

**What Child Is This?  
How The Old Testament Prepares Us for the  
Coming of God's Messiah**

**Rev. Bobby M. Morris**

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### ***About the Author***

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### **About the Contributor for the Youth Options**

Deacon Deborah Poole serves as the SC Synod Coordinator for Children and Youth. She recently retired after 30 years as Coordinator for Family Ministries at Mt. Hermon (1993-2005) and Pisgah (2005-2023) Lutheran Churches. Deborah lives in Lexington, and enjoys reading and gardening.

# Scripture Studies from the South Carolina Synod

During the South Carolina Synod Assembly in 2023, a Resolution on *Living into the Unity of the Body of Christ* was presented and adopted. The hope of this resolution was to encourage our congregations to unite in the study of Scripture and renew their love for the sacred texts by taking a deeper look together at even the challenging passages that can be difficult to understand in our current contexts. We recognize that the Scriptures were originally written in Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic and that the collection of books was initially intended for people who lived several thousand years ago, but we also know that the Scriptures are God's living Word for us today. So, how can we best study Scripture and what can they mean for our growth in faith and life?

A group of leaders in the South Carolina Synod were gathered to serve as the Synod Bible Team to collaborate on ways we could fulfill the hope of the Resolution. Knowing that Bible Study is best done together and not alone, this Bible Team has worked together over the past year to create materials that can be used with small groups in any congregation. Our hope is that these studies will be a blessing to all who use them.

These Studies are being shared in two sections. Section One will be sent out in May 2024 to allow leaders to prepare for group studies that may be used beginning August 2024 through January 2025. Section Two will be shared in the Fall of 2024 to allow leaders to prepare for group studies that may be used beginning February through July 2025. In an effort to make this user friendly we did not date any of the courses. You may use them in whatever order you wish, and you may claim the flexibility to use the material in a timeline that suits the needs in your context. Each Study also includes questions and/or activities that can be used to supplement the study when offered to Youth.

The South Carolina Synod Bible Team includes: Josh Kestner, Josh Knutson, Shelley Allen, Steven Gallego, Kevin Ogilvie, Lisa Isenhower, Bobby Morris, Joanna Gragg, Libby Bedenbaugh, Arden Hallman, Heather Apel, Deborah Poole, Wayne Kannaday, Ginny Aebischer.

## Section One Studies:

1. Introduction to What that Bible is and What the Bible is not
2. Themes in the Gospel according to Luke
3. What Child is This? How the Old Testament Prepares us for the Coming of God's Messiah
4. Jesus is born: Matthew and Luke's Birth Stories
5. Reading Revelation: Finding Good News in the Scariest Book of the Bible

It has been said, "Jesus didn't even mention many of the issues that divide us, but Jesus did have something important to say about unity." (see John 17)

Blessings in your Study of Scripture,  
+Bishop Ginny Aebischer

## I. Aspirations Of Messianic Dominion End in Disappointment

### What Is A Messiah?

The one born in Bethlehem would eventually be identified as God's Messiah. But what does the word "messiah" mean?

*If someone asked you, "what is a messiah?" - what would you say?*

The word "messiah" comes from a Hebrew word (ma-shi-ak) and essentially means "anointed one" – someone who has had oil imposed upon their head. There are various reasons for anointing a person.

*Can you think of a time when we anoint someone in the church?*

Baptism – when we use a bit of oil and make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the baptized and say, "You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever."

Anointing is a way of marking a special time and of declaring something special of someone – typically some special status or purpose that they now have.

*What is the special status or purpose we are given in baptism?*

We are declared a child of God, a sibling of Christ and of all the baptized, and we are given the purpose of a life of faith – a life-long journey that extends even beyond death on which God accompanies us and our other baptized siblings in Christ.

In ancient Israel (and elsewhere), one use of anointing was to coronate someone as king. For example, Saul and David are spoken of as "God's anointed" in the books of 1 & 2 Samuel. (1 Sam 24:7, for example). In the Old Testament, to refer to someone as "anointed" or especially "God's anointed" typically means that they are a king. And again, this would apply to Saul, David, Solomon, and many other Old Testament figures. So that means that there are actually lots of messiahs in the Bible!

*Can you think of any other Old Testament kings/messiahs? A good study Bible should have a list somewhere amid its study resources.*

### What Does It Mean To Have Dominion?

One of the things that can be said about a king is that such a person has a kingdom – in other words, a king has dominion over something or someone. So we can't really go further with the idea of "messiah" or apply it to Jesus without dealing with the idea of "dominion."

*How would you describe or define "dominion?"*

The first hint we get about dominion comes, well, at the very beginning of the Bible – in Genesis 1. After we humans are created in the very image and likeness of God in Gen 1:26-27, we are then told in verse 28 to be fruitful and multiply "and fill the earth and subdue it, and have **dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Open your Bibles and read Gen 1:28-31

*What do you think it means for God to say to us to subdue the earth and have dominion over it? Does it mean we can do whatever we want with it, or are there limits, or even a purpose?*

If we continue reading into the second (and third) chapters of Genesis into the second portrait of God's creative work, we find that there are indeed limits placed on Adam and Eve. They are given much, but they are forbidden to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It would seem they cannot have or do absolutely anything.

*And what are the results of their trying to do so anyway? How well does that go? Are your thoughts about dominion changing at all?*

In fact, look closely at Gen 2:15 – the very verse where some restrictions are placed on what the first humans may do with the creation.

*What does that verse suggest is the purpose of the dominion given to humans?*

God put the human in the garden "to till and keep it." This sounds more like the role of a caretaker, doesn't it? In fact, this is much like what we talk about in the church when we use the term "stewardship." So it turns out that one who has dominion, at least dominion as given by God, has the role of a caretaker, a steward.

\* For further reflection on our relationship with creation, read two beautiful psalms of creation: Ps 8 and 104. In Ps 8, note that we are created just a little less/lower than God, but we *are less* than God – only God is creator with limitless power. The psalm begins and ends with praising God and God alone as such.

Ps 104 sings of the beauty and majesty of God's creative work. Note, for instance, especially in verses 16-18 how various parts of creation are not exclusively for human use and enjoyment. The trees, the high mountains, even the rocks – they are not just for us, they are also for the birds, the wild goats, and the coneys (rock badgers)!

*What are some other parts of creation that you could add to Ps 104 that have purposes for other creatures and things besides humans?*

The concepts of messiah and dominion are related not only theoretically, as we have just seen, but also practically in Scripture. Long before God raises up kings for God's people, God raises up other leaders: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and the judges, such as Samson and Deborah. In none of these cases does God bestow absolute power, but rather God calls a partner to help bring about God's purpose and plan. In a manner of speaking, all of these individuals are called to be a kind of shepherd. (Samson is an example of dominion gone "off the rails" as his calling becomes less about shepherding and more about himself and his wants and lusts, thus ending in ruin.)

