# Overview

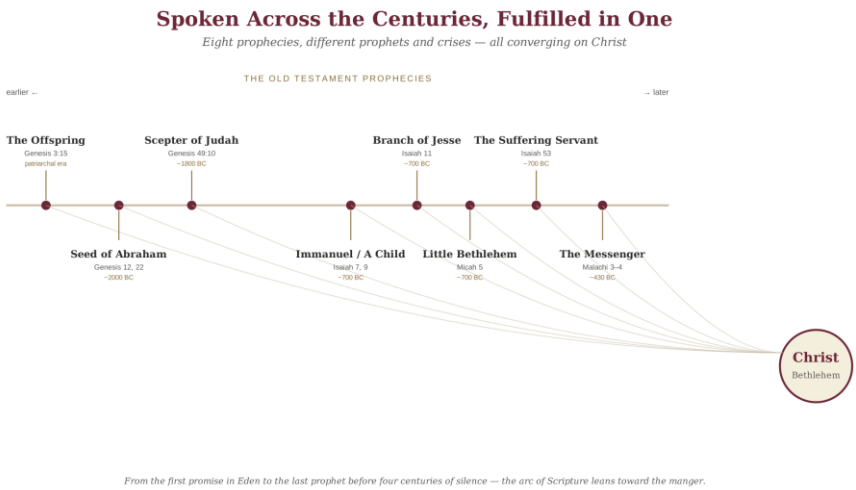
*The Prophecies Fulfilled · A Six-Week Advent Study*

*"These are my words that I spoke to you… that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." — Luke 24:44*

## Why This Study

Centuries before the first Christmas, the Old Testament was already speaking of a coming deliverer — in promises, poems, and prophecies scattered across a thousand years of Israel's history. Different men, in different crises, under different kings, each added a piece: a seed who would crush the serpent, a child called Immanuel, a branch from a cut-down stump, a ruler from a nothing town, a servant who would suffer, a messenger who would prepare the way. Taken one at a time they are striking. Taken together they are astonishing — because they all converge on one person, born in Bethlehem.

This six-week study traces that convergence. Each week we take one great messianic prophecy, read it first in its own time and place, and then follow it forward to its fulfillment in Christ. The aim is not just to admire the prophecies but to let them do what they were meant to do: deepen our wonder at the God who keeps his word across the centuries, and our worship of the Son he promised and sent.




*The six prophecies at the heart of this study were spoken across roughly a thousand years — and all converge on Christ.*

## How Each Week Is Built

Every lesson follows the same path, the format our Romans and James studies used, adapted for a study of prophecy:

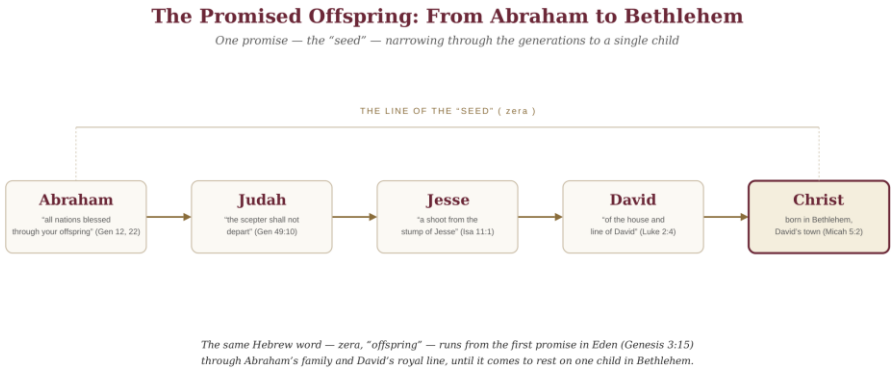
- Orientation — the prophecy in its original setting: who spoke it, to whom, and in what crisis.
- The Prophecy in View — a close look at the Old Testament text itself.

- The Fulfillment — where and how the New Testament picks it up and shows it fulfilled in Christ. This is the hinge of each lesson.
- Word Study — a key Hebrew or Greek term that unlocks the passage.
- Cross-References, For Reflection, and Living It Out — the connections, the discussion questions, and the application for us as men, fathers, and sons.
- Memory Verse and Carry Into Advent — the prophecy to carry with you, and a thought to take into the season.
- To Watch / To Listen — optional videos and music for those who want to go deeper during the week. The study stands complete without them.

> A note on the Jewish & Christian readings. Several of these texts have been read and treasured by Jewish interpreters for millennia, often differently than Christians read them. Where that conversation is especially rich — Isaiah 7's "virgin," or the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 — we've included a short box laying out both readings fairly. The goal is honest understanding and good discussion, not caricature. These passages sit at the meeting point of the two faiths' deepest hopes, and taking the Jewish reading seriously only sharpens our grasp of what the New Testament is claiming.

