve. The word “dominion” in Genesis 1 hints at God's intended role for humanity. He created the world and everything in it and then gave humanity dominion over it. Humanity was God's vice-regent over His creation. By God's extended authority, the first man and woman were king and queen over creation. This idea is central for the author of Psalm 8.

Q: *How is the worldview of Genesis 1, especially concerning the role of humanity, contested today?*

Q: *How does Genesis 1 affirm the value of every human being?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is common today to hear human beings referred to as just another species of animal. If we draw many of the claims made about the world to their logical end, we see that many people do not even give humanity an equal place with the animals or plant life. They see humanity as a blight upon the earth. The world would be a better place if there were no trace of human existence. This worldview could not be in sharper contrast to Genesis 1. In Genesis 1, humans are created beings, but we are the preeminent creatures over all God has made. God never intended for the world to remain absent of any sign of human existence. Instead, He

intended for humanity to rule over what He had made and cultivate it for our purposes and His glory. Genesis 1 gives humanity more dignity than would even be possible in any other worldview.

Q: *How has sin disrupted humanity's role in God's creation?*

Q: *How is humanity's role in creation contested?*

The author of Psalm 8 did not allude to the effects of human sin, but he would have certainly been aware of how humanity's story continued in Genesis. Although humanity was created to be God's vice-regent, the first human couple rebelled against Him and attempted to usurp His authority. One result of sin is that our dominion over the earth was marred. Creation no longer submits to human dominion but contests it, just as humanity contested God's rule over them. Even where humanity is able to gain control over creation, our dominion is characterized by our corruption, not by God's stewardship. In sin, humanity has forfeited our God-intended role in creation.

Q: *How is the perversion of our dominion evident in the world today?*

Q: *How does Genesis 3 give us hope for the world despite the awful sin it describes?*

APPLICATION POINT – We live in a broken world. It is impossible to escape the feeling that things are not the way they should be. We can be thankful that Genesis 3 provides us an explanation. Apart from Genesis 3, we would be left to wonder if the world we see is the world as God created it to be. We know that is not the case. We are all familiar with the expressions “that’s life” or “life is not fair.” When Christians hear these words, we know we have a better explanation. We know the pain and injustice we see in the world is not life as God created it to be. And we know Christ entered this world so that one day, it would no longer be this way.

Q: *How could the mission of Christ be explained in relation to what has just been said of Genesis 1–3?*

Q: *How would Psalm 8 affirm this explanation if it does refer to Christ?*

The New Testament authors applied Psalm 8:6 to Christ. The rest of this lesson will look for clues to help us follow their reasoning for doing so, but for the moment, focus on the implications of their reading of Psalm 8 considering what has been said of Genesis 1–3. God created humanity to be His vice-regent over His creation. In sin, humanity forfeited its role as God’s vice-regent. In subduing all things under His feet, Christ resumes the role humanity forfeited. He fulfills the role God created for humanity. He succeeds where we have failed. In Christ, God was overturning the effects of human sin.

Q: *Why is it encouraging to see Christ fulfill the responsibilities we vacated?*

Q: *If we cannot fulfill the role God created us for, how can we find fulfillment in this life?*

APPLICATION POINT – Christ assuming the role of God’s vice-regent shows that God has not abandoned His plan for creation, nor has He abandoned humanity. Although we have failed to rule creation under His authority, if we will submit to Christ’s rule, we can fulfill the role God created us for in Him. Christ is the only way we will find true fulfillment in this life because He is the one filling the role created for us. Everyone seeks fulfillment, and some people may claim to have found it outside of Christ. But they are settling for less than God intended. Believers know that being found in Christ is the only real way to find fulfillment in this life.

2. CROWNED WITH GLORY AND HONOR

■ **PSALM 2:7–8; PSALM 8:5–6; PSALM 21:5; PSALM 145:5, 11–12; ISAIAH 42:8**

Q: *Who are glory and honor typically ascribed to in the Old Testament?*

Q: What links do you see between Psalm 2, Psalm 8, and Psalm 21?

The first section focused on understanding the message of Psalm 8, especially with reference to its allusions to Genesis 1–3. It also considered the implications if the author was referring to a specific individual, such as the Messiah, instead of a general representative of all humanity. Now, this lesson will look at Psalm 8 to consider whether it contains any evidence for the specific individual view, and if so, what applications we can draw for us from this evidence.

We can find both positive and negative affirmations that the author of Psalm 8 was speaking of a specific individual instead of humankind in general. Psalm 8:5 describes this man being crowned. This is an allusion to the man's coronation. The nearest example of a coronation is Psalm 2, which describes the coronation of Israel's Messiah (Psalm 2:7–9). In Psalm 2:8, the Lord tells the Son, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession." This is similar to the idea of the coronated king receiving "dominion over the works of your hands." The Messiah's opponents appear in Psalm 2:1–3 and Psalm 2:10–12. These same foes appear in Psalm 8:2 and are likewise put down. The similarities and nearness of Psalms 2 and 8 suggest the messianic figure in Psalm 2 may be the royal figure in Psalm 8.

Psalm 8:5 declares that God has crowned this individual with glory and honor. These words, together with "magnificent" and "majesty," usually refer to God in the Old Testament (Psalm 45 3–4; 96:3–8). When two or more of these words are used together, they refer to God exclusively, with only one exception found in Psalm 21:5. Psalm 21 also contains multiple thematic links with Psalms 2 and 8. Again, these links suggest a specific individual, the Messiah, is being described in Psalm 8 rather than generic representative of all the rest of humanity.

These terms are usually reserved for God. For example, Isaiah 42:8 states, "I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other." Yet, the individual in Psalm 8 is crowned with glory and honor. This suggests this individual is no ordinary human being. Instead, He is tightly bound to God's plan for this earth, just as the Son is in Psalm 2. In a similar way, Psalm 145:12–13 says, "To make known to the children of man your mighty deeds and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations." The mighty-glorious-splendor combination occurs referring to God, but this passage also describes God's kingdom with the same terminology used in Psalm 8:6. Again, this points to a special relationship between God and the individual in Psalm 8. This individual was not a generic representative of humanity but a specific person we identify as the Messiah.

Q: *The psalmist uses language reserved for God to describe the Messiah. What does this imply about what our reaction to the Messiah should be?*

Q: *How would it distort God's creation for humanity to receive glory and honor?*

APPLICATION POINT – We should be thankful Psalm 8:5 does not apply to us. This does not take away the dignity God has placed on every single human being. If all humanity were crowned with glory and honor, how could we live up to this responsibility? How could our sin be coupled with glory and honor? This would only distort our understanding of God's glory and honor. Furthermore, our sin would only become a greater disgrace in the face of God. We do not need glory and honor ourselves, but we do need to submit to the one who receives glory and honor on our behalf.