### **Why Have Just A Shepherd When You Can Have A King?**

Eventually, God's people begin to ask for more than individuals raised up as shepherds – they want an actual king! We see this beginning to happen as we transition from the end of the book of Judges and move into the book of 1 Samuel. The problem, or at least a big part of the problem, as we see in 1 Sam 8:4, is that the people want a

king “like other nations.” The kings of other nations were not shepherds, they were more like dictators who amassed power and wealth for themselves. As chapter 8 continues, Samuel warns the people of things like taxation and draft into military service and how a king would take things that he wanted.

*What are some other ways you would describe differences between shepherds and kings?*

Despite the warnings, the people still insist on a king so they can be like the other nations (1 Sam 8:19-20). And somewhat remarkably, God gives in! Herein we see part of the amazing character of God’s grace. God journeys with us even when we are not on the path God would choose for us. Even after warning the people of the dangers of kingship, and certainly kingship like other nations, God determines to go along with these rebellious children. God doesn’t walk away. Instead, God meets the people where they are and reorients their joint journey accordingly. The power of God is that God can actually work through our wrong turns, misdirections and miscalculations to nonetheless bring about God’s purposes and get us to where God wants us to be.

*What does it mean to have a God who sticks with us even when we go astray? Have you ever had someone let you fail, but who stayed close to you along the way, even though they warned you that the direction you were going wouldn’t lead to a good place?*

## **What Kind Of King Would God Give Us?**

When God sticks with us on an ill-advised alternate path, however, God is going to take every opportunity to provide direction along the way. So while the people wanted to have a king *like other nations*, God is going to endeavor to lead God’s people to a different kind of kingship.

There are numerous instances in Scripture where God provides direction on what a king should be like and how a king should have dominion. Read Deut. 17:14-20 – sometimes referred to as “The Law of the King.” It is essentially a brief list of expectations for messiahship under God. Also read Ps 72 a much more comprehensive list of messianic expectations for someone chosen as king of God’s people. Note especially the mention of “dominion” in verse 8.

*What are some characteristics of the king described in these texts? What are the king’s priorities to be? What is the fundamental job of the king? How does the king described here differ from kings as we typically know them from history?*

For further reflection on God’s expectations and guidance on a king for God’s people, read Psalm 1 and 2. Ps 1 is often called a Torah psalm, in other words, a psalm that sings of the virtue of God’s law. Ps. 2 is often called a royal psalm, a psalm that speaks of the relationship between God and God’s messiah. Note especially in verse 7 how a king of God’s people is to be as a son to God.

*What is suggested about the guiding principles for a messiah of God by these two psalms appearing right next to each other?*

Technically speaking, the first king of Israel is Saul (1 Sam 10:1 – for further context, see also 1 Sam 9:15-27). However, due to some episodes of disobedience to

God (1 Sam 13), Saul loses his position. In 1 Sam 16 we find the story of the prophet Samuel going to Jesse to choose from among his sons a new king for Israel. You may certainly re-read this familiar story in which Jesse proudly shows off all of his handsome sons of great stature, but none are chosen by Samuel. At this point, Samuel asks Jesse if he has any more sons, to which Jesse responds that there is one more, David, the young little squirt who is out with the sheep. When Jesse brings him, as asked by Samuel, God speaks to Samuel, saying, “Anoint him, this is the one!” (1 Sam 16:12)

*What does it say about what God has in mind for a king of Israel that none of the Jesse’s older sons was chosen, but instead the younger, less likely David?*

David indeed became the king of Israel. In 2 Sam 7, David, who now has a palace, gets the idea to build a house for God (since the Exodus, the ark of the covenant had been kept in a moveable tent – known as the tabernacle). What follows in this chapter is God’s covenant with David – that it would be descendants of David who would be God’s kings for all times. Notice in verse 14 the same father-son relationship between God and God’s messiah that we saw in Ps 2.

*Who makes the most commitments in 2 Sam 7? In other words, who is doing the most work and putting the most on the line in this covenant? How long is this covenant good for? What do these things say about God?*

*What is said about God’s kings committing iniquities? Is it a matter of if or when? What does this say about God and God’s commitment to meet us where we are and walk with us?*

## **So How Does The Experiment of Kingship Go?**

It would not be long after God establishes an eternal covenant with David and his descendants that this trial run of messiahship takes an unfortunate turn. 2 Sam 11 recounts the story of David’s affair with Bathsheba. Read this chapter to refresh yourself on the sordid details. It is a story of lust, deception, adultery, and even murder.

*How does the behavior of David in 2 Sam 11 compare with how David should have been conducting himself as God’s king/messiah according to Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72? Is David behaving more like a king for God or a king of other nations?*

Not surprisingly, 2 Sam 12 opens by declaring that the thing David did greatly displeased God. As a result, God sends the prophet Nathan to David, who craftily draws the guilt out of David with a parable (vs. 1-7). Verses 8-25 in chapter 12 narrate the aftermath of David’s confession and God’s response.

*Was David punished for what he had done? Were the things that happened to David in the last part of the chapter caused by God or were they the result of David’s own actions – things that he set in motion by what he did, or some of both? Was the covenant between God and David and David’s descendants broken because of what David had done? What does this say about God and God’s commitments to us?*

For further reflection, Ps 51 is a psalm of lament introduced as being written by David after his affair with Bathsheba had been revealed.

*Does this psalm make you view David any differently? As more or less like one of us? Is there a part of worship liturgy that you recognize as coming from this psalm?*

Solomon, the son of David and Bathsheba would be the next king of Israel. You might think that he would have learned from the mistakes of his father, but it would not seem so. In 1 Kings 5:13 and 9:15 we learn that Solomon used large amounts of forced labor for building projects. 1 Kings 10 narrates the visit to Solomon of the Queen of Sheba. She was drawn to visit because she wanted to see with her own eyes the splendor she had heard about Solomon's kingdom. And see she did. After reading this chapter, consider the same questions of Solomon that we asked above of David. (The list of Solomon's escapades continues into chapter 11 if you'd like to see more.)

*How does the behavior of Solomon in 1 Kings 10 compare with how Solomon should have been conducting himself as God's king/messiah according to Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72? Is Solomon behaving more like a king for God or a king of other nations?*

After the death of Solomon, Israel splits into a southern and northern kingdom. The narrative of this split comes in 1 Kings 12, where we find that a major issue was how demanding Solomon had been of his subjects and whether the next king should do the same. As a result, the northern ten tribes secede under king Jereboam (who had served under Solomon), and the southern two tribes remain under Solomon's son, Rehoboam.

*To what degree do you think Solomon's extravagance and demands on the people played a role in the split of Israel? Might the outcome have been different if Solomon had been a king more like that described in Deut 17:14-20 or Ps 2 or Ps 72?*

Israel would never again be a united kingdom to the extent it had been under David and Solomon. Both the northern and southern kingdoms would see a string of kings that failed to live up to the messianic standards put forth by God. Some got closer than others, such as kings Hezekiah and Josiah, and some didn't even get in the ballpark, like kings Ahab and Manasseh. Both kingdoms ended in ruin. The Northern kingdom fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC and the ten tribes were exiled and scattered, resulting in their being lost forever. The Southern kingdom fell to the Babylonians in 587 BC and some of the population was temporarily exiled to Babylon. In both of these cases, we could turn to biblical texts that narrate poor and misguided messianic leadership by the kings of these kingdoms that played a major role in their downfall.