## The Thread: One Promised Offspring

Before we begin, it helps to see the single thread that ties the prophecies together. The very first promise, spoken in Eden, was about an *offspring* — a "seed." That one word is traced through the whole Old Testament: narrowing from all humanity, to Abraham's family, to the tribe of Judah, to the house of David, until it comes to rest on a single child born in David's hometown.




*The promise of an "offspring" narrows through the generations — from Abraham to one child in Bethlehem.*

## The Six Weeks

1. The First Promise — the offspring who crushes the serpent (Genesis 3:15; 12; 49:10)
2. Immanuel — God with us (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6–7)
3. The Branch from Jesse's Stump — the Spirit-anointed King (Isaiah 11)
4. O Little Town of Bethlehem — the ruler from the small place (Micah 5:2–5)
5. The Suffering Servant — the shadow of the cross over the cradle (Isaiah 52:13–53:12)
6. The Messenger & the Coming Lord — preparing the way, and the turn toward his return (Malachi 3–4; Luke 1, 3)

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

A study for Advent. These six weeks map naturally onto the Advent season — the four Sundays before Christmas, with a lead-in and a Christmas-week close — but the study stands on its own in any six-week window. Each lesson is built for about an hour to an hour and a half of discussion, with the Old Testament reading and reflection questions as homework beforehand so the meeting itself can dwell on the prophecy and its fulfillment.

**TO WATCH / TO LISTEN**

For the whole study. Scan a code with your phone's camera to open it. These stand in for the weekly suggestions you'll also find in each lesson.



**WATCH** BibleProject — "The Messiah"
About 5 minutes. Traces the promised deliverer from Genesis through David to Jesus — the whole arc of this study in miniature.
*Scan for the video* · bibleproject.com/videos/messiah



**LISTEN** Handel's Messiah (complete)
Built almost entirely from the prophecies in this study (Isaiah 7, 9, 40, 53; Malachi 3). Worth having on across the season; the Part I choruses track our first weeks.
*Scan for recordings* · YouTube search — "Handel Messiah full"

**PRAYER PROMPT**

Begin this study by asking God to open your eyes, as Jesus opened the disciples' eyes on the road to Emmaus, to see him throughout the Scriptures. Ask that these ancient promises would not stay distant history, but would renew your wonder at a God who keeps his word — and your worship of the Son he sent.

# Week 1 · The First Promise

*Genesis 3:15; 12:1–3; 49:10 · The Offspring Who Crushes the Serpent*

## Orientation

The story of the promised Messiah does not begin in Bethlehem, or even in Isaiah. It begins on the worst day in human history — the moment humanity fell — when God, even as he pronounced judgment, slipped in a promise. Tucked into the curse on the serpent is the first glimmer of the gospel: one day an *offspring* of the woman would crush the serpent's head. The whole rest of the Bible is, in a sense, the unfolding of that one sentence. This week we trace it from Eden forward, as the promise narrows from all humanity to Abraham's family to the royal tribe of Judah.

## The Prophecy in View

### *The first gospel — Genesis 3:15*

God 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" (3:15). Christian readers have long called this the *protoevangelium* — the "first gospel." In the very breath of judgment, God announces that the woman's offspring will deal the serpent a mortal blow (a crushed head), though at a cost (a bruised heel). Hope is planted in the rubble of the fall.

### *The promise to Abraham — Genesis 12 and 22*

Centuries later the promise narrows. God calls Abraham: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (12:3), and later, "in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (22:18). The blessing for the whole world will come through one family — and specifically through Abraham's *offspring*.

### *The scepter of Judah — Genesis 49:10*

Narrowing again: as Jacob blesses his sons, he says of Judah, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah… until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (49:10). The deliverer will be a king, from the tribe of Judah. The "offspring" now has a royal address.

**WORD STUDY**

zera *("offspring, seed")* — Gen 3:15; 12:7; 22:18. The same word runs through all three texts. *Zera* can be collective (many descendants) or singular (one particular heir), and the Bible plays on both. Paul seizes on exactly this in Galatians 3:16: the promises were spoken to Abraham "and to his offspring" — not "offsprings," plural, but one: "who is Christ." The whole thread hangs on a single word.

**THE FULFILLMENT**

The New Testament presents Jesus as the offspring all three texts were pointing to. Paul says the "seed" of the Abrahamic promise is ultimately Christ (Galatians 3:16), and that in him the blessing reaches "all nations" (Galatians 3:8). Matthew opens his Gospel by naming Jesus "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1) — both covenants in one breath. And the serpent-crusher of Genesis 3:15 is heard again in Romans 16:20: "The God of peace

will soon crush Satan under your feet." The head-wound promised in Eden is delivered at the cross and consummated at Christ's return. Revelation even reaches back for the imagery — the ancient serpent, the woman, the child (Revelation 12).

**CROSS-REFERENCES**

- Galatians 3:16 — the "offspring" is Christ; the hinge verse for this whole week.
- Romans 16:20 — God will soon crush Satan underfoot; Genesis 3:15 fulfilled.
- Matthew 1:1 — Jesus, son of David, son of Abraham.
- Revelation 12:1–17 — the serpent, the woman, and her child; the cosmic echo.