3. ALL THINGS UNDER HIS FEET

■ PSALM 8:6

Q: *Do you think Psalm 8:6 could fairly describe humanity as you know it?*

Q: *How would applying Psalm 8:6 to humanity disregard the message of Genesis 3?*

Psalm 8 also contains a negative affirmation suggesting that the author was speaking of a specific individual rather than making a general statement about humanity. Psalm 8:6 says God has given this individual dominion over creation. All things are under his feet. How, after Genesis 3, could this statement apply to humanity? Our dominion in this world is severely challenged, not only by the animal kingdom and meteorology but even by our own bodies. We constantly struggle with sickness and disease. Furthermore, in what sense could “all things” possibly have been put under our feet? Either the psalmist was grossly optimistic in his evaluation of humanity, or his statements did not pertain to the whole of humanity but to a specific individual. We know this individual is the Messiah, whom we identify as Jesus Christ.

Q: *Why is it better for us that all things are subject to Christ's authority rather than ours?*

Q: *Why do we not recognize how all things are subject to Christ?*

APPLICATION POINT – Christ fulfills what God created humanity to be. He is able to rule over all things with a perfection that could never characterize us after we became sinful creatures. Christ has no need to make compromises. He does not guess what the best path forward is in any situation. He never needs to settle for partial justice. There is no comparison between the kingdoms of fallen men and the kingdom of Christ. Rather than striving to regain dominion, we must simply submit to Christ's rule over our lives.

NEXT STEPS

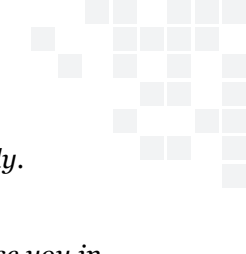
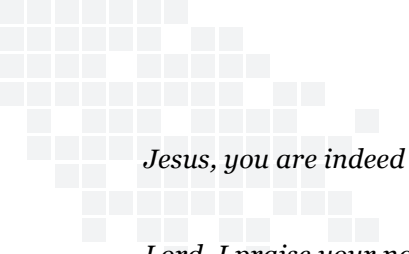
The psalmist declared, "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him?" Take some time to follow the psalmist's example this week. Allow yourself to be overcome by the greatness of God as displayed in the world He has made. This will help the first and last verses of praise in this psalm resonate in your heart. It will also help you grasp the greatness of our savior.

PRAY

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

God, you have created every single person with a dignity that cannot be taken away. I praise you for this gift and seek to always appreciate that dignity in others.

Father, even though humanity failed to fulfill the calling you placed upon us, you did not abandon us! Instead, you offered us a chance to fulfill our roles by submitting to the lordship of Christ.



Jesus, you are indeed crowned with glory and honor. I yearn for the day when I will see you reign fully.

Lord, I praise your name! I will praise you in the morning, I will praise you in the evening. I will praise you in times of plenty, and I will praise you in times of need.

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

November 6, 2022 | Anticipating Christ's Resurrection

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 is the resurrection so extraordinary?

Read Psalm 16.

Ask God to help you find refuge in Him through the resurrected Son.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

A careful examination of Psalm 16 in the context of the surrounding psalms reveals a way of reading it that anticipates the resurrection of Jesus.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

The resurrection was not an accident. It was part of God's plan from the beginning.

MEDITATE

“For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption” (Psalm 16:10).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will look at how the New Testament authors anticipated the resurrection of Jesus. This will set the context for the remainder of the lesson.

Q: *Why would Jesus call His companions on the road to Emmaus foolish for not foreseeing the resurrection in the Old Testament (Luke 24:25)?*

Q: *Why would someone question Peter (Acts 2:31) and Paul’s (Acts 13:36–37) interpretation of Psalm 16:10?*

Jesus’s resurrection was the most significant event of His first coming. So much of Jesus’s life was remarkable and miraculous. His virgin birth, His baptism, ministry, miracles, death, and ascension were all significant, but the resurrection began a new stage in God’s redemption of the world. It was the first act in God’s new creation.

Given its centrality, it is not surprising that Christians have suggested the resurrection was predicted in the Old Testament. According to Acts, this claim was first made by the resurrected Lord Jesus Himself. Speaking with two of His followers traveling to the town of Emmaus, Christ proclaimed in reference to his death and resurrection, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:25–26). Jesus said His resurrection was spoken of by the prophets, a reference to the Old Testament, but He did not point to a specific Old Testament passage.

On the day of Pentecost, not long after Jesus ascended into heaven, Peter also declared that the Old Testament spoke of Jesus’s resurrection. After quoting Psalm 16:8–11, he said, “Brothers, I may say to you with confidence about the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:29–31). Peter believed Psalm 16:8–11 spoke of Jesus’s resurrection, and he explicitly denied that this passage could have been about the author, King David.

Later, Paul also claimed that Psalm 16:10 speaks of Jesus’s resurrection in his address to the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:13–52). After quoting Psalm 16:10, he said, “For David, after he had served the purpose of God

in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his father and saw corruption, but he whom God raised up did not see corruption” (Acts 13:36–37). So, Paul also applied Psalm 16:10 to Jesus’s resurrection and denied that David could have been speaking about himself in those verses.

These two figures, who were central to Christianity in the days and years immediately following Christ’s death and resurrection, pointed to Psalm 16:10 as evidence of the resurrection. The problem was that many readers of Psalm 16 never recognized its connection to the resurrection and still questioned whether the author was really anticipating the resurrection of the Messiah. What did Peter and Paul see in Psalm 16 that led them to believe it was speaking of the resurrection of the Jesus? This lesson will present a way of reading Psalm 16 that affirms their insight into the Old Testament’s testimony of Jesus.

Q: *Why would believers be hesitant to affirm that Psalm 16:10 is about Jesus’s resurrection even though Peter and Paul claimed it is?*

Q: *What do you do when you encounter a biblical passage you do not understand, whether it is a New Testament reference to the Old Testament or not?*

APPLICATION POINT – It is often challenging to understand how the New Testament authors understood the Old Testament, especially when they made claims about the Old Testament’s relationship to the coming of Jesus. Some critical interpreters believe they made up their observations and that modern readers should not believe them. Other interpreters, even among believing evangelicals, argue that the New Testament authors made up their observations but think that affirming their observations is part of what it means to live by faith in Christ. This lesson will likely be received in different ways by the members of your group or church, but it is important for Christians to try to understand what the Bible means, especially when it pertains to the Old Testament’s message concerning Jesus. We need to have confidence in the Bible for a healthy faith. This lesson will suggest a way of reading Psalm 16 that is consistent with the New Testament. Whether you accept everything in this lesson or not, it is important for you to wrestle with Scripture until you have confidence in what the Bible says.