### **So Where Do We Go From Here? Is Messiahship Forever A Lost Cause?**

It would appear that messiahship was an utter failure for Israel. Not only had God warned that having a king was not a good idea – certainly if that king were like kings of other nations – but Israel and its kings consistently ran contrary to what a messiah of God should be like. God provided the directions, they simply were not followed.

And so we end this unit on a note of failure and despair. And that's OK for the moment, because part of the preparation of Advent should be for us to sit for a time with what happens when we turn from God and pursue our own self-interested avenues (much like David did in Ps 51).

*What is the value of reflecting upon our failures, the results of following our own ways rather than being more open to the direction of God? Why do you think we begin most all of our worship services with confession and forgiveness? What can this help us see about ourselves and God?*



## II. From Messianic Disappointment to Hope and Promise in the Psalms

### Seeking Direction In The Book of Psalms

At the conclusion of the last unit we left messiahship – a king for God over Israel – in ruins. No one was able to live up to what God expected of a messiah – one who would rule over God’s people as a shepherd and be as a son to God. After only a few kings, the kingdom of Israel split into a northern and southern kingdom, both of which would (largely self-) destruct in 722 BC and 587 BC.

As so we left open the question of whether messiahship was dead – whether there was a way forward for Israel to have a king that would live up to the high bars of messiahship in Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72. The question entails considering not only where the people would go from there, but where God would go – in what direction would God lead the people from there?

To help us with these questions we turn to the book of Psalms – a collection of hymnic writings from across ancient Israel’s history that bears witness to some of the highest highs and lowest lows in the lives of God’s people. Stated another way, the Psalms witness to the faith journey of ancient Israel – a faith journey that included messianic aspirations, disappointment, and what came after. So the psalms are extremely relevant in considering how the Old Testament prepares us for the coming of God’s messiah.

### How Can The Book Of Psalms Direct Us Regarding God’s Messiah?

The book of Psalms consists of 150 different hymns. These come from various time periods and circumstances across ancient Israel’s history – from the days of David and Solomon, down to near the time of Jesus. They are not arranged in a precise chronological order. In fact, there have been several arrangements over time. (Think of the changing landscape and categorizations of our own worship hymnody through different worship books over time.)

We see evidence of this collection process given that there are references to units like the Psalms of Ascents – hymns likely used on pilgrimage to and when approaching Jerusalem or even entering the temple (Ps 120-134). There are also blocks of psalms attributed to an individual or group, such as the Psalms of Asaph (Ps 73-83).

While the collection process happened over time, there was, of course, a final editorial arrangement that resulted in the product we now have. Evidence of such a final hand appears in the division of the Psalms into five “books” – an arrangement probably intended to give it final shape and mirror the five books of Moses (Genesis-Deuteronomy).

Book I: Ps 1-41

Book III: Ps 73-89

Book V: Ps 107-150

Book II: Ps 42-72

Book IV: Ps 90-106

While individual psalms are certainly enlightening for messianic expectations (as we have seen with Ps 2 and 72), this final arrangement is what becomes particularly helpful to us in terms of the history of messiahship and the coming of God’s messiah.

Even though Psalms 1-150 by no means follow a strict chronological order, there is, nonetheless, a loose historical progression that reflects ancient Israel's experience with and God's guidance regarding messiahship. Taken as a whole, the book of Psalms bears the imprint across time of the story and trajectory of messiahship for God's people.

### **How A Collection Begins Says Something**

We looked at Ps 1 & 2 in our first unit, but it is worth highlighting here that the entire book of Psalms begins with a Torah psalm followed by a royal psalm. The 150-piece collection begins with hymnody that sings not only of the virtue of God's law, but also of the relationship between God and God's messiah. Recall that verse 7 of Ps 2 indicates the father-son relationship that is to exist between God and God's messiah.

This paired opening significantly sets the stage for major themes of movement throughout the remaining 148 psalms. Adhering to God's law will be immensely important for how things go for God's people – and the degree to which Israel's king follows God's law will also have a dramatic impact on the life of the people and overall direction of the nation.

*How would our daily lives be without guidelines or laws? For example, how would highway travel be impacted? How does God's law give shape and order and direction to our lives?*

### **Israel Emerges As A Nation With A King**

Taken as a whole, books I and II (Ps 1-72) reflect the experience of the beginnings not only of ancient Israel as a nation, but as a people with a king to exercise dominion over an earthly kingdom on behalf of God. We know historically, that it did not take long at all for problems to emerge with messiahship. Think of Saul's short-lived reign, and the significant problems with David and Solomon, and the national split that happened after Solomon's death.

Similarly, we do not get far into the book of Psalms until we begin to get hints of problems with messiahship. Almost all of the psalms attributed to King David are laments. A lament is a psalm uttered when things are not going so well, when there is something about which the speaker seeks to cry out to God for help. Already in Ps 3 we encounter one of David's cries of lament. The psalm reflects David's pain over the death of his son Absalom. Absalom had rebelled against his father, tried to seize power, and was killed in the process (herein lies the inspiration for William Faulkner's book "Absalom! Absalom!")

David's laments pick up significantly in Book II. Ps 52, 54, 57, 59 all reflect David's conflict with Saul during the time of Saul's decline and David's rise to power. Read any one or all of these for a sense of David's angst over the situation with Saul and his failed kingship.

In the previous unit, we looked at Ps 51, which sits just before the above group. As we have already noted, it too is a lament – a cry of repentant pain from David after the discovery of the affair with Bathsheba.

*What does it suggest about being a king, especially a king governed by human standards, that so many of the psalms attributed to David are laments, rather than more joyful ones?*

## Messiahship Takes A Turn For The Worse

As we move into Book III, we find reflections of the full failure of messiahship with evidence of the destruction of kingdoms, exile, even the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Interestingly, Book II had just ended with Ps 72 – that extensive listing of God’s expectations for messiahship that we looked at in the previous unit. With this psalm ending Book II, it is almost as if to say, if David had followed this, there would have been less, perhaps none, of his laments in Books I & II. Nor would there be the further evidences of messianic failure about to be revealed in Book III.

The destructive results of messianic failures come to a climax in the last psalm of Book III – Ps 89. It is a rather long psalm (52 verses). The opening verses affirm the steadfast love of the Lord that never fails, followed by a brief remembrance of God’s everlasting covenant with David and his descendants in verses 3-4.

Next we encounter praises of God as creator extending as far as verse 18. With verse 19, we again return to the covenant with David, presented this time almost as an addition act of creation by God. Verses regarding God’s relationship with David continue, highlighting again the Father-son relationship in vss 26-27, and the eternal commitment of God to this covenant in vss 28-29 (“as long as the heavens endure”). Verses 30-37 consider the possibility of violation of God’s commandments and the results – punishment (vs 32), but the covenant commitment to David and his descendants holding fast (vss 33-37).

So far, this psalm has been rather positive and uplifting – an elaborately and artfully expanded account of God’s promises to David and his descendants in 2 Sam 7. However, a dramatic turn occurs with vs 38. Thus far, the psalmist has recounted all of God’s messianic promises to David and his descendants – vividly and meticulously reminding God of them.