**FOR REFLECTION**

- God planted a promise of hope in the very moment of judgment. Where do you most need to trust that God is already working redemption into a situation that feels like only consequences?
- The promise took thousands of years to be fulfilled. How does that stretch your own patience with God's timing on promises you're still waiting to see kept?
- The blessing to Abraham was always meant to reach "all nations." How wide is your vision of who the gospel is for — does it match God's?

**LIVING IT OUT**

As a man: The entire storyline of redemption rests on God keeping a single promise made in the dark. A man's word is tested the same way — over long stretches, when keeping it is costly and no one would know if he didn't. What promises are you in the middle of keeping (to your wife, your children, your work) that require the long faithfulness God modeled here?

As a father: Genesis 3:15 is a father's reminder that hope can be handed to children even in hard seasons. Are you teaching your children to see God's redemptive hand even when life delivers consequences — or only teaching them to fear the consequences? The first promise says judgment is never the last word with God.

As a son: You stand at the far end of a promise God began keeping in Eden and finished in Christ. The patience of God across those centuries is the same patience he extends to you. Rest in being part of a story far larger and older than your own — one whose outcome is already secured.

**MEMORY VERSE**

*"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

**CARRY INTO ADVENT**

As Advent begins, carry the wonder that the first Christmas was promised on humanity's worst day. Whatever darkness you're in, God is the kind of God who plants promises in it. Watch for hope in unlikely ground this week.

**TO WATCH / TO LISTEN**

**WATCH** BibleProject — “The Messiah”
About 5 minutes. The perfect companion to this week: it starts at “page three of the Bible” (Genesis 3) and traces the promised offspring through Abraham and David to Jesus.
*Scan for the video* · bibleproject.com/videos/messiah

**PRAYER PROMPT**

Thank God that before judgment had even finished falling, mercy was already promised. Ask him to make you a person of long faithfulness — one who keeps promises across time as he does — and to widen your heart for the “all nations” his blessing was always meant to reach.

# Week 2 · Immanuel

*Isaiah 7:14; 9:6–7 · God With Us*

## Orientation

Two of the most famous lines in all of Scripture — "the virgin shall conceive… and call his name Immanuel" and "unto us a child is born" — come from the prophet Isaiah, spoken into a national emergency. The kingdom of Judah was terrified, facing invasion, and its king was wavering. Into that fear Isaiah speaks a sign: a child whose very name means "God with us." This week we sit with that promise of God's presence, and the staggering claim the New Testament makes about how literally it came true.

## The Prophecy in View

### *The sign to Ahaz — Isaiah 7:14*

King Ahaz of Judah is panicking as two enemy kings march against Jerusalem. God offers him a sign; Ahaz refuses to ask. So the Lord gives one anyway: "The virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (7:14) — "God with us." In its immediate setting the sign assured Ahaz that before a child grew up, the threat would pass. But the language reaches far beyond Ahaz's moment.

### *The child who is God — Isaiah 9:6–7*

A chapter later the vision expands breathtakingly: "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (9:6). The child is not merely sent by God; the titles — "Mighty God," "Everlasting Father" — say he *is* God. And "of the increase of his government… there will be no end" (9:7). This is no ordinary royal birth announcement.

**WORD STUDY**

'immanu'el *("God with us")* — Isa 7:14. Two Hebrew words fused: *'immanu* ("with us") and *'el* ("God"). The name is the message. The deepest promise of the whole Bible is not first that God will *rescue* us or *fix* us, but that he will *be with* us — and the child's name says it before he says a word.

**JEWISH & CHRISTIAN READINGS**

The "virgin" question. Isaiah 7:14 uses the Hebrew word *'almah*, which means a young woman of marriageable age (its exact overlap with "virgin" is debated). Jewish interpreters have generally read the verse within Ahaz's own day — a young woman then living, whose child's growth would mark the timeline of the prophecy — and do not read it as predicting a miraculous virgin birth. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint), made by Jewish scholars two centuries before Christ, rendered *'almah* with *parthenos*, which does mean "virgin." Matthew, writing in Greek, quotes that reading and sees it fulfilled in Mary (Matthew 1:22–23). So the two traditions diverge on whether a virgin birth is predicted here — but share the deeper hope the name carries: that God himself would be present with his people. Worth discussing together: how does holding both readings honestly affect the way you hear the claim Matthew is making?

### THE FULFILLMENT

Matthew places Isaiah 7:14 at the very center of the Christmas story. When the angel tells Joseph that Mary's child is conceived by the Holy Spirit, Matthew comments: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matthew 1:22–23). And Matthew bookends his whole Gospel with the theme: it opens with "God with us" and closes with Jesus' promise, "I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). The name was not just a title; it was the mission — in Jesus, God came to be with us in the flesh. As John puts it, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

### CROSS-REFERENCES

- Matthew 1:22–23 — Immanuel fulfilled in the conception of Jesus.
- John 1:14 — the Word became flesh and "dwelt among us."
- Matthew 28:20 — "I am with you always"; Immanuel to the end.
- Isaiah 8:8, 10 — "Immanuel" again; God's presence as Judah's hope.