■ ■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson is about trying to understand how Peter and Paul read Psalm 16:10 as evidence of Jesus’s resurrection. It is important to remember, however, that Psalm 16 is about more than just the resurrection. As with all Scripture, Psalm 16 was written to instruct believers and increase their faith. The first section of this lesson will consider

the main points of Psalm 16. The final two sections will consider issues pertaining to reading it as evidence of the resurrection.

1. THE MESSAGE OF PSALM 16

2. FINDING THE MESSIAH IN PSALM 16

3. RESURRECTION OR NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE?

GOING DEEPER

+This section will follow the outline given above and draw applications from the discussions for believers.

1. THE MESSAGE OF PSALM 16

■ PSALM 16:1–7

Q: *How does Psalm 16 guide us to find protection in God?*

Q: *Why is experiencing God as a refuge dependent on submitting to Him as Lord?*

The main message of Psalm 16 is that God can be depended on as a refuge in times of great need or danger. The psalmist declared this in the opening verse. A refuge is typically some kind of shelter that offers protection from the elements and roaming predators. Applied metaphorically to God, it means that God offers protection from enemies and the routine dangers of life.

Finding refuge in God also means finding a goodness or a pleasantness in life that is only available to the godly. The psalmist declared he knew no good apart from God (Psalm 16:2). He described life with God with language similar to that used by Joshua when he divided the promised land among the Israelites (Joshua 13–19; Psalm 16:5–6). His allotment in life was good because God had made it so.

God as a refuge is only available to those who submit to His will. Those who, like the wicked in Psalm 12:4, challenge His lordship will only find sorrows (Psalm 16:4). By including these lines, the psalmist continues the great contrast between the righteous and the wicked that is so germane to the Psalms (Psalm 1).

Q: *How have you seen God's protection over the last year?*

Q: *In what areas do you struggle to submit to God's rule over your life? Why is it tempting to think you can provide for yourself better than He can?*

APPLICATION POINT – The Scriptures contain a consistent witness of God's provision in the lives of those who trust in Him, but trusting God remains hard for us to do. One reason trusting God is hard is that even when we are trusting Him, we do not remain passive. Rather, trusting God usually entails trusting Him to work through what we are doing to secure our provision. The problem is that the line between trusting God to work through us and failing to trust Him by relying only on ourselves is often blurry for us. We can start by trusting in God's provision but quickly begin to think and act as though we are providing for ourselves. One sign that we are no longer trusting God for provision is being unable to find rest. Jesus promised that following Him would secure our rest (Matthew 11:28). This does not mean complete freedom from toil and hard work. Instead, it means being able to stop and reflect upon the goodness of God regardless of our situation.

Q: *The psalmist obviously delighted in God's refuge. What else did he delight in?*

Q: *What is the relationship between fellowship and finding refuge in God?*

The psalmist found refuge in God, but it was not as though he ran away by himself to find solitude in being alone with God. In finding refuge in God, he found others doing the same, and the comradery between them was cause for delight as well (Psalm 16:3). When based on the foundation of God's refuge, community can build one's delight in God and others beyond compare.

Q: *How is your faith personal? How does it drive you to community?*

Q: *How can you promote in your church the delight David experienced in Psalm 16:3?*

APPLICATION POINT – God created us as communal creatures, and the community God intended is best exemplified in local church communities. Although trusting Christ as Savior is a personal commitment, the Bible gives abundant evidence of the importance God places on His people finding community with one another. The local church should be prized among believers, not neglected. If you are going through this lesson in a group, you know first-hand the delight David spoke of in Psalm 16:3, but there are others who are content to stay on the margins of the local church and fail to find the community they need. If that is you, or if it describes someone you know, make the commitment needed to find the delight David did.

2. FINDING THE MESSIAH IN PSALM 16

■ PSALM 15–24 (THIS SHOULD TAKE FEWER THAN 15 MINUTES)

Q: *Why do we usually read the psalms individually, without much concern for their arrangement?*

Q: *Who wrote Psalms 15–24?*

Unlike the rest of Scripture, the Psalms are typically read independent of one another without much attention to their arrangement or what precedes or follows a psalm. While most interpreters believe context is crucial for understanding narratives or epistles, few consider the context of any psalm to be of importance. Recent research questions this approach by showing an intentional design behind the arrangement of some psalms. One of the arrangements that has received the most attention is that of Psalms 15–24, which, of course, includes Psalm 16. Many scholars believe these psalms are placed in a chiasmic arrangement based on their themes. A chiasm (also called a chiasmus, chiasmic structure) is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated in reverse order. The result is a “mirror” effect as the ideas are “reflected” back in a passage.

A. Psalm 15: The holy king

B. Psalm 16: Song of trust

C. Psalm 17: A prayer for help

D. Psalm 18: A royal psalm

E. Psalm 19: A creation/Torah psalm

D. Psalm 20–21: Royal psalms

C. Psalm 22: A prayer for help

B. Psalm 23: Song of trust

A. Psalm 24: The holy king

Psalms 15 and 24 both question who may dwell or ascend the holy hill of God (Psalm 15:1; 24:3). The answer in both is one who lives in righteousness (Psalm 15:2–5; 24:4). Who is this one seeking to dwell on God’s holy hill? In Psalm 24, it is the king. This king is identified with God. In Psalm 2:6, God set the messianic king on His holy hill, the very phrase used in Psalm 15:1. This and the correspondence with Psalm 24 suggest the individual who will dwell with God in Psalm 15:1 is the same king. Psalms 16 and 23 declare the speaker’s absolute trust in God. Both psalms include the phrase “my cup” (Psalm 16:5; 23:5), which appears in the Old Testament only in these two instances. Both psalms also declare the joy of dwelling with God (Psalm 16:11, Psalm 23:6).

In Psalms 17 and 22, the tone quickly changes from confident celebration to desperate need. The speaker was surrounded by those seeking to do him harm (Psalm 17:9, 11; 22:16). Lions were after him (Psalm 17:12; 22:13, 21). Despite the danger, the psalmist anticipated God’s deliverance (Psalm 17:15; 22:22). In Psalms 18 and 20–21, the king found protection in God (Psalm 18:2; 20:2). Furthermore, God gave him great victories (Psalm 18:50; Psalm 20:6, 9), even with the power of His right hand (Psalm 18:35; 20:6; 21:8). In Psalm 20:6, this king is referred to as God’s anointed, the same title given to the Son in Psalm 2:2. “Anointed” is the term from which we get the word “messiah” and the Greek word “Christ.” In Psalm 19, David intertwined God’s creation with His law. In Psalm 19:2, he declared of creation, “Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.” This is reminiscent of Psalm 1:2 where the speaker meditates on the law of God day and night.