At vs 38, however, the psalmist’s disposition toward God completely changes. Verses 38-49 essentially accuse God of renegeing on the promises just outlined. It would appear that Jerusalem has fallen to the Babylonians, and perhaps the temple has already been destroyed as well. In the psalmist’s view, the only way such an unthinkable tragedy could have occurred is for God to have turned God’s back on David and his descendants in Jerusalem. And so the psalm ends by asking God to take notice of how Israel’s enemies taunt the fallen nation, with the implication that perhaps God would recall the messianic promises and change the current situation. But the psalm ends without indicating whether or not God hears or answers.

*Have you ever, as the psalmist here does, essentially called God to account for a situation, asking where has God been and what happened to God’s supposed steadfast love? Why is it OK to speak to God in such a way? What is the value in being able to do so?*

## Is That It For Messiahship?

Book III ended leaving us wondering if messiahship had any future, whether God was going to have anything else at all to do with the idea. God had, after all, advised against the whole thing in 1 Sam 8. Yet, God had gone along and even made eternal

promises to David and his descendants in 2 Sam 7. But Ps 89 witnessed to the total collapse of messiahship. So is that it???

Book IV responds to this lingering question with a number of psalms that witness to God as cosmic king – king of the universe. It is the psalms' way of saying, yes, it would appear that the earthly king, the messiah, failed and appears to be no more. However, the king of the universe hasn't gone anywhere!

For example, Ps 93 opens by declaring "The Lord reigns!" The earthly messiah might not, but God does. Despite the way things might look and feel, God's reign hasn't ended and will not end. God is far more powerful and enduring than floods and raging waters. These sentiments are echoed in a number of other psalms in Book IV, such as Ps 95, 96, 97, 98, 99.

Book III had ended wondering if God was done not just with messiahship, but even with Israel. Did God still reign or even care to reign? Book IV answers with a resounding "Yes!" It would appear that God was not finished with Israel (or perhaps messiahship) just yet.

*Have there been times in your life when it feels like God has gone silent or turned away? How did it feel to come to the realization that God had not turned away? What convinced you of this?*

### **So God Still Reigns, But Will A Messiah Ever Again Reign For God?**

Book V witnesses to something even more remarkable – surprising even. Psalm 110 represents almost a merger of the overarching movements of Books I and IV – the cosmic reign of God and the reign of God's earthly messiah are brought together in some respects. Not only has God's reign not changed or gone anywhere. It would appear that the reign of God's messiah has not breathed its last either. God still might be able to raise up an earthly messiah worthy to sit at God's right hand.

Not coincidentally, it is also in Book V that we find Ps 119 – the grandest psalm to God's law. The location of this psalm in Book V in the midst of hints at messianic hope would seem to be a hearkening to Ps 1 and 72 – those psalms that lifted up the importance of the Torah, God's law, to the functioning of God's messiah.

Further hope for the future comes in the location of the Psalms of Ascent (Ps 120-134) all here in Book V. After the ending despair of Book IV, which would suggest the experience of the temple in Jerusalem being destroyed, here we have a batch of psalms that sing of the joy of making pilgrimage as one goes up to Jerusalem to enter the temple and worship the Lord there.

Psalm 132 provides an excellent example. The text opens asking God to remember the difficulties that David faced, and for David's desire for the Lord to have a house, a temple, rather than just a tent. Ps 132 envisions a day when pilgrims will again have the ability to journey to the temple in Jerusalem. Further, the psalm repeatedly couples this hope with expectations of a day when one would sit on the throne in Jerusalem as God's messiah. Vs 10 implores God, for David's sake, not to turn away from the possibility of an anointed one. Vs 11 reminds God (as had Ps 89) of the promises made to David. Vs 17 virtually takes on a prophetic flavor, with God declaring that in Jerusalem a horn would sprout up for David, and a lamp for God's anointed one. Verse 18 concludes the vision with a gleaming crown for God's messiah, Israel's king.

How can there be such hope expressed as we see here in Ps 132 and as we saw in Ps 110 after the deep dark cry of Ps 89? How can you be aware of a destroyed Jerusalem and temple and sing Ps 132? These psalms witness to an awareness of God's faithfulness. Although we frequently renege on our promises, God never does, even though at times the appearance of things might suggest the opposite.

What we see developing in Book V is the realization that although humans had failed so egregiously with regard to messiahship, that didn't mean God had given up on messiahship or God's people. It is a revelation found at various locales in the book of Psalms, but especially in Book V, where the faithfulness of God, even when we are unfaithful, is repeatedly lifted up in two beautiful ways:

1. The psalms repeatedly urge us to "Give thanks to the Lord, because the Lord is good, because God's steadfast love endures forever." (Ps 106, 118, 136)
2. "The Lord our God is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." (Ps 86, 103, 145) This statement originates in Exodus 34 in the midst of the golden calf episode. In Ex 34, we find God so angry with the people, that they would have so swiftly turned against God and to an idol, that God is ready to obliterate them, or at least to abandon them. Moses intervenes to remind God of God's promises to the people, rebellious though they are. And God remembers that "Yes, indeed, I am merciful, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." And thus the Exodus journey continues and the people do make it to the promised land.

In similar fashion, the psalms, especially in Book V, suggest that despite God having every right and reason to trash the idea of messiahship, that because God is faithful to God's promises, that is not what ultimately happens. God can be faithful even to an ill-advised idea of the people that the people messed up really badly. God's grace is so profound that God can say, "OK, let's have a second go at that bad idea of yours. We might just be able to make it work this time."

### **A Hymnic Witness To God's Amazing Messianic Faithfulness And Grace**

The psalmists clearly get how profound it is to have a God so committed to God's people and covenant promises. The entire collection began with psalms to God's law (Ps 1) and to God's relationship with the messiah (Ps 2). Now, all these years and psalms later, we have witnessed just how serious and steadfast God's commitment to these things and to God's people really is. So having come to that realization, especially in Book V, how else could the psalms end than on a high note of praise?

Such an ending is exactly what we find. Ps 146-150 are known as the Hallelujah Psalms, because they each begin and end and frequently have throughout the phrase "Praise the Lord!" (the English rendition of the Hebrew phrase "Hallelujah").

Ps 150 is the grand conclusion not just to this final batch but the entire collection – a Hallelujah Chorus of sorts for the entire book of Psalms – lifting up way after way and reason after reason to praise the Lord. So it turns out that the book of Psalms has a profound messianic trajectory, one that shows us, despite early and repeated failures, that messiahship has a powerful future in God's plans for God's people.

### III. From Messianic Disappointment to Hope and Promise in the Prophets

#### Seeking Direction Among The Prophets

In the last unit, we approached the book of Psalms for help in answering the question, in light of significant and catastrophic failures, whether messiahship was dead – whether there was a way forward for Israel to have a king that would live up to the high bars of messiahship in Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 or Ps 72. Where would the people go from the apparent demise of messiahship? Where God would go – in what direction would God lead the people from there?

Taken as a whole, the Book of Psalms demonstrated an incredible sensitivity to the ebbs and flows of ancient Israel's experience with messiahship – and was able to offer significant hope and promise that a path forward still remained for Israel to have a king who would be worthy to bear the title of God's messiah.