### FOR REFLECTION

- The sign was given to a frightened king who wouldn't even ask for help. Where is God offering you his presence in a fear you've been too proud or too anxious to bring to him?
- The deepest promise of Christmas is "God with us" — not first a fix, but a presence. In what situation do you need God's presence more than you need a solution right now?
- Isaiah 9 says a *child* is called "Mighty God." Sit with that paradox. What does it do to your picture of God that he came as an infant?

### LIVING IT OUT

As a man: Men are wired to want the fix, the solution, the plan — and can miss that God's first gift is simply *himself, with us*. In the pressures you're carrying, are you so focused on getting God to *do* something that you've overlooked the promise that he is *with* you in it? Immanuel says his presence is the gift, before any outcome.

As a father: "God with us" is also a model of fathering. Much of what your children need from you is not solutions but presence — you, with them, in the ordinary and the hard. Where might your children need more of your *presence* than your fixing? Being *with* them is itself the gift, as it was God's.

As a son: Whatever you face, the name of the child promises you are not alone in it. "I am with you always" is spoken to you. Before you ask God to change your circumstances, let the truth land that he is already present in them — Immanuel, with you now.

### MEMORY VERSE

*"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given… and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* — Isaiah 9:6

### CARRY INTO ADVENT

Carry one word into this week: *with*. In every room you enter and every pressure you face, quietly remember — God is *with* me here. Let Immanuel turn fear into company.

**TO WATCH / TO LISTEN**

**WATCH** BibleProject — "Heaven & Earth"
About 6 minutes. For the "God with us" theme: it traces how God has always been working to dwell with his people — the backdrop to Immanuel.
*Scan for the video* · bibleproject.com/videos/heaven-and-earth

**LISTEN** Handel's Messiah — "For unto us a Child is born"
Handel sets Isaiah 9:6 directly in this famous chorus — a stirring companion to this week's prophecy.
*Scan for recordings* · YouTube search — "Handel Messiah For unto us a Child is born"

**PRAYER PROMPT**

Thank God that he did not stay distant but came to be *with* us. Name the fear or pressure you most need his presence in, and ask him not first to fix it but to meet you in it. Pray that "Immanuel" would move from a Christmas word to a daily reality this week.

# Week 3 · The Branch from Jesse's Stump

*Isaiah 11:1–10 · New Life from a Cut-Down Tree*

## Orientation

Anyone who has worked land knows the sight: a tree cut down to a stump, seemingly dead — and then, against expectation, a green shoot pushing up from the old wood. That is Isaiah's image for the Messiah. The royal line of David had been reduced to a stump, the dynasty humbled and nearly ended. From that apparently dead stump, Isaiah promises, a living Branch will grow — a Spirit-anointed King who will one day rule a world so at peace that the wolf lies down with the lamb.

## The Prophecy in View

### *The shoot from the stump — Isaiah 11:1*

"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit" (11:1). Jesse was David's father; naming the *stump of Jesse* rather than the throne of David is deliberate — the royal tree has been cut down to its roots. Yet from that humble stump comes new life. God's king arises not from strength and grandeur but from what looked like a dead end.

### *The Spirit-anointed King — Isaiah 11:2–5*

"And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him" — the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and the fear of the Lord (11:2). This King judges not by appearances but with righteousness, and "with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked" (11:4). He is marked by the Spirit and by perfect justice, especially for the poor.

### *The peaceable kingdom — Isaiah 11:6–10*

Then the famous vision: the wolf dwelling with the lamb, the leopard lying down with the young goat, a little child leading them, and "the earth… full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (11:6–9). The reign of this Branch finally undoes the violence and enmity of a fallen world. "The root of Jesse… the nations shall inquire of him" (11:10) — his kingdom reaches the whole world.

**WORD STUDY**

netzer *("branch, shoot")* — Isa 11:1. A tender green shoot from a stump. Many scholars connect *netzer* to the town name *Nazareth* / *Nazarene* — and Matthew may be reaching for exactly this when he writes that Jesus settled in Nazareth so that "he would be called a Nazarene" (Matthew 2:23), echoing the prophets' "Branch." The Messiah as the *netzer* is life sprouting from what looked dead.

**THE FULFILLMENT**

The New Testament presents Jesus as this Branch. At his baptism "the Spirit of God" descends and rests on him (Matthew 3:16) — the very Spirit Isaiah said would rest on the shoot of Jesse. Jesus opens his public ministry by reading another "Spirit of the Lord is upon me" text from Isaiah and declaring it fulfilled in himself (Luke 4:18–21). Paul quotes Isaiah

11:10 directly: “The root of Jesse will come… in him will the Gentiles hope” (Romans 15:12) — the nations streaming to the Branch. And Revelation hears Jesus call himself “the root and the descendant of David” (Revelation 22:16). The peaceable kingdom of Isaiah 11 is inaugurated in Jesus’ first coming and completed at his return, when creation itself is finally set right (Romans 8:19–21).

