



ADVENT  
DEVOTIONAL  
2022

PART TWO



## THE SEED OF THE WOMAN



Occasionally I find myself sitting at home, minding my own business, when all of a sudden, a blood curdling scream lets out from the other room. Now, for the protection of my children, I will not name names. But only one of our children actually screams like that so you can maybe guess. So what am I to do? I go investigate. Almost always the scream comes from some disagreement between Karis and Jericho. So what happens when I get there? It's always the other's fault. You know the drill right? There's a lot of "he said, she said," a lot of blame, and not a lot of confession. You don't have to teach kids how to spin a story, twist, and deceive.

Lying is easy. For many of us, the hardest part of society today is not knowing who to trust. We live in an age of spin. Whether we call it twisting, disinformation, or spin, we know we have a problem with telling the truth and knowing the truth. But this shouldn't surprise us. Spin was the first temptation Satan used. Scripture says Satan is the "Father of Lies" and one of his forms of lying is twisting. Let me show you.

### ***Read Genesis 2:16-17 and 3:1-5***

Who twisted God's words first? Do you see how subtle Satan is? Look again. Satan didn't technically lie in his first comment to Eve, right? He just twisted. And even more, he twisted in the form of a question. He acted as if he wasn't sure what God had or had not said. But his twisting was a set up. Notice Eve's reaction. She corrects him. But not with the full truth. What Satan has accomplished is a twisting so subtle that the woman is baited into responding in forceful correction, but in that correction she misstates

what God said. God did not say they would die if they touched the tree. You may not think it's a big deal. After all, not touching it is a good safeguard to put in place right? You can't eat something you don't touch. Maybe in communicating God's command to Eve, Adam just overstated to keep her safe.

Whatever happened, the end result is not true to what God said. The serpent twists, and Eve expands. And then the serpent attacks Eve's faith in the goodness of a God who would restrict what she eats. Once he's made some progress with twisting, he throws in an outright lie not only about God's words but about God's character. The "Father of Lies" can often accomplish his purposes with spin and twisting without outright lies.

What does this have to do with Christmas? A few verses after Eve falls into Satan's trap, God gives us a glimpse of how He will fix the truth problem. He says to the serpent, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"* (**Genesis 3:15**).

For many centuries, theologians have called Genesis 3:15 the Protoevangelium. That's a fancy word that means "First Gospel." God has just given us the first glimpse of the good news of what He will do to fix the problem. And the solution is Jesus. Jesus is in Genesis 3:15. Did you see him? Here He is known as the woman's offspring. Literally, the Hebrew means "seed." So Jesus, the Son of God, comes as the "seed" of a human woman. When He comes, the serpent strikes His heel (representing great pain and anguish). But Jesus crushes the serpent's head (representing full defeat).

Are you tired of not knowing who to trust? Are you tired of not knowing what's real and what's twisted?

Then spend this Advent season listening to the voice of the one who conquered and came to tell the truth (John 18:37). This "Seed of the Woman" was described as God's ultimate answer to the problem of sin on the same day the first sin occurred. God has never been surprised by any lie, sin, or evil that has occurred since.

So keep reading this week as we continue to examine who Jesus is predicted to be and why that's really good news for us.

## THE TRUE PROPHET



A few thousand years after the serpent in the garden twisted God's words, Jesus stands in front of Pilate and says, *"For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice"* (**John 18:37**).

And how does Pilate respond? Like a good Postmodern. *"What is truth?"* (John 18:38)

In an age of confusion, Satan is the Father of lies and Jesus, our Messiah, comes to tell us the truth. But not everyone wants to hear. Do you know what the word Messiah means? Messiah is derived from a Hebrew word (Mashiach) that means "anointed one." Do you know what the Greek equivalent is? *Cristos*, which we transliterate to Christ.

So, if you're one of those people who just thought Christ was Jesus's last name, now you know. Christ basically means the same thing as Messiah one was derived from Hebrew and the other from Greek. But they both mean, "anointed one." In the Old Testament, there are three anointed offices of leadership prophet, priest, and king. Jesus comes to fulfill all three offices and meet the three greatest needs these offices address.

As the true prophet, Jesus corrects our ignorance. He reveals the truth. The prophets came to reveal the truth of God and show people the way to follow Him. The prophets were sent to address the people's problem of ignorance and faithlessness.

