

SESSION 1: FINDING JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Isaiah 40:5; Isaiah 53:7, 11; John 1:29

QUESTIONS

1. How is the entire Bible the story of Jesus?
2. How does the season of Advent serve as a reminder of God's promise to send a Light to the world?
3. In the video, you heard how John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the Promised Savior. From what we know about the life of John, he started to doubt this later in his life, asking Jesus, *"Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?"* How do you think that someone so confident in the promise of Jesus could start to doubt?
4. What can you do this Advent season so that you aren't distracted from the promise of Jesus?

Handel's Messiah

Read Isaiah 40, verses 1 through 5. Now listen to the following clips of the Messiah.

5. **Comfort Ye My People:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RmknWYFr6Xk>
- a. How does this song make you feel when you listen to it?
 - b. Does this music help you understand Isaiah's words differently? How?
6. **Ev'ry Valley Shall be Exalted:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jlkMlw1wz7A>
- a. How does this song make you feel when you listen to it? How is it different from the first example?

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SESSION 2: FINDING JESUS IN OUR LIVES

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Matthew 27:54; 1 Timothy 2:4

QUESTIONS

1. **Video excerpt:** *Mary, the biological mother of Jesus. What an incredible faith she had in the promise of the angel! Then there is Simeon, who waited such a long time in the temple. He finally could say: "Now, my eyes have seen your salvation!" How about Peter and the disciples when Jesus asked them: "Who do you think I am?" and Peter could say: "You are the Christ!" Even a Gentile, the Roman centurion at the cross, who was not a follower of Christ, recognized that Jesus was the Son of God.*

In these instances, what do you think made it possible for these people to see their part in God's plan of salvation? What challenges could've stood in their way?

- a. Mary
 - b. Simeon
 - c. Peter
 - d. The Roman Centurion
2. How do you know that you have salvation? *God with us*. What meaning did this have at the time of Jesus' birth? What meaning does it have to you now?
 3. How can you experience Jesus through the apostles?
 4. From the beginning, with Adam and Eve, God has always given humans a choice. Why do you think we so often pick the wrong path?
 5. Even with our history of faulty decisions, God has always made a way for us to come back to Him. How does this make you feel?

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6. Why have you chosen salvation in Christ? Is this a choice you make only once?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: FINDING JESUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

As we gather over the next few weeks to celebrate the season of Advent, we will see and hear words like “promise,” “hope,” and “joy.” They are found on coffee cups, holiday decorations, in Christmas performances, movies, and in God’s Word. We celebrate on Christmas the arrival of the Lord Jesus. His coming was long awaited, and yet so many missed out on recognizing the fulfillment of God’s promise. Today, we have to continually seek Him and recognize that Jesus is the promise that gives us hope that leads to our everlasting joy.

Some might think that the story of Jesus begins with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. That is where we are told of the events that happened in Nazareth and Bethlehem some 2000 years ago. But the story of Jesus is told throughout the entire Bible, from the beginning to the end.

We see Jesus in the book of Genesis after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. The relationship that man had shared with God was changed. However, in the infancy of this brokenness, God shared His restoration plan and made a promise that one of Adam and Eve’s descendants would someday come and rescue mankind from the grip of sin. Even though they had fallen prey to the power of sin and would experience separation from God for the first time, Adam and Eve experienced the love of God through His promise. So here, at the very beginning, we can see Jesus as the One promised by God to be the Savior of the world.

Have you recognized Jesus as your promised Savior?

Throughout the next centuries, God made covenants with faithful souls and brought together a people of His own. He was their God, and He demonstrated His love. But all too often they lost sight of the great promise that had been given to them. They chose to walk in the darkness instead of living in the light. God gave them prophets who would continually remind them of what God had done and would do. Through their revelations, the prophets provided the details of how Jesus would be born in Bethlehem, live as the Light of the world, and die to set mankind free. These prophecies served as messages of hope for the people of Israel during their difficult days of struggle and time in exile.

A fixture for many during the holiday season is Handel’s *Messiah*, a work of music that brings together several of the Old Testament prophecies to share the story of Jesus. In the *Messiah*, Handel set many Old Testament prophecies to music, including this verse from Isaiah 40: *And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together:*

for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it (KJV). You can take some time in your discussion to explore excerpts of the Messiah and the verses they were taken from.