**CROSS-REFERENCES**

- Romans 15:12 — Paul quotes Isaiah 11:10: the root of Jesse, the hope of the nations.
- Matthew 3:16–17 — the Spirit rests on Jesus at his baptism.
- Luke 4:18–21 — “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me”; fulfilled today.
- Revelation 22:16 — Jesus, “the root and the descendant of David.”

**FOR REFLECTION**

- The Branch grows from a stump — new life from what looked dead. Where in your life (or your family, your work, your faith) does something feel cut down to a stump? What would it mean to expect a shoot?
- This King is marked by the Spirit and by justice for the poor and the voiceless. How does it shape your picture of Christ’s kingship that his first concern is the powerless?
- The peaceable kingdom — wolf with lamb — is where history is headed. How does that final vision of restored peace change how you carry today’s conflicts and brokenness?

**LIVING IT OUT**

As a man: Isaiah 11 is good news for any man facing a “stump” season — a failed venture, a dead-ended career, a humbled dream, a faith that feels cut back to the roots. God’s pattern is to bring new life precisely from such places; his own King came that way. Where are you tempted to write something off as a dead stump that God may intend as the very place he brings new growth?

As a father: For a family close to the land, the stump-and-shoot image is a living parable to share — point it out when you see it. And model for your children a king worth following: one whose greatness shows in justice for the weak, not dominance over them. The way you treat those who can do nothing for you teaches them what Christ’s kingship looks like.

As a son: The same Spirit that rested on the Branch is given to those who are in him. You are not asked to live the Christian life on your own strength any more than Jesus ministered on his. Where do you need to stop striving in your own power and ask for the Spirit Isaiah 11 describes — wisdom, counsel, might, the fear of the Lord?

**MEMORY VERSE**

*“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him.”* — Isaiah 11:1–2

**CARRY INTO ADVENT**

This week, when you see a tree, a stump, a new shoot — out on the land or anywhere — let it preach Isaiah 11 to you: God brings his best life out of what looked finished. Carry that hope into whatever feels cut down.

**TO WATCH / TO LISTEN**

**WATCH** BibleProject — “Anointing”
About 3 minutes. Short and on-point: it explains what it meant for a king to be “anointed” with the Spirit — exactly what rests on the Branch of Jesse.
*Scan for the video* · bibleproject.com/videos/anointing

**LISTEN** Handel’s Messiah — Part I
“There were shepherds” and the surrounding Part I pieces carry this season’s hope of the coming King.
*Scan for recordings* · YouTube search — “Handel Messiah Part 1”

**PRAYER PROMPT**

Bring God the “stump” in your life — the place that feels cut down or dead — and ask him to bring new life from it in his way and time, as he did through the Branch. Ask for the Spirit that rested on Jesus to rest on you: wisdom, counsel, might, and the fear of the Lord.

# Week 4 · O Little Town of Bethlehem

*Micah 5:2–5 · The Ruler from the Small Place*

## Orientation

Of all the places God might have chosen to send his King, he picked Bethlehem — a town so small it barely registered. The prophet Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, names it seven centuries in advance: the ruler of Israel will come from this insignificant village. It is a theme that runs through the whole Christmas story and through the whole Bible — God delights to work through the small, the overlooked, and the unlikely, so that the glory is clearly his.

## The Prophecy in View

### *The ruler from Bethlehem — Micah 5:2*

"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days" (5:2). Micah is explicit about Bethlehem's insignificance — "too little" — and yet from it comes the ruler. And that last phrase, "from of old, from ancient days," hints that this ruler's origins run back far beyond his birth; he is no ordinary man.

### *The shepherd-king and his peace — Micah 5:4–5*

"And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord… and they shall dwell secure… And he shall be their peace" (5:4–5). The ruler is a shepherd — a king who tends rather than merely dominates — and he himself *is* their peace. The echo of David, the shepherd-boy from Bethlehem who became king, is unmistakable; the greater Son of David will also come from the shepherd's town.

**WORD STUDY**

Beth-lechem *("house of bread")* — the town's own name means "house of bread." There is a quiet fittingness that the one who would call himself "the bread of life" (John 6:35) was born in the "house of bread," and laid in a manger — a feeding trough. *Ephrathah*, the older name attached to it, means "fruitful." God's provision is written into the very place-name.