The arrangement of these psalms and the connections between them suggest a single speaker throughout. The king who ascends God’s holy hill (Psalm 15, 24) is the same victorious king of Psalms 18 and 20–21. And the same individual who must endure his enemies’ schemes (Psalm 22, 17) has complete trust in God’s preservation. Given the connections with Psalms 1 and 2, the theme of the way of the righteous versus the way of the wicked, and the identification of the king with the anointed Son, it is understandable that this king could be thought of as the Messiah. Thus, when this individual speaks in Psalms 15–24, we hear the voice of the Messiah. These are still David’s psalms, and it is David who was writing/speaking. But David’s voice is subsumed by the messianic king. This is why Peter and Paul could apply Psalm 16 to the Messiah.

Q: *How do you typically read the Psalms? What implications does this study have for your reading?*

Q: *Peter and Paul believed Jesus was at the center of the Old Testament. Why is this an important point?*

APPLICATION POINT – Peter and Paul, the two central figures in Christianity following the resurrection, believed Jesus was at the center of the Old Testament. This reveals what they thought to be central in life and can instruct us as well. Life is about Christ at the center, not us. The story that must be told is His. What is important in this world is the gospel of Jesus Christ, not our personal comforts and desires. Humanity has sinned, and Christ has provided for us a way of redemption. Follow Peter and Paul’s lead and make Jesus the center of the life you lead and the stories you tell.

3. RESURRECTION OR NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCE?

■ PSALM 16:10

Q: *Can you explain the connection between the resurrection and the absence of corruption? How does the absence of corruption point to the resurrection?*

Q: *What notes, if any, does your Bible have pertaining to the word “corruption”?*

The previous section described how Peter and Paul could claim Psalm 16 was speaking of the Messiah. This section will consider how they found the resurrection in Psalm 16. The word the apostles appear to focus on is “corruption,” which means to depart from what is normal in a negative way. Applied to a dead body, corruption refers to decay, the body wasting away from its normal state. When the psalmist said God would not let His holy one see corruption, he meant the body would not decay because God would raise Him from the dead before decay began. This is how Peter and Paul were reading this verse. The problem with this interpretation is the Hebrew word underlying “corruption” may also mean “pit.” This is likely noted in many of your Bibles. The discrepancy over this word stems from uncertainty regarding which Hebrew verb the word derives from.

Without getting into the linguistic details of the Hebrew language, this section will offer a few simple arguments in favor of “corruption.” Thinking about the chiastic structure of Psalms 15–24 again, Psalms 16 and 23 are prayers of trust in response to the turmoil found in Psalms 17 and 22. The word “awake” in Psalm 17:15 gives us a clue to

the author's meaning in Psalm 16:10. This rather innocuous word is frequently used to refer to resurrection or coming to life after death in the Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 4:31; Job 14:12; Isaiah 26:19; Jeremiah 51:39, 57; Daniel 12:2; and Habakkuk 2:19). Given the hostility against the speaker, it is unlikely he was describing waking up from a nap. Instead, it seems likely that his enemies succeeded in killing him. They surrounded him (Psalm 17:11) and pounced on him like a lion (Psalm 17:12). They caused the speaker's death, from which he awoke. Psalm 22 also alludes to the death of the speaker. He was laid in the "dust of death" (Psalm 22:15). He was surrounded by dogs and evildoers (Psalm 22:16). His hands and feet were pierced, and his bones are visible (Psalm 22:16–17). They cast lots for his clothing (Psalm 22:18), presumably because he would not be needing it. Psalm 23, which reveals the king's trust in God, says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). It would make sense, then, for Psalm 16, which parallels Psalm 23 and is linked to the death scenes in Psalms 17 and 22, to refer to the resurrection of the dead.

David entitled Psalm 16 as a *miktam* (superscription). We have no way of knowing what this Hebrew title entails, but nearly all five remaining *miktam* in the Psalms (Psalms 56–60) contain the word that is translated "corruption" in Psalms 16:10, and each *miktam* alludes to death.

Finally, the word "see" in Psalm 16:10 suggests that the Hebrew word it is linked to should be translated as "corruption." Corruption or decay is something that would happen to a dead body. A pit would be a location. In Hebrew, the verb "to see" is often used with the sense of "to experience." For example, "to see death" in Psalm 89:48 means to experience death. Thus, the verb "see" refers to something that could be experienced, such as the decay or corruption brought by death. A verb of motion, such as "to walk" or "fall into," would have been used if the word in question meant "pit."

Since Psalm 16 declares that the speaker would not see the decay of death even after having died, Peter and Paul were right to claim that Psalm 16:10 anticipated the resurrection of the Messiah.

❏: *Why is Jesus's resurrection crucial for the Christian faith?*

❏: *Why is your resurrection crucial for your faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus's death on the cross was not His end. For all who put their faith in Christ, the risen Lord, death is not their end either. Death is not a pleasant subject to think about, but believers can do so with the hope of resurrection.

NEXT STEPS

The verses in this lesson concerning Peter and Paul come from occasions when they were preaching to non-believers. They were sharing the central doctrine of the gospel with those who needed to accept Christ as savior. It is not enough to learn of how the Old Testament anticipates the resurrection of Christ. You must share what you know with others who need to hear it.

PRAY

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

God, I am amazed by your Word. No matter how it is studied, it leads to greater faith in you.

Lord Jesus, you are the center of the Old Testament, you are the center of the New Testament, and you are the center of my life. Help me to live in worship of you.

Father, you have given hope in the resurrection. Although we want to live for righteousness now, we know this life is ultimately not our end.

God, you are my refuge and my strength. I can trust in your provision.

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.


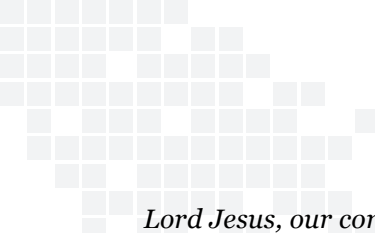
NEXT STEPS

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.

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

November 20, 2022 | *The Servant, Part 1*

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 would your life be different if you knew God would give you strength to accomplish every task He called you to?

Read Isaiah 42:1–9 and 49:1–7.

Ask God to help you understand His commission and rest in His strength, just as the servant did.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The servant's commission and strength come from God.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

If Jesus relied on God's strength, so should we.

MEDITATE

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce Isaiah’s servant passages.

Q: *Why would Jesus be identified with a servant?*

Q: *How was Jesus a servant for all of humanity?*

The second half of Isaiah contains several passages known as the “Servant Songs” that refer to a servant figure who either speaks or is spoken to by God. In each case, the servant has a significant role in God’s plan. The identity of this servant is contested. Many scholars believe he is the nation of Israel. While this is possible for some of the Servant Songs, the servant cannot be the nation of Israel in Isaiah 49:5–6, part of the second passage studied in this lesson, because this passage distinguishes the servant from Israel.