The prophetic writings of the Old Testament are vast – encompassing not only the three large works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, but also the collection of the twelve “smaller” prophets, Hosea-Malachi. Before we begin to probe these writings for direction regarding the potential future of messiahship, a few general comments about these writings may be helpful.

#### What Kind Of Writings Do We Have From The Prophets?

*If someone asked you, “What do prophets do?” how would you respond?*

Biblical prophets were not crystal ball gazers. In other words, they were not about gazing into the future in order to “predict” specific events at specific times and places. Prophets certainly speak to the future, but in a more present-grounded way. Old Testament prophets are inspired by God to look carefully at the times and circumstances of their day and speak to where those circumstances, if unchanged, will likely lead, as opposed to where and how God is trying to lead God's people.

As an illustration, think of having someone to inspect a house. They walk into a room and identify a circular stain in the ceiling material. The person notes that it would appear there is a leak in the roof, and that if not fixed, the roof and ceiling will likely sustain further damage that could eventually lead to the demise of the entire house. If, however, the roof is repaired, these things may be averted. This is actually very similar to how the prophets speak to God's kings and God's people.

*Are we today, then, able to act as God's prophets? How so?*

*What does it mean to say a prophet has a vision?*

Prophets are often thought of as visionaries – people who have visions. This would be a fair assessment of the Old Testament prophets. However, all prophetic visionary experiences need not be thought of as eerie, dream-like experiences. Some of the visions of the prophet Ezekiel sound this way, with references to things like strange creatures and wheels with eyes in Ezek 1.

For the most part, however, Old Testament prophetic visions are more about the stuff of average, everyday life. The prophet Amos is a great example. In chapter 7, for example, Amos has a vision of a plumb line. *Make sure everyone knows what a plumb*

*line is.* This vision leads him to the conclusion that Israel is “out of plumb” and needs correction. While not impossible, it is not necessary to imagine Amos falling into a spooky trance and seeing the heavens torn open with a plumb line appearing in the sky.

Probably more likely is that Amos is out and about one day and notices someone building a structure and using a plumb line to make sure it is straight and square. At that point, Amos has what we might call an “ah-ha moment.” Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Amos has the realization that in a similar fashion to what he sees in front of him, God is holding a plumb line to Israel, and has found Israel to be out of plumb and in need of correction.

*Are we as God’s people, then, still able to have visions? How so?*

## **The Prophets As Political Critics**

The prophets by no means ignore the behaviors and proclivities of the people, but their words of rebuke and correction are very often directed at the leadership of the people – in particular the kings. This is because, as we have seen, the kings of Israel, as God’s messiahs, were supposed to shepherd God’s people, giving them guidance, helping them to see and correct their wrongs. So when the people go astray, the prophets will often point an indicting finger at the leaders of the people for their lack of messianic leadership.

In Amos, for instance, the reason that Israel is not “plumb” is because the leadership has failed the people. In Amos 4:1, the prophet criticizes the grotesque extravagance of the “cows of Bashan” – the elite who recline on beds of ivory (6:4) and gulp wine from bowls (6:6) while Israel suffers and is falling apart. (Recall Solomon’s extravagance that was the precursor to the split of Israel into a northern and southern kingdom.) Amos 9 narrates the coming harsh judgment upon such failed leaders. God had said, in 2 Sam 7, after all, that if the king committed iniquity, that God would punish.

While Amos delivers some of the most harsh indictments and calls for divine punishment in response to messianic leadership failures, we find similar assessments of the leaders of God’s people across the prophetic literature. Time and time again, the prophets call attention to lacks of messianic leadership and how, if unchecked, such flawed leadership will lead to the demise of all of Israel.

*What are some examples in our modern world of leadership that falls short of messianic principles resulting in suffering, misdirection, even catastrophe for nations or peoples?*

## **The Prophets As Advocates Of Messianic Restoration**

While unafraid to speak harsh words to God’s would-be messiahs, the prophets have more to say. Despite the level of injustice and corruption they see, they are not ready to say that all is lost.

Even Amos is not ready to say that all is lost. Just after Amos’ biting words in the beginning of chapter 9 in the midst of the judgment and destruction unfolding there, vs 11 take a significant turn. The prophet says that the “booth” of David will be raised up, its breaches repaired, and it will be rebuilt as in the days of old. Suddenly, in the midst of

what could have been taken as a doomsday prophecy, messiahship seems to yet have a future.

Verse 11 began with the words “On that day” and reading on we find vs 13 beginning “The time is surely coming...” When the prophets utter these or similar words, they are indicating that God is about to do something surprising – that an amazing divine act of renewal and restoration is about to take place. It is the kind of activity pointed to by the prophet Isaiah in 43:19 – “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” The message of the prophets is not just condemnation and judgment, but the news that there is no human failure from which God cannot bring forth a new beginning.

*What words of hope do you find in Amos 9:11-15? What is God going to do to bring forth a new beginning for Israel and messiahship?*

### **The Preeminent Prophet Of Messianic Hope**

A majority of our Old Testament Advent readings come from the prophet Isaiah. In fact, Isaiah is second only to Psalms as the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. So this prophet clearly has a great deal of relevance in preparing us for the coming of God’s messiah, and even in providing insights into what we observe as the life of God’s messiah unfolds in the gospels. In Isaiah, we encounter, as we have, for instance, in the psalms, great messianic expectations, messianic disappointments, and cause for messianic hope in the future.

(First Sunday of Advent, Year A, Isa 2:1-5) Isa 2 comes from a time before messiahship had failed. No kingdoms had fallen, there was still a king in Israel. The kings were not perfect – there was plenty to be criticized (vss 6-22 make it clear that all is not perfect). However, notice how hopeful the opening verses of Isa 2 sound. Verse 2 speaks of nations streaming to the mountain of the Lord’s house and vs 3 of instruction and the word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem. Implied here is that God’s messiah, the king of the people, would play a key role in Jerusalem being such a beacon, for Jerusalem was the place from which the king reigned. If the king reigned according to the principles of Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72, then Jerusalem certainly could and would be known for these things noted by Isaiah. So at this point, there is still hope that the earthly king could and would be such a messiah.

(Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A, Isa 7:10-16) This is the text from which we get one of the most memorable names in all of Scripture – Emmanuel, which means God is with us. Some historical background is necessary here (see also 2 Kings 16). At this point in time, the king in Jerusalem is Ahaz, and he is in a bit of a pickle. There is an international conflict brewing and the king of the Northern Kingdom (Pekah) is pressuring him to join an alliance with King Rezin of Syria against the Assyrian empire. When Ahaz resists pressure to join, Rezin and Pekah attempt to force Ahaz into compliance with an attack (see Isa 7:1-2). Although unsuccessful, the allied attack rattles Ahaz significantly.

At this point, God sends Isaiah to speak to Ahaz. The message to Ahaz is essentially that he should calm down and maintain his trust in the Lord. Isaiah assures Ahaz that these outside threats will fade. And for further reassurance, Isaiah offers for



Ahaz to ask for a sign from God. When Ahaz refuses to ask a sign, Isaiah says that God will give one anyway. At this point, Isaiah points to a young woman who is pregnant. (The Hebrew word here does not mean “virgin” = a woman who has never had sexual intercourse. Instead, this is a young woman of marriage/childbearing age.) We do not know who this woman was. Some have suggested it was Ahaz’ wife, but we cannot be sure.