**THE FULFILLMENT**

Matthew records that when the magi came seeking the newborn king, Herod's own scholars knew exactly where to look: they quoted Micah 5:2 — "And you, O Bethlehem… from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel" (Matthew 2:5–6). The religious experts had the right answer and still missed the King; Herod had the information and used it to try to kill him. Luke, from a completely different angle, shows how it actually happened: a Roman census forced Joseph, "of the house and lineage of David," to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem precisely when Mary was due (Luke 2:1–7). The vast machinery of an empire was unknowingly moving to fulfill a village prophecy spoken 700 years before. God used Caesar's tax to get the Messiah born in the right town.

**CROSS-REFERENCES**

- Matthew 2:1–6 — the magi, Herod, and the scribes quoting Micah 5:2.
- Luke 2:1–7 — the census that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem.

- 1 Samuel 16:1–13 — David anointed in Bethlehem; the shepherd-king pattern.
- John 6:35 — "I am the bread of life"; the child of the "house of bread."

**FOR REFLECTION**

- God chose the small, overlooked town on purpose. Where are you tempted to despise the "too little" — small beginnings, unimpressive places, ordinary work — that God may intend to use?
- Herod's scholars knew the prophecy cold and still missed the King. How can right knowledge about God coexist with a heart that never actually comes to him? Where might that be a risk for you?
- God used a pagan emperor's census to fulfill his promise. Where might God be working out his purposes through the "ordinary" machinery of your life — your job, your obligations, your circumstances — in ways you can't yet see?

**LIVING IT OUT**

As a man: Bethlehem is God's standing rebuke to the worship of bigness. Men are pushed constantly toward the impressive — the bigger title, the larger operation, the visible win. God chose the *too little* place. Where are you overlooking the significance of small, faithful, hidden things — in your home, your work, your walk with God — because they don't look like much? The most important thing God ever did came from a town no one valued.

As a father: Much of fathering is "Bethlehem" work — small, unglamorous, unseen, repeated ten thousand times. It will never trend or make the news. But God's pattern says the small faithful place is exactly where he does his greatest work. Are you believing that about the ordinary, hidden labor of raising your children? It matters more than almost anything you'll do that looks bigger.

As a son: If you feel small, overlooked, or from an unimportant "place" — Bethlehem is for you. God specializes in bringing world-changing things out of what the world counts as nothing. Your smallness is not a disqualification in his economy; it may be the very thing he uses.

**MEMORY VERSE**

*"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel."* — Micah 5:2

**CARRY INTO ADVENT**

This week, notice the "too little" things — the small duties, small places, small people the world overlooks — and treat one of them as if God might do something great through it. He chose Bethlehem.

**TO WATCH / TO LISTEN**

**WATCH** BibleProject — "The Last Will Be First"
About 5 minutes. Fits this week closely: how God's kingdom overturns the world's ranking of big and small, first and last.
*Scan for the video* · bibleproject.com/videos/last-will-be-first

**LISTEN** “O Little Town of Bethlehem”
The carol is a meditation on this exact prophecy — “yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.” Worth a slow, attentive listen.
*Scan for recordings* · YouTube search — “O Little Town of Bethlehem hymn”

**PRAYER PROMPT**

Thank God that he chose the small place and the humble way. Confess any worship of bigness and the impressive in your own heart, and ask him to help you value the “too little” things he delights to use. Pray that, unlike Herod’s scholars, your knowledge of Christ would always lead you to actually come and worship him.

# Week 5 · The Suffering Servant

*Isaiah 52:13–53:12 · The Shadow of the Cross Over the Cradle*

## Orientation

This week we come to the deepest and most astonishing of all the prophecies — and the one that most sharply divides Jewish and Christian readers. Seven centuries before Christ, Isaiah describes a "servant" who suffers, is rejected and pierced, and bears the sins of many — and through whose suffering others are healed. For Christians it is the clearest Old Testament portrait of the cross, and it belongs in a Christmas study because it answers the question *why* the child was born. The shadow of the cross falls across the cradle from the very start.

## The Prophecy in View

### *Despised and rejected — Isaiah 53:1–3*

The servant has "no form or majesty that we should look at him" (53:2). He is "despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (53:3). This is no conquering hero as the world pictures one; he is overlooked and scorned.

### *Pierced for our transgressions — Isaiah 53:4–6*

The heart of it: "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows… But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed" (53:4–5). "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6). The servant suffers not for his own sin but for the sins of others — in their place.

### *The silent lamb and the exalted servant — Isaiah 53:7–12*

"Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter… he opened not his mouth" (53:7). He is "cut off out of the land of the living" (53:8), buried with the rich (53:9) — and yet, astonishingly, afterward "he shall see… and be satisfied" (53:11) and is given "a portion with the many" (53:12). Death is not the end of the servant's story; vindication follows.

**WORD STUDY**

asham *("guilt offering")* — Isa 53:10. The servant's life is made "an *asham*" — the specific Old Testament sacrifice that made restitution for guilt. Isaiah casts the servant's death in the language of the temple: he is not merely a victim of injustice but a sacrifice that actually deals with sin. The imagery of substitution could hardly be more explicit.