Think about Moses. The law was revealed through Moses so that the people would know the difference between sin and righteousness. The people did not know what God expected of them as a nation until God revealed His word to Moses. But then when the people failed to follow the law as revealed, God sent more. Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many others were anointed by God and sent to the people to tell them God's truth. But we all know what happened right? Many of these prophets were killed and few were listened to. Yet many of the Scriptures we still have today are the written records of what God said to them. Now, the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus fits right into that office.

### **Hebrews 1:1–3**

*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*

See what I mean? Jesus speaks to us as a prophet. So what does this mean for us? It means that in an age of uncertainty and confusion we have “everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him” (1 Peter 1:3). Jesus reveals the truth and shows us how to live. God has spoken to us by His son. What are some things He says to us?

- “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).
- “For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).
- “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is

the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40)

- What are some other beautiful truths we needed to hear from Jesus? Take some time today to remember your favorite verses directly from the mouth of Jesus and write them below:

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If you couldn't think of any, look up who Jesus says He is in John 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 11:25; 10:11; and 14:1. Tomorrow we will see why the author of Hebrews didn't stop in verse 3 and why information about God is not enough to solve our problems.



# THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST



I can't drive a stick. I know how to do it, but that doesn't mean I can do it. There's more to driving a stick shift than understanding the theory of clutch, break, gas. When I was first learning to drive, my dad spent a day teaching me how to drive a stick. At that point I got it. I understood the theory, I got the rhythm, and I got some good practice. But then I went years without ever doing it again.

A few years after that, I was working a summer job on a construction site installing appliances. One day my boss threw me the keys to one of the big trucks that had a stick shift. He said, "take this today, it has a stick." Now, if you've ever been an 22-year-old guy, you can understand my predicament. There was no way I was going to look at my good-old-boy, can-fix-anything boss and tell him I couldn't drive a stick. So what did I do? I waited until he walked back inside, cranked it, stalled it, cranked it, stalled it, cranked it, stalled it. This happened more times than I could count and then finally I figured it out again. That was the last time I successfully drove a stick.

My next chance came about a few years later at an FBC Family Camp (the good old days - if you know you know). I was tasked with returning the tubes we had used to the rental place, and the truck they were piled in was a stick. So what did I do? I admitted my weakness. I told one of the dads that I might need him to drive the truck if I couldn't figure it out. He laughed and walked over to the truck with me. He watched me crank and stall a few times and his laughter turned to concern. Finally he approached the window and said, "I actually thought you were exaggerating but you weren't. You should let me do it before you tear that

truck up or hurt yourself.” I haven’t tried again since.

Our relationship with sin and righteousness is much more extreme than my relationship with stick shifts. Though the knowledge of how to drive a stick shift is not enough for me, given enough time, I could figure it out again. But when it comes to sin and righteousness, it is important for us to know the truth, but knowing the truth is not enough. Because we have inherited a sin nature in Adam, we do not have the ability to live righteously. We do not have the ability to keep from sinning on our own. We need someone else to step in and do it for us. That’s why Jesus came to do more than reveal the truth as prophet, He also came to atone for our sin as priest.

### **Hebrews 1:3-4**

*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

He "makes purification for sins." From the beginning of the Scriptures, God makes it clear that sins require punishment and that punishment includes the shedding of blood. How did God cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve in the garden? By killing an animal and giving them animal skin as clothing (Genesis 3:21). What did God tell His chosen people to do in response to their sins? Make sacrifices. In fact, He was specific in multiple types of sacrifices to give in response to multiple acts of sin (Leviticus 1-7). Yesterday I told you that the Law was given to Moses to reveal to people the difference between sin and righteousness. So then what happens when the Law exposes your guilt?

You need a sacrifice.

The good news for us is that when Jesus made purification for sins, He did it once and for all. So while Moses's Law still reveals sin, Leviticus' plan to deal with sin no longer applies. Why? Because Jesus fulfilled it (Matthew 5:17). But Jesus didn't just fulfill it as the Priest, he fulfilled it as the Lamb! So as you reflect on the beauty of the season, remember that when the angels came to the shepherds, they weren't just proclaiming a King, they were proclaiming that the lambs the shepherds held that night were no longer needed. Our priest and lamb made the final sacrifice, Himself!