In any case, Isaiah points to a young woman who is pregnant, and suggests giving the child a symbolic name – Emmanuel – as a reminder to Ahaz that God is with him in this crisis. Verse 16 suggests that before this child exceeds his toddler years, the things that Ahaz are so worried about will have faded away.

What we find in this text is hope in the face of serious doubt and fear. Ahaz was the people’s king, God’s messiah. But in the face of threats and challenges, he was afraid that was not enough. In fact, rather than putting his trust in God, he was toying with the idea of putting trust in a foreign political alliance. God seeks to reassure (and correct the misplaced trust of) Ahaz by pointing to a greater sense of security in a child, not yet born, whose name will be a reminder of God’s steadfast presence.

As Book IV of Psalms lifted up the cosmic reign of God, Isaiah seems to be trying to show Ahaz that the power and steadfastness of messiahship comes not from any individual, even if they are descended from David, but from God.

*What are some things in which we put trust when that trust should be in God alone? How does misplaced trust lead us astray?*

(Nativity of the Lord, Years A, B, C, Isa 9:2-7) The child referenced in this text might be the same child highlighted in Isa 7, having now been born in Isa 9. If so, and if that child is in fact the son of Ahaz, then the child would turn out to be Hezekiah – the next king of Israel, and the king that gets about as close as any to the messianic principles of Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72 (the only rival in this regard would be Josiah). Hezekiah’s reign would be one of reform and returning to the laws and precepts of God. There were likely high hopes that Hezekiah would finally be the one to get messiahship right. As history would unfold, Hezekiah got at least as close as, if not closer than, any other king. But even Hezekiah would not turn out to be “the one” to bring messiahship to full realization. Still, the fact that he was such a good, messiah-like king kept hopes alive. Maybe, just maybe we are moving in the right direction. And let’s not fail to note why we are moving in the right direction and will ultimately get there. This passage ends by saying “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.” It is not us, but God, the one who made covenant promises to David, who will accomplish all that the prophet envisions.

(Second Sunday of Advent, Year A, Isa 11:1-10) Two things are clear as this text begins. Messiahship has not been fully realized, but it may still be. The language of a “shoot coming from the stump of Jesse” and a “branch” from roots is a reference to the line of David – hearkening back to David’s choice as messiah from Jesse’s sons in 1 Sam 16, and even to God’s eternal promise regarding David’s descendants in 2 Sam 7. Messiahship is not dead. It may have endured a winter, but spring rebirth is on the horizon. Incidentally, the image of a shoot or branch is very true to the land of the Bible. Olive trees are very hardy. They can be cut down, half dug up, and still have the

resiliency to put forth little green shoots – bringing a new beginning where it had looked as though no life or future remained.

What follows beginning with vs 2 is essentially Isaiah's version of the messianic principles outlined in Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72. The shoot, the branch will embody these attributes. You may recognize these words because they are part of our baptism liturgy. These words are spoken over, these messianic attributes are placed upon the baptized. When we are baptized, we are reborn sons and daughters of God – itself a messianic attribute – to be as a son, a daughter to God. Baptism joins us to God, and to God's coming messiah.

Verses 6-10 give us a glimpse into the world as it could be if governed by messianic principles – no hurting, no destroying, only knowledge of the Lord. We are not there yet in Isa 11, but the prophet definitely wants to share a passionate view of such a God-ordered future.

*Luther encouraged a daily remembrance of baptism. How might remembering our baptism be especially meaningful during Advent? Do we play a role in realizing the vision of Isa 11? How so?*

(Third Sunday of Advent, Year A, Isa 35:1-10) Here we find another vision of restoration and renewal. It may be that at this point in Isaiah, Jerusalem as in fact already fallen to the Babylonians and the prophet is beginning to look beyond the cataclysm. In any case, the vision is future-oriented and filled with hope and promise.

As with the shoot and branch of Isa 11, the imagery here is very true to the land of the Bible. The wilderness in this land is for most of the year very dry and barren. For seven to nine months out of the year, it is a semi-mountainous landscape of dirt and rocks with little to no vegetation. The image of such a landscape being glad, rejoicing, and blossoming is indeed extraordinary. It is a defiant word of hope in the face of barrenness and ruin.

In fact, the winter rains, which for much of the wilderness may only be 3-4 inches, do in fact bring green grass and blooming flowers to the barren landscape in the spring. So the land demonstrates the hope that Isaiah wishes to convey.

Much as we saw in the latter verses of Isa 11, vss 5-9 here convey the miraculous transformative power of God – the lame leaping and burning sand becoming a pool. There will even be a highway, so unmistakable that even a fool can't go astray. Nothing that has been lost cannot be restored and brought back to Jerusalem. If the Babylonians had in fact conquered Jerusalem at this point (which is likely), then messiahship had also fallen – there was no king in Jerusalem. Therefore, messiahship would definitely be among the things for which Isaiah seeks to offer return and restorative hope.

*In what ways does the season Advent and our own messianic expectations offer hope to the world?*

## IV. Messianic Hope And Promise Realized In the Prophets and Beyond

### The Prophets Continue To Point Forward

In the last unit, we looked at how the prophets routinely called the people, and especially the people's leaders, to account for not embodying the principles of messianic leadership as found in Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72. Our focus, however, was how, in the midst of repeated messianic disappointment, the prophets consistently hold out hope that a time would come when an individual would arise that would fully embody the attributes of God's messiah.

We will be moving next into a section of the prophet Isaiah in which Jerusalem had clearly fallen to the Babylonians, meaning there is no messiah, no king in Israel, and where many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem have been carried into exile in Babylon.

(Second Sunday of Advent, Year B, Isa 40:1-11) The passage begins with a call for comfort for God's people. They have been punished (Jerusalem has been destroyed and many of them have been exiled), but that is not the end of the story. Verse two makes clear that the time of punishment is coming to an end, opening the way to a new beginning for Israel, and for messiahship.

Beginning with vs 2, we again get a highway image (as in Isa 35:8). The highway language points not only to the literal return of exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem, but also more generally to the fact that Israel's story is not finished. Israel and messiahship have not come to the end of the line. The presence of a highway suggests there is yet somewhere for them to go. Witnesses are called upon to get up onto mountains and announce this good news.

We should note that the prophet's vision here is not of just a path through the woods. This highway would be massive even by modern construction and engineering standards – between 600 and 700 miles through desert across valleys and over mountains. This indeed would be a marvelous “new thing” done by God as spoken of in Isa 43.

*Has there been a time in your life when God made a way through a “wilderness” for you when you saw no way possible?*

The final chapters of Isaiah (56-66) come from an even later time, after which exiles had been allowed to return from Babylon to Jerusalem. Many did and began to rebuild the temple, the city, and its walls. But initial excitement dwindled as quarrels emerged, projects did not go as fast or well as hoped, and the rebuilding fell far short of former glories.