**JEWISH & CHRISTIAN READINGS**

Who is the servant? This is one of the most important and respectful conversations the two faiths can have. A major strand of Jewish interpretation reads the suffering servant as *Israel itself* — the nation, personified, suffering among the nations yet ultimately vindicated by God; this reading has deep roots and gives voice to centuries of Jewish suffering. Christians read the servant as an individual — the Messiah — and see the portrait fulfilled with startling precision in Jesus' rejection, silence before his accusers, death among criminals, burial in a rich man's tomb, and resurrection. (Notably, some ancient and medieval Jewish sources also entertained a messianic reading.) The passage rewards being read slowly with both lenses: it is worth asking your group where each reading is strongest,

and what it means that the New Testament writers reached for this text, above almost any other, to explain the cross.

**THE FULFILLMENT**

The New Testament applies Isaiah 53 to Jesus more than any other Old Testament passage. In Acts 8, an Ethiopian official is reading this very chapter and asks who the prophet is speaking of; Philip, "beginning with this Scripture, told him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35). Peter quotes it directly — "he committed no sin… he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree… by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:22–24). Jesus himself said he came "to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45), language drawn straight from Isaiah 53:12. This is why the child was born: the cradle leads to the cross, and the cross is where the servant "bore the sin of many." Christmas and Good Friday are one story.

**CROSS-REFERENCES**

- Acts 8:30–35 — Philip explains Isaiah 53 as being about Jesus.
- 1 Peter 2:22–25 — "by his wounds you have been healed"; Isaiah 53 applied to the cross.
- Mark 10:45 — "a ransom for many"; Jesus echoes Isaiah 53:12.
- John 1:29 — "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

**FOR REFLECTION**

- Isaiah 53 says the servant was pierced "for *our* transgressions." How does it land personally to say that the suffering described here was for *your* sin, by name?
- The servant "opened not his mouth" before his accusers. What does his silence — his refusal to defend or retaliate — reveal about the kind of strength Christ embodies?
- Why do you think a Christmas study should include the suffering servant? How does remembering *why* Jesus was born change the way you celebrate *that* he was born?

**LIVING IT OUT**

As a man: Isaiah 53 confronts the self-made man with a truth he can't fix himself: "all we like sheep have gone astray… and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." The whole weight a man carries — his failures, his guilt, the things he'd never say aloud — was laid on the servant. You don't have to carry it, and you can't atone for it yourself. Have you actually let Christ bear what he came to bear for you, or are you still shouldering it alone?

As a father: The servant's strength is shown in restraint and sacrifice, not dominance — "like a lamb… he opened not his mouth." That is a profound model of manhood to pass on in a culture that equates strength with force and the last word. What are your children learning from how you handle being wronged, accused, or disrespected? The cross redefines strength as sacrificial love.

As a son: "With his stripes we are healed." Whatever wounds or guilt you carry, the servant's suffering was aimed at your healing and your peace. This is the gift under all the other gifts of Christmas. Receive it this week — not as an idea, but as something done personally for you.

**MEMORY VERSE**

*"But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed."* — Isaiah 53:5

**CARRY INTO ADVENT**

Let the cross stand behind the cradle this week. As you see the lights and gifts of the season, carry the deeper reason for them: he was born to bear your sin. Let gratitude for the *why* deepen your joy in the *that*.

**TO WATCH / TO LISTEN**

**WATCH** BibleProject — "Sacrifice and Atonement"
About 6 minutes. Explains the sacrificial "covering" for sin that Isaiah 53 draws on — the background that makes the servant's death make sense.
*Scan for the video* · bibleproject.com/videos/sacrifice-and-atonement

**LISTEN** Handel's Messiah — the Isaiah 53 choruses
The heart of Handel's Messiah sets this chapter almost word for word: "Behold, the Lamb of God," "He was despised," "Surely He hath borne our griefs" / "And with His stripes" / "All we like sheep."
*Scan for recordings* · YouTube search — "Handel Messiah Surely He hath borne our griefs"

**PRAYER PROMPT**

Read Isaiah 53:4–6 slowly as a prayer, putting your own name into it. Thank Jesus for bearing what you could never bear yourself. Confess anything you've been trying to atone for on your own, and receive the healing and peace the servant's wounds were meant to purchase for you.

# Week 6 · The Messenger & the Coming Lord

*Malachi 3:1; 4:5–6; Luke 1, 3 · Preparing the Way*

## Orientation

The Old Testament ends not with the Messiah's arrival but with a promise about the one who would announce him. Malachi, the last of the prophets, foretells a messenger who will "prepare the way" before the Lord suddenly comes to his temple. Then the prophetic voice falls silent for four hundred years. When it breaks again, it is John the Baptist in the wilderness, calling Israel to get ready. This final week closes the arc of prophecy — and then turns us forward, because the first coming it promised also guarantees a second.