## THE CONQUERING KING



When I was 16, I began working at the home of the original chicken sandwich. I very quickly found myself in an awkward situation. The owner had done some of my training himself, and he told me that he was concerned with some of his management staff and the way they cut corners. He told me, the new high school kid, to make sure that I did things the way I was trained and to not pick up bad habits. You see, he had just taken over the franchise from someone who had not run it very well, so he was in the process of cleaning house with some of the staff.

So within my first week, when I was working with a certain manager, he told me to do something I knew was not the right way to do it. I knew this, because I had heard directly from the boss. So here I was, as a 16-year-old, trying to discern whose authority to follow, the owner or the shift manager? Luckily for me, I had a good enough relationship with the owner that I knew if I got in trouble with the shift manager, I could still keep my job. So I took more time, I did it the right way, and I annoyed the shift manager. It took me months to earn back the respect of that shift manager. But it all worked out in the end and I learned a lesson about following higher authority.

We didn't just need Jesus to come as prophet, we didn't just need Jesus to come as a priest, we needed a new authority. We needed a victorious king. Our problem was not just lack of information or lack of ability, our problem was bondage.

Look again at **Hebrews 1:3-4**

*"After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as*

*much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs."*

He sat down. Why did he sit down? Because His work was finished. Scripture says he "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). That is next level victory. He didn't just defeat death. He abolished it. Scripture also says that through His own death, Jesus destroyed the one who has the power over death and rescued us from slavery (Hebrews 2:14-15). In all of this, God "delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13).

Do you remember what the angels said to the shepherds about the baby that was born? They said, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).

The people in that day were living in darkness, under the authority of the prince of darkness, enslaved to sin, and enslaved to death. But then the Savior, Messiah, and Lord was born. New authority had come.

Where is your allegiance? There are all sorts of important things for us to prioritize. Work, family, friendships, pleasure, service to others, and education are all reasonable priorities. But do you put your primary allegiance toward your highest authority?

Jesus has come so that we could be rescued from the effects of our sin and the bondage to death that entails. Yet many days we still live for the things of the flesh as if our bondage still remains.

Perhaps as you're preparing for all of the excitement of this advent season, you are struggling with some old behavior that you really wish you were past at this

point. Remember, He has rescued you from bondage. Lean into His word and seek His presence in prayer as a reminder of the great victory you have received.

# THE FAITHFUL GOD

BY JESS CHANEY



A couple of years ago I discovered a new Christmas song that has become one of my favorites. It's a great Christmas song, but I've actually listened to it year round because the message is such a good reminder to me to look to Christ and the cross for the purest example of faithfulness. The song is by Sovereign Grace music; the title is "O Come, All You Unfaithful." We are all used to singing our more traditional hymn, "O Come all Ye Faithful." When I first heard the new song, it caught me off guard because of my familiarity with the original. "O Come, All You Unfaithful?" What does that mean?

The song opens with this line, "O come all you unfaithful, come weak and unstable, come know you are not alone. Oh come barren and weighty ones weary of praying, come. See what your God has done." In our broken humanity, we are all weak, weary and unstable. I don't often think of myself as unfaithful but when I think about the words to this song, I can see when I fall short. I read this definition of God's faithfulness in a journal that I have, "God is incapable of anything but fidelity. He is loyally devoted to His plan and purpose" (*Daily Grace Co.*).

**Deuteronomy 7:9** says, "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations"

God does not grow weary. God is not unstable and He is "incapable of anything but fidelity." **2 Timothy 2:13** says, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful." The gospel is not the news of my faithfulness but God's faithfulness on my behalf.

In September, Tim was quarantined and Eden, in particular, really struggled with it. As we laid in bed talking one night she asked me, "Mama, how do you handle bad things like daddy being quarantined?" I immediately began to cry as the lyrics to another song began to go through my mind, "*All my life you have been faithful. All my life you have been so, so good. With every breath that I am able. Oh I will sing of the goodness of God.*" And I had the opportunity to sing of that goodness to my daughter as she cried for her dad.