Furthermore, the servant is frequently connected to royalty. In Isaiah 37:35, King David is referred to as a servant. Several other Old Testament passages use “servant” to refer to a king (1 Samuel 23:10; 1 Kings 3:6; Psalm 78:70; Ezekiel 34:23). The servant in Isaiah received God’s spirit (Isaiah 42:1) as do kings Saul and David (1 Samuel 10:10–12; 16:13). The servant’s ministry of justice (Isaiah 42:1) was typically the role of a king in the ancient world.

Most Christian interpreters throughout church history have understood the Servant Songs to be about Jesus. These prophetic oracles anticipated the coming of a figure distinct from Israel but who at the same time took up Israel’s role.

Q: *If the Messiah was a servant to others, what does that say about us?*

Q: *Although the servant cannot be identified as Israel, why is it important that he*

continue to be identified with Israel?

APPLICATION POINT – We know Jesus as king and as the Son of God, yet He can also be identified as God’s servant. If Christ can identify as a servant, His followers must as well. We are not the Son of God. We are not kings or queens. We are lost sinners redeemed by Christ. Being God’s servants is more than we deserve.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Each of the four Servant Songs shares themes with the others and the rest of Isaiah, but each also presents a unique element of the servant. This lesson will cover the first two Servant Songs.

1. THE SERVANT’S INTRODUCTION

2. THE SERVANT’S MISSION

GOING DEEPER

+This section is divided between the first two Servant Songs. Each section identifies the main points of the Servant Song and offers personal applications.

1. THE SERVANT’S INTRODUCTION

■ ISAIAH 42:1–9

Q: *Where does the servant draw strength for his ministry from?*

Q: *What does Isaiah mean by saying the servant will not break a bruise reed or blow out a faint candle?*

The first thing we are told of the servant is that he is upheld by God (Isaiah 42:1). God will uphold the servant because He delights in him. Furthermore, God will put His Spirit upon the servant. Only then are we told the servant will bring forth justice. The order is instructive for understanding the servant. Although he will accomplish many great things, he always does so through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit also explains the endurance of the servant. He will not give out or give up until he accomplishes the justice he seeks (Isaiah 42:4). All of this reveals that the servant finds his strength in God.

The source of the servant's strength is crucial for understanding Isaiah 42:2–3. The ancient Near East was familiar with invading conquerors who used their power to smash and rebuild their enemies. Their heralds would announce the king's intentions to the besieged city to create terror among its citizens (2 Kings 18:28–35). The servant, however, will not need to lift His voice to be heard in the street. He will not need to exploit weak enemies (Isaiah 42:3). He will accomplish what he sets out to do because of the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

Q: *Why is it crucial for us to rely on God's strength instead of our own? Can you describe a time when you failed to fully rely on God's strength?*

Q: *How does relying upon the Holy Spirit's power keep us from compromising essential matters of our faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus, who has been given all power and authority, calls us to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18–20). The implication is that we will do so in the power He has been given. Like it does for the servant, working in God's strength makes all the difference for us. When we try to work in our own strength instead of the Holy Spirit's, we will make compromises. We will have to, because there is no way we can adequately accomplish a spiritual task like disciple-making apart from God's power. When we make compromises to complete spiritual tasks, we compromise the task itself. Like the servant, we must remember to always work in God's power.

Q: *What is the point of identifying God as the creator in Isaiah 42:5?*

Q: *What are the servant's tasks?*

After describing the source of the servant's strength, Isaiah describes the servant's commission, beginning with identifying God as the creator of the heavens and earth and the giver of life to all people on the earth. This may seem like a pointless excursion at first, but it is important to understand that the one commissioning the servant is also the one who created the realm in which he will carry out his task. God has the authority over what He has made. The servant is carrying out the owner's wishes and does it in God's strength and authority. To reject the servant is to reject the creator God.

The servant's task is to be a covenant for the people. We typically think of a covenant as being made between two parties, but in this case, the servant himself will actually be the covenant. The servant's people will include the nations (Isaiah 42:6). The Old Covenant was made with the people of Israel, but the servant's covenant will include all nations. The servant's task will be to open blind eyes and free those imprisoned by darkness (Isaiah 42:7), similar to the words of the speaker in Isaiah 61:1–2 and to Luke's quotation of this passage (Luke 4:18–19). The servant's task, ultimately, is to reveal the glory of God (Isaiah 42:8). God will not tolerate the idolatry that consumed Israel and the other nations.

Q: *God commissioned the servant to be a covenant for the nations. As a follower of Christ, what is your role in fulfilling the servant's commission?*

Q: *In what ways could you be removing God's glory from what He has called you to do?*

APPLICATION POINT – God will not give His glory to another. Certainly, no one can take it from Him. It is easy to become self-centered. We want to feel important and know that what we do matters. We want to be admired by others. But finding our worth in our jobs or in the admiration of others robs God of the glory meant for Him alone. The servant is our example. Jesus did not seek His own glory (John 8:50). When Jesus received glory, it was to glorify the Father (John 17:1–5). Instead of seeking worth in our jobs or in the admiration of others, we should find our worth in being made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). When our worth is based on what God has made us to be, the glory we receive glorifies God.

2. THE SERVANT'S MISSION

■ ISAIAH 49:1–7

Q: *What themes does Isaiah 49:1–7 share with Isaiah 42:1–9?*

Q: *Why did the servant emphasize his calling from his mother’s womb? How does the New Testament affirm these words?*

Isaiah 49:1–7 further describes the mission of the servant. Where God is the speaker in Isaiah 42:1–9, the servant himself is the speaker in Isaiah 49:1–7. Throughout these verses, the servant keeps his mission centered on God. It is the Lord who chose Him for this mission while he was still in his mother’s womb (Isaiah 49:1, 5). God shaped the servant (Isaiah 49:2) and expanded his ministry (Isaiah 49:6). As in Isaiah 42:1, God is the servant’s strength (Isaiah 49:5).

Q: *Why did the servant describe himself as a sword and an arrow?*

Q: *The servant appears discouraged in Isaiah 49:4. How did he fight this discouragement?*

APPLICATION POINT – God formed the servant into a sharp sword and polished arrow (Isaiah 49:2). These are instruments of war and suggest that the servant’s ministry will be undertaken in a hostile context. The servant will defend his people when they are under attack. Jesus alluded to this when He distinguished the good shepherd from the hired hand (John 10:1–18). Jesus is committed to the perseverance of His flock. It is also appropriate to remember that Hebrews describes God’s Word as a double-edged sword that pierces us to the soul (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus defends His flock from outside attacks, but He also disciplines us for the purpose of transforming us into who He desires us to be.

Q: *Who did the servant address in Isaiah 49:1?*

Q: *Why did God include the nations within the scope of the servant's ministry?*

The nations hold a remarkable place in the Servant Songs. Both Isaiah 42 and 49 refer to the coastlands. Our modern understanding of geography and travel likely causes us to overlook what is meant by “coastlands,” but for ancient peoples, the coasts were the ends of the earth. You could not go any further. If this is implicit in Isaiah 49:1, it is explicit in Isaiah 49:6. It was also understood that the people residing in the coastlands were non-Israelites.