(First Sunday of Advent, Year B, Isa 64:1-9) This text reflects the stresses and distress of the return from exile and the activities mentioned above. The disappointment with what was supposed to be a grand return and restoration prompts the prophet to address God, saying “O that you would tear open the heavens and come down!” (vs 1). Either God is viewed as having deserted the people, or at the very least is being asked to act more visibly and directly. Verse three recounts that God has in fact done awesome

deeds in the past – implying that God can and hoping that God will again. In vs 5, Israel acknowledges that it has transgressed and that God has a right to be angry. Verse 7 returns to the premise that God is hidden – thus no one is calling on God's name. Nevertheless, vss 8-9 end on a somewhat hopeful note. Even though God is not exceedingly visible at the moment, Isaiah recalls that God still is the Father of the people, their potter. Verse 9 implores God not to be exceedingly angry (note that the request is not for God to have no anger at all), and finally, to remember that the people are God's own people. While the people are clearly feeling a setback in hopefulness, hope has not been lost.

*Are the Israelites disappointed and despondent because God has not acted, or because God has not acted in the way they wanted/expected God to? The Israelites placed a lot of their expectations and standards for satisfaction in the rebuilding of buildings and structures. How might our expectations for satisfaction set us up for disappointment? How might our expectations be better formed to look for what God has in mind for us?*

We have seen that Isaiah offers several perspectives on messiahship, given different historical circumstances. Most are hopeful, but we just saw in chapter 64 that the hope is not completely realized. Other Old Testament prophets join Isaiah in maintaining hope for messianic fulfillment even in the face of difficult circumstances, when that hope is not immediately materializing.

(First Sunday of Advent, Year C, Jer 33:14-16) This text emerges from circumstances similar to those behind Isa 64 (the exact point on the timeline is a bit different, but thematically they are very similar). If we read a bit before the assigned text (begin with vs 10), we find despondence and despair over the ruin of Jerusalem – “a waste without human beings or animals.” However, before vs 10 ends, the disposition changes dramatically – from deep despair over ruin, to the declaration that in those same ruined streets, voices of gladness, of brides and bridegrooms, of singing will again be heard (vs 11). God is going to restore the fortunes of the land!

At this point we pick up with the assigned text above. “The days are surely coming” is a phrase, as we have noted before, that points to God doing something surprising and extraordinary, a “new thing” such as envisioned by Isa 43:19. The use in vs. 15 of “in those days” and “at that time” emphasize God's intention to act dramatically to bring a new thing into being.

The new thing that God is gearing up to do is the restoration of Davidic messiahship. A “branch” (vs 15) indicates something new, but also something continuous with the promises made to David and his descendants. And that it will be a “righteous” branch that executes “justice and righteousness” points to the messianic virtues of Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72. Verse 16 confirms that what Jeremiah is describing is a full restoration of Jerusalem and its messiah, resulting in a renewed Jerusalem that lives in peace.

*How significant is it to have this message of restoration and renewal come not from just one of the prophets, but several? How does that impact our level of hope going into Advent?*

(Third Sunday of Advent, Year C, Zeph 3:14-20) Here we find yet another vision of God restoring the fortunes of Jerusalem and God's people. The fortunes of Israel cannot be restored only in terms of city or city walls or temple. Messiah must be a part of any full restoration. While Zephaniah does not explicitly reference the messiah, the level of restoration spoken of – the changing of shame to praise (vs 19) and making the people renowned and praised in all the earth (vs 20) can hardly be imagined without a messiah who brings God's guiding of principles of Deut 17:14-20, Ps 2 and Ps 72 into the midst of the people.

While these are by no means all the possible prophetic illustrations of forward-oriented messianic hope, we have surveyed enough to make the point that the Old Testament prophets hold out hope that a messiah would play a pivotal role in the restoration of Jerusalem, and thus the ultimate salvation of the world.

### **Other Old Testament Preparations For Our Receiving God's Messiah**

Isa 7 and Isa 9 included childbirth in the prophetic witness to messianic hope for the future (Emmanuel – Isa 7:14, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace – Isa 9:6). It is well worth noting that elsewhere in the Old Testament, childbirth helps prepare us for receiving God's messiah, born of the virgin Mary.

The reason for this assertion is that the birth of Jesus is not the first miraculous birth in the Bible. Further, when God brings about a miraculous birth, it is always to bring someone into the world to fulfill a special purpose for God. *Can you think of any other miraculous births in the Bible?*

\* Isaac – Both Abraham and Sarah were nearly one-hundred years old when Isaac was born. Gen 21:1 emphasizes that God played a role in the conception of Isaac: "The LORD dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as he had promised." The Hebrew word translated "dealt" literally means "visited."

In Rom 4:19, Paul refers to Abraham as being "as good as dead." Yet, from Abraham, and from Sarah come a son, as had been promised, who would be the father of the tribes of Israel – the nation given the purpose of being a light to the nations of the world for God.

\* Samuel – Hannah, one of the wives of Elkanah, is childless. The reason given for her inability to conceive is that the Lord had closed her womb (1 Sam 1:5). Yet, she prayed fervently to God, asking that she might conceive a male child (vs 11). She goes on to say that if God would grant her this, that she would devote the child to the Lord for his entire life.

When Hannah is later together with her husband Elkanah, the Lord "remembers" her (vs 19) and she does conceive and bear a son. The child named Samuel would become Israel's first great prophet, and would also be at the very center of the beginnings of messiahship in Israel, being the instrument of God's choice of David from among Jesse's sons.

The Old Testament precedent of God acting dramatically and significantly for the history of God's people through the birth, even miraculous birth, of children continues in the New Testament. Much as Isaac and Samuel, John the Baptist came into the world

through a miraculous birth. His mother Elizabeth had been said to be barren, and was also advancing in years. Yet she conceived and gave birth (Luke 1) to the one who would announce and prepare the way for God's messiah, who would himself also be born of a miraculous conception.

### **The One For Whom We Have Been Prepared**

A number of centuries pass between the days of even the latest Old Testament prophets and the birth of Jesus. Nevertheless, as we approach the time of Jesus' birth, messianic hopes were still very much alive. For example, Luke 17:20 recalls a time when the Pharisees ask Jesus when the kingdom of God was coming – an event tied directly to the coming of the messiah.

Those long held hopes for which the Old Testament prepared us come to fruition in Matt 1:18-25. Matthew says clearly in vs 18 that the focus of his narrative is the birth of Jesus, the messiah. Not only is the one born of the virgin Mary referred to as Emmanuel, "God with us" (a connection with Isa 7:14), he is to be named Jesus, "because he will save his people from their sins" (vs 21). This is one of the key things never realized in all the other messiahs of Israel. None of them had been able to embody the virtues of messiahship fully enough to be able to deliver their people, to introduce them to the fullness and full freedom of life that God intended.

Further, it is significant to note that the name "Jesus" in Hebrew is Yeshua – which is derived from a Hebrew verb that means to *save* or *deliver*. So the very name of Jesus is a part of his embodying the role of messiahship, as God's son, in all its fullness. Jesus is the deliverer, the one who saves.