I told Eden that I can't handle anything but that I've seen God's goodness and faithfulness through too many experiences to not trust Him. I began to list for her the ways I've seen His faithfulness, "I saw God's faithfulness when your brothers were born and in their deaths. I saw God's faithfulness when you were very sick with an infection and fighting for your brand new life exactly one year later. I saw God's faithfulness as he walked with me, Mimi and Poppy as Aunt Harriet and Uncle Shawn died of cancer a few months after you were born. And, I see his faithfulness right now as we navigate sickness, and quarantines. God continues to be good and He continues to be faithful. I pray you will see that as you get older." We were both teary as she processed that and fell asleep that night.

"God is incapable of anything but fidelity. He is loyally devoted to His plan and purpose" If my relationship with God were based on my loyalty, I would have failed when our baby boys died. If it was up to my devotion, I would have given up when Eden's newborn body was suffering with infection and she was breathing through a vent. If I had a vote on God's plan, I would have changed it when my brother died from a brain tumor at 39. If God asked me about His purposes, I would definitely question as I watched my 9-year-old beginning to process the brokenness of this world. But I am not God and I am not always faithful.



The last line of that lyric is “See what your God has done.” God has perfectly displayed His faithfulness through loyalty and devotion to His plans and purposes. And I believe we see that especially through the Christmas Story. God sent His Son to this sinful and broken world as a baby. He would live a perfect life but carry the sins of man to his death and then rise again so that we may have life. That is faithfulness. That is loyal devotion to a plan. His example gives me hope in my journey toward faithfulness as we all navigate a world that makes us weary.

WEEK FOUR

*FULFILLED PROPHECY*

MICAH 5:2

## SEARCHING, INQUIRING, LONGING



God was very gracious to me in giving me Jess. We complement each other so well. Every day I am reminded that it is only by His grace that He sovereignly brought us together. A perfect example of how uniquely well we fit together is that Jess is really good at finding things. Me? I'm REALLY good at losing things. I cannot tell you how many conversations we have had about the need to just establish a place for my keys, wallet, and various other items. Every time one of those things is lost, we agree that if I just left them in a designated spot every day, we would know where they are. The problem is... that designated spot has been established and changed many times now. Why? Because I'm good at losing things, which means I'm bad at putting things where they go. Unfortunately for Jess, everyone else who lives in our house is really good at losing things like I am. And no one else is very good at finding things.

I think my problem is that I'm just so impatient with stuff. However, I do enjoy a good hunt. I don't enjoy hunting for stuff, but I do enjoy hunting for answers. Have you ever had a question that you just needed to get answered? That happens to me a lot. I love those searches.

This week, I'm inviting you to go on a quest with me to put yourselves into the shoes of an ancient nation that was searching for answers but only seeing glimpses of the answers.

Put this down and read **1 Peter 1:3-12**. Pay close attention to verses 3-5 and 10-12.

Verses 3-5 show us the beauty of the salvation we have received, which comes with an eternal inheritance given and guarded by God Himself. Then, verses 10-12 show us how desperately previous generations of God's followers searched for the answers to their questions. Look at the words used to describe their quest. In verses 10 and 11 the prophets were described as 'searching' and 'inquiring.' Then, in verse 12, we are told that even the angels long for deeper answers. They searched, inquired, and longed for answers we now have!

**Here is a core truth for us to reflect on this week:**

The brokenness of our world and the brokenness of our hearts creates a longing deep within us. When we reflect on the brokenness of the world, we long for a restored world, a better world. When we reflect on the brokenness of our hearts, we long for restoration.

God's followers in the Old Testament experienced the same longings. God gave them glimpses of his ultimate plan along the way, but God never revealed the full picture of how salvation worked, or its effects on the whole world, until Jesus's resurrection.

Therefore, we live in an incredibly privileged period of history. We know how God saves the world! We know how God redeems his disobedient people. We know how God brings the Messiah into the world and who that Messiah is. We know the message the whole world needs to hear about Him.

This week we are going to look at how four major sections of the Old Testament demonstrate God's people searching, inquiring, and longing to know how God would ultimately bring about salvation. As we reflect on their longing, I hope you will join me in longing for a deeper knowledge of Jesus as well. Though we know more answers, we do not know

all of the answers. There is more to be seen in the Scriptures if we search, inquire, and long. Wouldn't it be amazing to experience a new hunger and longing to know God more and then see Him meet us in that longing this Christmas? That is my prayer for all of us this week.