These words from Isaiah 40, verse 5, “*And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together*” were addressed to the Israelites who were exiled in Babylon. The exiles received a promise that they would one day return to Jerusalem, the place where God would meet them in the form of the Suffering Servant, the very One who would become a great King. The way for them to see their salvation would be made clear so that they could experience their full salvation in Jesus Christ. They would first experience the glory of God through their release from exile, and then later through their Savior.

The trial of exile stood in the way of the Israelites seeing God’s promise. What do you need removed from your sight so you can clearly see the promise of Jesus today?

These words of Isaiah were echoed centuries later by John the Baptist who was the “*voice crying out in the wilderness.*” He used the words of Isaiah to prepare the people of his time to “*see the salvation of God*” and proclaim Jesus as “*... the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29, cf Isaiah 53:7, 11). At the time of the birth of Jesus and throughout His life, we can see how the hope given in the Old Testament prophecies came into being and brought joy to those who could see Him. And while people like John the Baptist could clearly recognize Jesus and the promise He would fulfill, not all people could see Him as the promised Savior. Their hope went unfulfilled, and they continued to walk in darkness.

The writings of Scripture can be a source of joy for us as we read about how the promises of God fulfilled the hope of many who awaited the arrival of Jesus. In this season, seek to see Jesus through the lens of the Scripture and renew the promise, hope, and joy that comes from being in love with the Savior.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 2: FINDING JESUS IN OUR LIVES

In our last session, we learned that God provided prophets who would continually remind the people of His salvation plan and of what God has done and will still do. The fact is that only a few noticed and recognized God's plan of salvation, even in the time of Jesus. Let me name some examples:

Mary, the biological mother of Jesus. What an incredible faith she had in the promise of the angel! Then there is Simeon, who waited such a long time in the temple. He finally could say: *"Now, my eyes have seen your salvation!"* How must Simeon have felt when he saw the fulfillment of his entire lifetime of waiting? Was his faith and hope in the promise of Jesus worthwhile for him? Absolutely. How about Peter and the disciples when Jesus asked them: *"Who do you think I am?"* and Peter could say with ALL certainty: *"You are the Christ!"* Even a Gentile, the Roman centurion at the cross, who was not a follower of Christ, recognized that Jesus was the Son of God (Matthew 27:54). This was already a sign that predicted the universality of salvation in Christ beyond the people of the old covenant.

And yet, the majority of people could not see the promise of God. In that moment, salvation passed them by.

How is it today? It is no different than in former times! Few believe in the salvation of Christ compared to the multitude of people on earth. A Simeon-like attitude of faithfully waiting, longing, and hoping for Christ's return is not found everywhere.

Jesus clearly entrusted His commission to the apostles. With the help of the Holy Spirit, the work of Jesus can be experienced through the apostle ministry when they preach His words and keep them alive, pronounce the forgiveness of sins in His name, and dispense the sacraments. Are we like a Simeon or Peter of today who can clearly see God's plan of salvation offered through the activity of Christ's ambassadors? If we are, we shall experience our own salvation in Christ. Yet it is not an easy walk - it truly is a life's journey. Please, let us not give up!

God's offer of salvation does not end today. He wants that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4). His plan continues into the future. What God had promised after the fall into sin by Adam and Eve, to offer salvation to all human beings, will ultimately be fulfilled in the kingdom of peace. After the conclusion of the first resurrection, Jesus Christ will establish His kingdom of peace and exercise his reign for "a thousand years." This symbolizes a long, but limited, period of time. During this time, the gospel

will be preached unhindered to all human beings living on earth, as well as to the souls in the realms of the departed. At the end of this time period, all will have been acquainted with His gospel.

Salvation in Christ has never been forced on anyone. From the beginning of mankind, God gave everyone the ability to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. Each person can make his or her own decision whether to accept the offer of salvation or to refuse believing in Him.

In summary, God's offer of salvation is like a thread woven through many time periods. It was always available, but it had to be recognized. May this Christmas season focus us again on matters of importance in our own lives. Let us not miss out on God's promise of salvation. May it be the same source of joy and hope as it was in the time of Jesus for those who awaited His arrival.