The servant's mission includes both Israel and the nations. God called the servant to gather Israel back to Him. In the second half of Isaiah, the prophet projected himself into exilic times. Thus, this gathering of Israel is a gathering of the people from exile back to the land. In the ancient Near East, the practice of displacing a nation from its homeland was an attempt to eradicate it. Once a people were scattered from their homeland, they were then assimilated into the foreign culture and posed less threat to the conquering empire. Thus, it is quite remarkable for the servant to speak of gathering Israel from exile. Although the nations who exiled Israel intended to eradicate them, God had other plans.

While it is remarkable for the people of Israel to be gathered from exile, it was apparently not remarkable enough for God! He declared it too light a thing for Him to accomplish (Isaiah 49:6). Thus, God will make the servant a light for the nations in order to bring them into the salvation God will make for Israel.

Q: *How is the servant's global mission evident in Jesus's ministry?*

Q: *How are you involved in the servant's global ministry?*

APPLICATION POINT – During His time on earth, Jesus limited His ministry to the people of Israel (Matthew 15:24). By the time He ascended into heaven, however, He pointed His disciples to the nations and told them to spread the message about Him among them (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). If the servant was called to minister among the nations, His church is too. World missions is a vital part of the outlook of any healthy church and any healthy church member. Certainly not everyone will go to the ends of the earth, but everyone has a role in

participating in the servant's world-wide ministry.

Q: *Why is the servant despised and abhorred?*

Q: *Why is it significant that kings and princes will prostrate themselves before the servant?*

The servant will work in God's authority and strength, but He will not have immediate success. This will be even more evident in the next lesson. He will be despised even by the people He was sent to gather (Isaiah 49:7). But this is not the final word on the servant. One day, the kings and princes of the earth will bow before him. And this will be accomplished in God's strength because He has chosen the servant.

Q: *How do you see the servant, Jesus Christ, being despised today?*

Q: *Is it possible for Christians to behave in a way that despises the servant?*

APPLICATION POINT – If even the kings and princes of the earth will one day find themselves submitting to the servant, submission should be our goal as well. We are conditioned to value leadership and action, but our ultimate responsibility is not to lead but to follow Christ. We are called not to take charge but to submit to Christ's will. Only in full submission will we ever understand what it means to be a follower of Christ.

NEXT STEPS

God says it is too light a thing for His salvation to go only to Israel. It must encompass all peoples. If we limit what God can do in this world to our vision, we will miss the wonder of what God is prepared to do. Take time to evaluate the ministries you are a part of and your role in them. How are you limiting how God can work through you? How can you take your hands off these ministries and place them in God's hands? Write down your thoughts.

PRAY

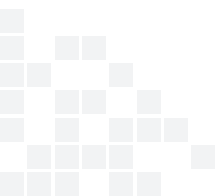
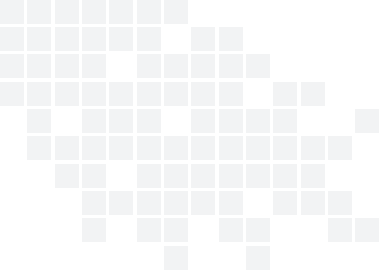
+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, I need to live and work in your strength today, not my own. Make me your true servant so I can step aside and give you the glory you deserve.

Lord Jesus, you are the servant. You came to earth to fulfill the Father's plans. As you are the servant, make me a servant for you.

Father, forgive me for the times I have placed limits on what you are prepared to do. My vision is not what is important, and it is far too small for you.

Jesus, mold me into the disciple you desire me to be. Pierce me to the heart, even if it hurts. Remove any part of me that refuses to submit to your will.



CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

November 27, 2022 | The Servant, Part 2

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 do you respond to suffering? How do you respond to seeing someone else suffer?

Read Isaiah 50 and 52:13–53:12.

Pray that this lesson will help you catch a glimpse of what Christ endured for you.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

The servant is despised, but he remains at the heart of God's plan.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

Our response to the servant makes all the difference for eternity.

MEDITATE

"Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin

of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:12).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the lesson by considering the theme of rejection, which links these two Servant Songs.

Q: *Why is rejection hard? What are some different kinds of rejection?*

Q: *What are some ways people shield themselves from rejection?*

No one likes to be rejected. Regardless of the situation, rejection brings hopes and dreams to a halt. It can negate loads of hard work. It can be the end of relationships. Rejection can put life on pause.

Although we may not like rejection, we have no right to expect that we will not encounter it in our lives. Jesus, on the other hand, could reasonably question why He should ever encounter rejection. He is the Son of God. He is God Himself. He came to give of Himself, not take. Nevertheless, His life was marked by constant rejection. The religious elites despised Him. And although He drew large crowds, they deserted Him at His crucifixion. Jesus experienced rejection at nearly every turn in His ministry.

The final two Servant Songs foresaw Jesus’s rejection from ancient times. Isaiah 50:8 references the servant’s adversaries. Isaiah 53:3 declares Jesus was despised and rejected by men. The rejection Jesus faced in His life was foretold long ago

Q: *Why would the Old Testament foretell Jesus’s rejection? Why not focus only on the positive aspects of His life?*

Q: *Have you experienced rejection because of your faith?*

APPLICATION POINT – Jesus knew He would be rejected by the world, and He warned His followers that they would be rejected too (John 15:18). He used the word “hate.” This shows that the rejection He and His followers

experience is not merely an unimpassioned indifference but a focused disdain. It is part of following Jesus. We will share in His rejection.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This lesson will examine the last two Servant Songs. As with the first two, the servant's identity is debated, but Christians have consistently understood these Servant Songs to refer to Jesus.

1. THE MESSAGE OF THE SERVANT 2. THE SUFFERING SERVANT

GOING DEEPER

+This section will consider each point above and draw applications for a modern audience.

1. THE MESSAGE OF THE SERVANT

■ ISAIAH 50:4–11

Q: What did the speaker mean by “the tongue of those who are taught”?

Q: Why did he ask God for a “tongue of those who are taught”?

This passage begins with the servant describing the help he gives to the weary. The context of this statement is not immediately clear. It could occur within a wartime context with the servant encouraging His fellow soldiers before a battle. Or he could be encouraging laborers in the midst of a building project. The context could simply be the exile in which the people found themselves yearning to return home. Whatever be the case, his message is clear. He was given the ability to speak to those in need of encouragement. He was a teacher who pushed His students to continue on.