Go to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to show you Himself more clearly through the Scriptures this week. May He meet us as we search and inquire in the Old Testament Law, History, Poetry, and Prophets. May that search result in greater longing and deeper knowledge.

## LONGING FOR JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW



I remember the day Karis came into our room in the middle of the night to tell Jess and me something was in her room. She was terrified. She told us it was something scary. She told us it was something really mean-looking. Of course, I stumbled out of bed to investigate the matter with my eyes half open and my mind skeptical about how something so scary could have snuck into her room. I have to admit I was surprised by what I saw. Mean-looking was an apt description. I'll never admit to being scared, but I will say I got where she was coming from.

The culprit was a weird amalgamation of a night light, a ball, a couple of barbies, and random accessories that together cast a shadow on her ceiling of what appeared to be a horned creature looking over her bed. If the shadow I saw that night represented a reality of a real creature, you would have been scared if you woke up with it looking over your bed too. Of course, that night the shadow did not represent something real, so I was able to move some things around and “kill the beast.”

Shadows are fascinating. Shadows represent real things, but it's often difficult to get a clear picture of the real thing from a shadow. The Bible contains shadows too, and some are hard to discern, but the Bible's shadows are meant to be studied so that we are prepared for the real thing that will be revealed in the future. The nation of Israel was given a great number of shadows in the Law, all pointing forward to a better reality that they longed for. Here is a beautiful truth for today: Jesus replaces shadows that appeared in the Old Testament Law with a blazing reality of His finished work. Hebrews 8:5 says that the Priests who

administer the Law “serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.”

Today in our study of Jesus we focus in on the section of Scripture called the books of the Law or the Pentateuch. The Old Testament is divided into multiple sections, with the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) being referred to as the books of the Law, because in these God reveals Himself to His people and gives them His law which they must obey. But, as I said above, some aspects of the law that are revealed are shadows that point to greater things.

Revealing these shadows is a huge priority in the entire New Testament and especially the book of Hebrews. In your study today, here are a few of the shadows you can examine from the Old Testament law which are revealed fully in one important section of Hebrews 7-8:

In Leviticus, we see the repetitive actions required of the priests who were replaced in each generation, as one died and the next rose up. In Hebrews 7:23-24, we see that Jesus is a permanent priest who never dies.

In Leviticus, we also see the strict repetitive actions required of the priests as they continually offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as the sins of the people. In Hebrews 7:27 we see that Jesus is the true High Priest who offers Himself as a sacrifice once and for all.

In Exodus, we see the shadow of the Tabernacle as God dwells in the midst of the people and allows them to enter His presence only under the strictest regulations. In Hebrews 8:1-2 we learn that was only a shadow of the true tabernacle built by God.

Can you imagine the longing the people must have felt knowing that they were limited in their relationship to God? Can you imagine the feeling of longing in knowing that sin could only be atoned for in specific ways and at specific times? How glorious it is that we now see the picture of redemption in a brighter light!

And yet, we too live in a shadow. There are still pieces of the beautiful truth of this picture that we do not see. Though we see the beauty Jesus brought in His first Advent, we await the fullness that will be revealed in the second Advent when He comes again to fully establish His eternal kingdom. As you continue in this journey of drawing near to Jesus and anticipating the celebration of His birth, praise Him for the beauty of seeing the fullness of what was once a shadow. Long for the day when the light of His glory will fully reveal the beauty of His eternal kingdom and all shadows will be removed.



## LONGING FOR JESUS IN OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY



My son has a rival in our church. His name is Josh. Josh occasionally threatens my son Jericho. He says he's joking, but I'm keeping my eye on him.

Here's the scenario: Jericho will be joking around about something (as he often does) and then all of a sudden, Josh will threaten to bring a trumpet and march around him seven times. Do you see how threatening that is?

If that doesn't sound threatening you should take a minute to familiarize yourself with the first few chapters of the biblical book of Joshua.

*\*\*I hope you realize that while this story is true and Josh does joke with Jericho about this, they are not rivals. Josh is, in fact, one of Jericho's favorite people. It is a blessing to see adults in our church that care so deeply about our kids.*

Today, we are going to reflect on how this book of biblical history reflects the nation of Israel's longing for salvation. The salvation that would ultimately come from Jesus.