## The Prophecy in View

### *The messenger who prepares the way — Malachi 3:1*

"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple… behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts" (3:1). A forerunner will go ahead to ready the people; then the Lord himself will come. Note the stunning implication — the messenger prepares the way for *the Lord*, and the one who comes is the Lord.

### *Elijah before the day — Malachi 4:5–6*

The very last words of the Old Testament: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (4:5–6). The forerunner will come in the spirit of Elijah, and his work will be one of reconciliation — restoring relationships, beginning with fathers and children. Then: silence.




*Four centuries pass between Malachi's last word and John the Baptist — not empty time, but God preparing the world for his Son.*

### *The silence breaks — Luke 1 and 3*

After four centuries, an angel tells a priest named Zechariah that his son will go "in the spirit and power of Elijah… to make ready for the Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:17) — quoting Malachi directly. That son is John the Baptist. When John begins to preach, Luke frames him with another prophecy of preparation: "the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

Prepare the way of the Lord" (Luke 3:4, quoting Isaiah 40). John is the messenger Malachi promised.

**WORD STUDY**

pannah derek *("prepare / clear the way")* — Mal 3:1; echoed in Isa 40:3. The image is of clearing a road ahead of an arriving king — removing obstacles, filling potholes, making the path straight and smooth. John's whole ministry was this: clearing the obstacles of pride and sin out of people's hearts so they would be ready to receive the King. The same preparation is still the right response to his coming.

**THE FULFILLMENT**

All four Gospels identify John the Baptist as Malachi's promised messenger. Jesus says it plainly: "This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face'" (Matthew 11:10, quoting Malachi 3:1), and "he is Elijah who is to come" (Matthew 11:14). John prepared the way; then the Lord came to his temple, just as Malachi said. But the prophecy also looks past the first coming. Malachi spoke of "the great and awesome day of the Lord" — and the New Testament teaches that Christ's first coming, which these six weeks have traced, guarantees a second. The child who came in humility will come again in glory. So Advent faces two directions at once: we remember that he came, and we prepare for the fact that he will come again. "Prepare the way" is still the call.

**CROSS-REFERENCES**

- Matthew 11:10–14 — Jesus identifies John as Malachi's messenger and "Elijah."
- Luke 1:16–17 — John will go in the spirit of Elijah, quoting Malachi 4.
- Isaiah 40:3–5 — "prepare the way of the Lord"; the other preparation prophecy.
- Titus 2:11–13 — grace has appeared; we await the "blessed hope," his appearing. The two comings.

**FOR REFLECTION**

- John's work was to "prepare the way" — clearing obstacles out of hearts. What obstacles in your own heart most need clearing to make room for Christ this Advent?
- God's last prophetic word before the silence was about reconciling fathers and children. Is there a relationship — with a parent or a child — where God is calling you to turn your heart and seek restoration?
- Advent looks both backward (he came) and forward (he will come again). How would genuinely living ready for Christ's return change the way you're living right now?

**LIVING IT OUT**

As a man: "Prepare the way" is active, deliberate work — roads don't clear themselves. A man can drift through Advent as a season of busyness and consumption, or he can do the preparing work John called for: honest self-examination, repentance, making room. Which are you doing this year? What one obstacle will you deliberately clear to receive the King — both as you remember his first coming and prepare for his second?

As a father: It is striking that God's final prophetic word before four centuries of silence was about turning "the hearts of fathers to their children." Reconciliation between the generations is close to God's heart. Is there distance between you and your children — or you

and your own father — that God is prompting you to close? Few things prepare a family for Christ like a father who turns his heart toward his children.

As a son: The same word also turns "the hearts of children to their fathers." If there is a breach with your father, or with your heavenly Father, Advent is the season to turn back. And live ready: the Christ whose first coming you've studied for six weeks is coming again. Prepare the way — keep the road to your heart clear for the King.

**MEMORY VERSE**

*"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple."* — Malachi 3:1

**CARRY INTO ADVENT**

As Christmas arrives, do the forerunner's work: clear one obstacle, mend one relationship, make room. He came — celebrate it fully. He is coming again — live ready for it. Prepare the way.

**TO WATCH / TO LISTEN**

**WATCH** BibleProject — "The Gospel of the Kingdom"
About 5 minutes. A fitting close to the study: the announcement John and Jesus proclaimed — the King and his kingdom have come, and are coming.
*Scan for the video* · bibleproject.com/videos/gospel-kingdom

**LISTEN** Handel's Messiah — "Comfort ye" / "Every valley"
Handel opens with exactly these prophecies — Isaiah 40's preparation text and Malachi 3's "Behold, I send my messenger." A perfect bookend to the whole study.
*Scan for recordings* · YouTube search — "Handel Messiah Comfort ye Every valley"

**PRAYER PROMPT**

Ask God to show you what obstacles need clearing in your heart to receive Christ well this Christmas. If he brings a strained relationship to mind — with a child, a parent, or himself — take a step to turn your heart back. Thank him that the child came, and ask him to help you live ready for the day he comes again.