Q: *How does Isaiah 50:4 show the need for being involved in a local church?*

Q: *How can you encourage others with God's Word this week?*

APPLICATION POINT – Just as the servant encouraged those around him with a word from God, we must also encourage one another with God's Word. In 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Paul commanded the people to encourage and build one another up. In Hebrews, the author commanded readers to consider how they can stir up one another to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24). Being a follower of Christ is often challenging, but it is easier if we follow Christ's example in this Servant Song.

Q: *Why did the servant not resist the mistreatment of others?*

Q: *What was the basis for the servant's confidence in Isaiah 50:7-9?*

The servant was well acquainted with sorrow. His suffering is described in the next section, but in Isaiah 50, he received lashes while in the hands of his enemies. His enemies were those who rebelled against God (Isaiah 50:5), which the servant refused to do.

The servant, however, had no need to fear his enemies because God is his help (Isaiah 50:7). Even though the goal of his enemies was to disgrace Him, God would keep Him from disgrace and shame. With God's help, the efforts of those opposing the shepherd were brought to nothing, so much so that the servant could ask, "Who will contend with me? ... Who will oppose me? ... "Who will condemn me?" These are remarkable questions for someone receiving lashes and having his beard ripped out. The servant had complete confidence in God. It was his enemies who would not endure. They would be worn down and eaten by moths.

Q: *Why is it challenging to maintain our faith when we are suffering?*

Q: *How does our faith in Christ put our suffering and trials into proper perspective?*

APPLICATION POINT – The servant faced incredible opposition, but He trusted God to deliver him. When we trust in God’s deliverance rather than our own, we can endure hardships because we have faith that God will ultimately hold every deed accountable. We do not need to take matters into our own hands or waver in our faith.

Q: *What did Isaiah mean by “darkness” and “light” in this passage?*

Q: *Why is it wrong for people to kindle a fire or wield a burning torch in these verses?*

This Servant Song concludes by urging people to follow the servant and his God (Isaiah 50:10). Those who walk in darkness must trust in the Lord. If they try to find their own way by lighting a fire and burning a torch, they will be consumed by their efforts (Isaiah 50:11). We must understand Isaiah’s metaphor to understanding what he was saying. The darkness is a life of rejecting God and His servant. Isaiah was urging those who reject the servant to yield to the servant’s leadership. If they persisted in rejecting him and trying to find their own way, they would seal their own demise.

Q: *In what ways do you see people pursuing salvation apart from Christ? Why is this so tempting?*

Q: *Why is it better for salvation to be found in Christ alone rather than anything we could accomplish?*

APPLICATION POINT – Isaiah’s warning highlights the impossibility of approaching God in our own way. God has made Jesus the way of salvation. Forgiveness of sin can only be found in confessing Him as Savior and Lord. If we attempt to secure our salvation in any other way, we will only bring our own destruction.

2. THE SUFFERING SERVANT

ISAIAH 52:13–53:12

Q: *How does Isaiah 52:13–53:12 capture the agony of Christ’s suffering and death to an even greater extent than the New Testament?*

Q: *Why did Isaiah focus on the servant’s appearance?*

The Suffering Servant song is widely recognized by the followers of Christ as detailing His rejection and substitutionary death more than five hundred years ahead of time. Many would even say the Suffering Servant song describes the events surrounding Jesus’s death with greater emotion than even the New Testament. If you want to feel the pain of rejection and suffering Jesus felt on the cross, Isaiah’s Suffering Servant song is the first place to go.

The Suffering Servant song begins by describing the Jesus’s brutal treatment and rejection. He was beaten so badly that it was difficult to see he was human (Isaiah 52:14). Even before his appearance was marred, he could easily be overlooked. There was never anything extraordinary about his appearance (Isaiah 53:2). His appearance is tied to His rejection. He was despised by all, and people did not want to even look at him (Isaiah 53:3). Isaiah’s words describe Jesus’s brutally beaten body on the cross.

Q: *Why did Christ suffer in addition to His death on the cross?*

Q: *If others turn their faces from Christ crucified, why must believers turn them back?*

APPLICATION POINT – The thought of Jesus’s body mangled on the cross remains tough for us to think about two thousand years later. While those in Jesus’s own time and many others since have rejected Him, we know that our only hope for salvation is to embrace the man others refused to even look at. The marred and deformed man others despised is the sweetest sight we could behold.

Q: *What surprising element did Isaiah introduce beginning in Isaiah 53:4?*

Q: *Why was it God's will for His servant to suffer?*

After describing the servant's suffering, Isaiah went on to describe the meaning behind his suffering. He was not suffering because of what he had done. Instead, he suffered on behalf of others. He bore the grief and sorrow created by the sins of others (Isaiah 53:4–5). Remarkably, this was the Lord's doing (Isaiah 53:6). God approved of the suffering of the servant.

Although the servant's suffering was unjust, he did not protest (Isaiah 53:7). He willingly sacrificed himself on behalf of others. At death, the servant was buried with the wicked. He would be associated with the wicked even to the grave although he was not himself wicked (Isaiah 53:9).

If the mistreatment of the servant arouses indignation, Isaiah quickly reminded His readers that this was God's will (Isaiah 53:10). God intended the servant to suffer for others as a sacrifice for their guilt. Those who find forgiveness from God because of the servant's suffering will become the servant's offspring. Because of his suffering, they will prosper (Isaiah 53:10–11).

Q: *Christians rejoice at the idea of Christ as our sacrifice. Do we equally rejoice at the idea of Christ as our example in suffering?*

Q: *What allusions to Isaiah 52:13–53:12 do you see in 1 Peter 2:18–25? What do these connections mean for us?*

APPLICATION POINT – Our need to receive Jesus's suffering on our behalf for our salvation was covered under the previous point. It is crucial for us to recognize that Christians are called to share in Christ's sufferings just as we share in His resurrection. Peter recognized Christ as our example in suffering when he addressed Christian servants:

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:18–25).

Peter's words contain multiple allusions to Isaiah 52:13–53:12. They are a sobering reminder for all believers. In many ways, we could find ourselves in Isaiah 52:13–53:12. We will never suffer for the salvation of others like Jesus did, but Christians are called to follow Jesus's example in suffering.

❖: *Isaiah 53:12 describes dividing up portions and spoils. How is it gloriously unexpected that the servant would receive a portion of the spoils?*

❖: *Why is the servant numbered with the transgressors?*

Isaiah 53:12 is one of the most significant verses in the Bible. It begins with an allusion to warriors dividing up the spoils of war. Even though the servant poured out his soul to death, he still received a portion of the spoils. This is unprecedented. No matter how valiantly a warrior fought in battle, if he died, he was not around to receive a portion of the spoils. Dead men receive no portion, but the servant did! Death was not the end of the servant.

This is even more remarkable when we recognize that, in this sense, the “battle” was not a conflict of one nation against another over land and property but God against His people over their sins. Again, the Lord acknowledged that the servant had borne the sins of many upon himself, but sin did not crush him. He was still around to divide up the spoils. The servant was about to withstand the crushing weight of sin.