The book of Joshua is the first book of history in the Old Testament. This section of books chronicles the history of the nation of Israel and their relationship to God. Joshua tells the story of the people entering the promised land, conquering the Canaanites, and God's provisions all the way through. Joshua comes after a period of deep longing on the part of the nation as they waited in slavery in Egypt and then wandered in the wilderness. All the while, the people waited and longed for God to fulfill the promise originally stated to Abraham--that a nation of his descendants would

prosper in the promised land. Throughout the book, Joshua is a strong leader and obedient follower of God. He is exactly the kind of leader God's people needed in that period. But Joshua points beyond himself to a picture of a greater leader to come; let me show you two examples.

### **Joshua leads by following and knowing the Law.**

God's calling of Joshua includes a calling to be careful to obey the Law and to not let it depart from his mouth (Joshua 1:6-8). Joshua must lead the people by demonstrating faithfulness to the Law and knowledge of the Law. But Joshua is only a picture of who Jesus would be. Jesus was the leader of the nation who would not just set the example of obedience but whose obedience of the Law would result in life for those who believe. Jesus would not just know the Law, but interpret the Law, challenge assumptions, and show how it ultimately pointed to Himself. Joshua was a great leader in his time, but the picture of his leadership pointed to the need for a greater and more permanent leader.

### **Joshua defeats the enemies of God's people.**

When God called Joshua, he promised him that no one would be able to stand against him because the Lord was with him (Joshua 1:5). Through Joshua's leadership, the Canaanites were driven out of the land and God's people were given peace and a home. Jesus is a better conqueror. Even during Joshua's lifetime, the peace achieved was fragile, as some of the people made foolish mistakes in dealing with the Canaanite peoples (Joshua 9 and 10). Shortly after Joshua died, the nation again began facing conflict after conflict (beginning in Judges and continuing throughout the Bible). Jesus is the final conqueror. At the cross, rulers and authorities are disarmed, put to shame, and defeated for all time. The people of Israel longed for sound leadership that would conquer their enemies.

They saw it briefly in the life of Joshua, they saw more glimpses in a few Judges, they saw another glimpse in David, but the full picture of the warrior who would defeat their enemies was displayed in Christ.

They longed; we see.

As we practice Advent and long for the fullness of who Jesus is, let us remember the gift of peace. The peace we experience in this life is fleeting. The Israelites knew that all too well. But the peace that God gives through Jesus goes beyond normal understanding and equips us to live in God's presence despite the anxieties of this life (Philippians 4:5-7). Spend some time praising God for the peace that He already brought and ask God to bring even greater peace to our world through His Son.

## LONGING FOR JESUS IN OLD TESTAMENT POETRY



Trivia time!!! What song was widely regarded as the best song to uplift American troops during the Christmas season while simultaneously being banned by the BBC because of its potential negative effect on British troops during World War II? Drum roll please...

If you guessed Bing Crosby's "I'll be Home for Christmas," you win! Your prize is a FREE Advent devotional next year!

Many of us are familiar with the song but may not know the origin and setting. Originally released in 1943, it was written as a letter home from a soldier serving overseas in the war. It became the most requested song by American soldiers during the holiday season as they remembered the family back home they were fighting for and longed for the day when returning home for Christmas could be more fully realized than "only in my dreams" as the song concludes. Meanwhile, the BBC felt the song was overly sentimental and detrimental to both troop and civilian morale.

So, while there may be differing opinions on the benefits of the song, one thing is certain, it captures a longing. Specifically, it captures a longing for home and a longing for people. The Christmas season is an important family season for many of us. It is filled with travel and family in beautiful ways. Part of the joy of celebrating Christmas is being reunited with those we love, recovering the beauty of the presence of someone we long for. Old Testament poetry captures longing in similar ways. The poets compose songs (Psalms) that speak of longing for God's eternal kingdom and the fullness of God's presence. So now

I invite you to put this booklet down and read the eleven verses of **Psalm 16**.

***What did you see? Did you see David's longing? What was he longing for? Who was he longing for? Look again at verses 8-11; do you see the longing for God's presence?***

He says, "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken" (Psalm 16:8). David is longing for the anchoring presence of God. Have you ever felt so connected to someone that their very presence calmed you, anchored you, reassured you?