Earlier in this study, as messiahship was taking shape, we noted how God in God's incredible grace has a way of meeting us where we are. Such was the case when the people wanted to have a king "like the nations." Rather than flatly denying the peoples' wish, God allowed them to choose a king. However, God covenanted to walk with the people down this path of their choosing, even though God had advised (through the prophet Samuel) against it.

In the birth of Jesus, God makes another profound act of meeting us where we are. God takes on flesh and literally becomes one of us, being born of a woman in the meager surroundings of a stable, not unlike most other common people of the day. Later God would take the ultimate step of meeting us where we are by meeting us in death. It turns out that God would work through messiahship not only to keep promises made to ancient Israel, but to join us in and continue to journey with us in, through, and beyond the grave.

*Can you think of other ways God meets us where we are? How might God do this through the sacraments?*

Truly, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in the one born in Bethlehem on that most holy of nights – a birth and a night for which the Old Testament and the season of Advent richly prepare us.

# Youth Options for this Course

Created by Deborah Poole

## WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

### SESSION 1

Ever heard the expression, "The grass is always greener on the other side"?

1. What does it mean?

The Israelites felt that the other nations were better off because they had a man as their ruler. They wanted to be like everyone else.

2. Have you ever wanted to fit in, without actually considering what changing would mean.
3. Why did God give them a King, then?
4. How did God feel when the Israelites said they wanted a king?
5. Why did the Israelites want a king?
6. Name a situation when it is better NOT to be like everyone else.
7. How does a king defeat enemies?

### Activity

Divide into groups. Give each group a paper with headings:

Kings Demand

God Demands

Have them use their Bibles to find things that kings demand of their people and things that God demands of us.

### Game

Divide the students into three groups: sheep, shepherds, and kings.

Have the sheep spread out in a designated area. The shepherds must protect their sheep by linking arms with them, while the kings try to "capture" the sheep by tagging them.

Once a sheep is tagged, they become a king. The game continues until all the sheep have been turned into kings or until the time runs out.

Afterwards, discuss how it felt to be a shepherd, or king, and how this game relates to what we studied today.

## **SESSION 2**

### Activity

The way to identify messianic passages in the Psalms is to listen to Christ—not to mention the New Testament apostles, who spoke and wrote under the Holy Spirit's inspiration. They pointed to certain psalms as messianic.

Divide into groups. Give each group a paper with these Psalms/NT books and have them find the foretelling messianic events

Psalms 118:22-23 and Luke 20:17 (*Cornerstone*)

Psalms 40:6-8 and Hebrews 10:5-7 (*Incarnation*)

Psalms 69:9a and John 2:17 (*Cleansing the temple*)

Psalms 69:4a and John 15:25 (*Rejected because of hatred*)

Psalms 41:9 and John 13:8 (*Betrayal by Judas*)

Psalms 69:21b and John 19:28 (*His thirst on the cross*)

Psalms 16:8-11 and Acts 2:25-28, 31; 13:35 (*His resurrection*)

Psalms 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8 (*His ascension into heaven*)

## **Session 3**

Read Isaiah 9:6-7

- The prophet Isaiah spoke these words around 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.
- Isaiah foretold that a child, a son, would be born, and He would bear significant titles, revealing His divine nature and role.
- This prophecy ultimately points to Jesus Christ, who fulfilled these words perfectly as the Messiah, the Savior of the world.



## Activity

Divide into teams and prepare a list of statements. Some statements should be biblical promises, while others are not. Each team must identify whether the statement is a promise from God or not. The team with the most correct answers wins!

## Questions

1. How does knowing that all of God's promises find their fulfillment in Christ deepen your faith?
2. What are some ways we can actively participate in God's work?
3. How can we ensure that our responses to God's promises are filled with faith and trust, just like saying "Amen"?

## SESSION 4

The birth and birthplace of Jesus were prophesied about hundreds of years before they happened.

Prophecy is a message from God spoken through a person. Prophecy might be in the form of a warning, a proclamation or a statement of future events.

Consider how little we know now about the future and how impossible it is to predict what will happen even tomorrow. Self-proclaimed prophets can sometimes "predict" what will happen in the future, but they are wrong often enough to show that they are only guessing. When we find Old Testament prophecies fulfilled centuries later in Christ, we know that more than human wisdom was used in giving the prophecies.

One of the messages God sent through the prophets of Israel was to send His royal Son (Messiah) to his people, Israel, to rescue them. The Old Testament contains many prophecies of the coming Christ (Messiah).

God's plan to rescue humanity was first revealed in Genesis 3:15 when he told the serpent that an offspring (seed) of the woman would someday crush the serpent's head.

Hundreds of years later, the Lord told Abraham that the "seed" would come through him and his descendants, Israel. Genesis 22:15-18.

Galatians 3:15-16 makes it clear that the "seed" spoken of since the book of Genesis was Jesus Christ. That is a long time to keep a promise!

Matthew 1:18 speaks of the fulfillment of the prophecy of the virgin birth. The prophecy can be read about in Isaiah 7:14.

Bethlehem, as the birthplace of the Messiah, is foretold in Micah 5:2.

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem in the 8th century before Christ was born. Isaiah 9:6-7 is one of the most poetic announcements of the Messiah. These verses speak of a coming Messiah who will rescue God's people and bring peace and righteousness. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of this prophetic word.

In Luke 1:31-33, the angel told Mary that the child she was to bear would be the prophesied Messiah, the son of David. She was to give Him the name Jesus, which means "the Lord saves." It must have been awe-inspiring for Mary when she realized she was to bear the prophesied king, the Savior! The language in Luke 1:33 is very similar to Isaiah's description of the Messiah's kingdom (see Isaiah 9:7). In both verses, this kingdom is described as one that would last forever.

God's people were waiting for something very important to happen. They had been told about a promise God made long ago. God had promised to send a King and Savior into the world. After God made the promise, hundreds of years passed, but the King still had not come. Throughout the Old Testament, however, is the message. "He is coming! He is coming!"

1. Do you think God kept his promise?
2. Name two Old Testament Prophets who prophesied about Jesus.
3. What is a promise?
4. In what city did Micah prophesy that Jesus would be born?

Read Zechariah 9:9-12

- This passage is a prophecy about Jesus, the Messiah. The reference to the king riding on a donkey was fulfilled when Jesus entered Jerusalem (Matthew 21:5).
- God's promise to take away the chariots and warhorses symbolizes the end of warfare and the beginning of peace.
- The "prisoners from the waterless pit" represents us, sinners. God promises freedom and restoration because of His covenant.
- We are called 'prisoners of hope,' indicating that we should always have hope in God's promises.
  1. How does this passage speak to you about God's character?
  2. What does it mean to be a 'prisoner of hope'?
  3. How can we apply the promise of God's restoration in our lives?

### Activity: Bible Verse Scramble

Break up into teams. Give each team a set of cards with words from Zechariah 9:9-12, all mixed up. The goal is to arrange the words in the correct order as quickly as possible. The first team to correctly assemble their verse wins!

No matter what challenges we face, we should always have hope in God's promises. He has plans to bring peace and restoration in our lives. Let's trust in Him and continue to grow in our faith.