❖: *How would Christianity be different if the servant bore our sins but was not around to receive the spoils?*

Q: *The servant received a portion along with others. Why do we share in his spoils even though we did nothing to win the battle against sin?*

APPLICATION POINT – Isaiah 53:12 allows us to know that Christ has taken the full extent of God’s wrath against our sins. If Christ were not raised from the dead, we could have no certainty of this. If He were not resurrected, we might believe that perhaps He absorbed the full measure of God’s wrath, but there might be more wrath waiting for us when we die. We could not know and would live in uncertainty. In the New Testament, Paul removed the uncertainty. He argued that if Christ were not raised from the dead, then we are still in our sins, and our faith is futile. The portion the servant received is our guarantee of peace with our God.

NEXT STEPS

As the Christmas season approaches, peoples’ minds are drawn to Jesus’s incarnation and birth. These are wonderful truths for Christians to focus on, but it is also appropriate to focus on Jesus’s death during this season. One of the reasons Jesus was born was to die on our behalf. As God leads, help others you meet during this season to make this connection as well. It may take them by surprise. Some will wonder why you wish to spoil the Christmas season by thinking about Jesus’s death. But the true meaning of Jesus’s birth cannot be fully appreciated apart from His death on our behalf and His resurrection. Use the focus on Jesus this season to point people to the gospel.

PRAY

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

-Lord, the servant promised to sustain the weary with a word. I am weary. Sustain me with your word.

-Jesus, you were pierced for my transgressions. I will praise your name for all eternity.

-Father, your plan for my redemption is more than I deserve. Help me to live my life in light of the suffering Jesus endured on my behalf. Make me ever more faithful to Your will. Make me ever more willing to lay myself aside for the sake of your kingdom.

-God, help me to suffer well. As Christ is my example in all of life, make Him my example in suffering as well. Strengthen my faith so I may endure whatever trials are before me.

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.

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

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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

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

Q: *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

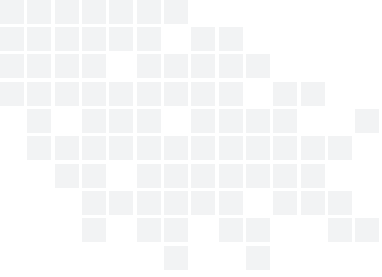
+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God’s Word this week.

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.

II 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

II 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.

Q: *Why is it more appealing to find our own solutions to our problems than trust in God?*

Q: *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.

Q: *Who did God tell Isaiah to take with him when he confronted Ahaz [Isaiah 7:3]?*

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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

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

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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.

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

Q: *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.

Q: *Which of the verses in Isaiah 9:1–7 would you most expect to find quoted in the New Testament?*

Q: *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.

Q: *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?*

Q: *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.

II 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

II ISAIAH 9:1–5

Q: *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?*

Q: *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 dependance 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.

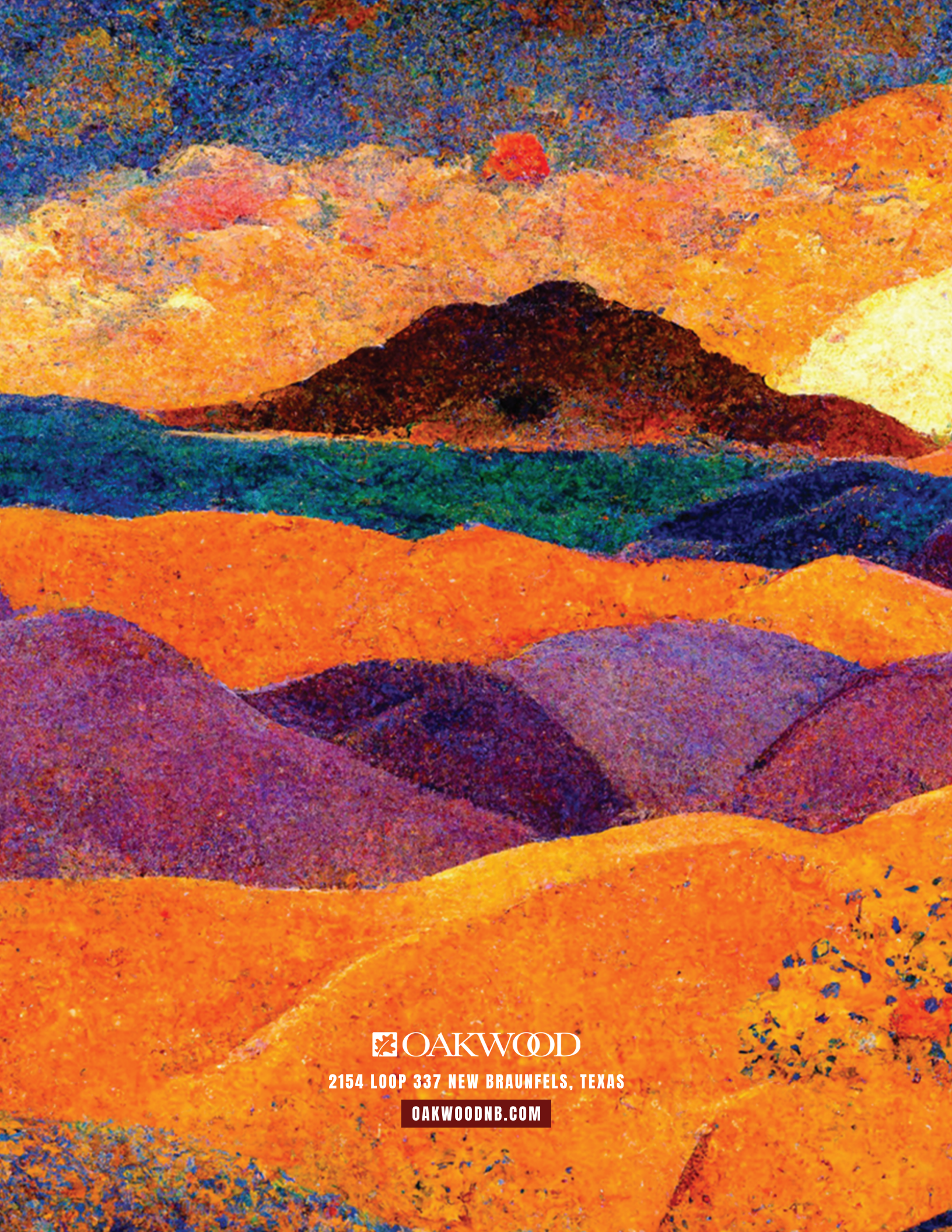
Lord Jesus, your birth was foretold centuries beforehand. In the same way, your return was foretold centuries beforehand. Keep my hope focused upon you.

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.







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