I recently saw this at a hospital visit. There was a little boy who was so scared and yet so brave at the same time. Where did he get the courage in the midst of finger pricks, IVs, and other scary things he didn't understand? He got his courage from the presence of his mommy. I saw it. In the scariest of moments, he just watched his mother and repeated "Mommy." Most of the time there weren't even any specific requests, just repetition of the one word that brought him most comfort and gazing into the eyes of the one person who most steadied him. It was beautiful.

That is what longing for a steady presence looks like. That is why David can be unshaken by the challenges of life, because the Lord is with him in the trial.

You may have noticed something else in this Psalm. Not only is this Psalm pointing toward Jesus in longing for his presence, this Psalm actually sounds like Jesus. In Acts 13, Paul quotes this Psalm and says it's not only about David, it's about Jesus. Ultimately, Jesus is the one whose soul was not abandoned, and Jesus is the Holy One who did not experience corruption

(Acts 13:35 and Psalm 16:10).

Here is the beautiful conclusion: because Jesus was not abandoned in His death, we experience joy in the fullness of His presence (Psalm 16:11). In His presence is the fullest sense of joy anyone could ever experience. In His presence is the fullest pleasure anyone could ever experience. That is a presence we should long for.

As we remember family and joy this Christmas, may we seek the fullest joy in the presence of the Holy One who has died to bring us into His presence.

## LONGING FOR JESUS IN OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY



Have you ever been dismayed by how hard it is to get information from a middleman? It can feel so limiting and the information always feels incomplete. What if the middleman got something wrong, or didn't ask a question you would have asked? Or what if your middleman is 8 years old and just not the best with details?

I can't tell you how many times we have looked at one of our kids with skepticism about something they heard at school. Usually, there is some kernel of truth in the story but it gets difficult to ask enough questions to find out what really was said and not said in a conversation. Did your friend's mom really invite you over or is that just what your friend wants? Did your teacher really tell you that or did you misunderstand? Was he really mean to you for no reason or did you do something too? Discerning important information through a middleman can be a mystery.

God's Old Covenant people, Israel, dealt with the difficulty of relating to God through a series of middlemen. The Priests administered the Law by offering sacrifices and explaining it to people. The Prophets spoke to the people on God's behalf. Living in ancient times, the people themselves did not even have much access to the written Old Testament Scriptures. They were dependent on other people to share with them what God said and desired. I am certain they experienced a longing for better understanding and a deeper connection to God. This deeper connection to God is another gift Jesus brings. Another way Jesus fulfills our longing.

Take a minute now to read **Jeremiah 31** and pay special attention to verses 31-34. Then flip back over to see it quoted in **Hebrews 8:11**, a passage we briefly looked at on Tuesday.

Now I understand how these verses may sound confusing. Jeremiah 31:34 and Hebrews 8:11 tell us that in the New Covenant there will not be a need for the people to teach each other because every member of the covenanted community will know God. That is not to say that the New Covenant period has no need for teachers or for learning more about God and His Word. That is instead saying that the knowledge a person has of God is no longer dependent on a Priest who stands between God and His people.

In the New Covenant, God relates directly to His people because the mediator (Priest) is Jesus who is God Himself. The Old Covenant people only had access to God through the Priests who offered sacrifices and explained the Law. In the New Covenant, every believer relates directly to God through Jesus and God's indwelling Spirit. In the New Covenant, we all still have much to learn but we learn from teachers, preachers, and mentors who relate to God at the same level as we do. We do not sit beneath the teachers as if we can know nothing without them. Each of us can relate to God through our own study of the Word. This study can then be enhanced by mature leadership in God's local community (the Church) teaching and admonishing us from the Word we have all been given.

The only middleman now is Jesus Himself who is God Himself. There are no more prophets, priests, or kings who fulfill essential roles to lead God's people. Jesus is the ultimate priest who administers a better covenant and offered Himself as the final sacrifice. Jesus is the ultimate prophet who is also the word from God



Himself (John 1) that brings the message and means of salvation to His people. Jesus is the ultimate king who reigns on His throne over a kingdom that will have no end.

So as we get closer to Christmas Day and our celebration of the arrival of the Messiah, take some time today to reflect on the beauty of God's new arrangement (covenant) that He has made with His people (the Church, you, and me) through the ministry of the ultimate Priest (Jesus). Take advantage of the opportunity to relate directly to God through some intentional time in His word and in prayer today.







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