

Unit 1: Major Messianic Prophecies

Lesson 3 | December 15, 2024

The Promised Messiah

Study Text

Isaiah 7:1–14; 9:1–7; 40:1–5; Matthew 1:18–25; Luke 3:1–20

Central Truth

Jesus Christ is all He was promised to be.

Key Verse: Isaiah 9:6

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: And the government shall be upon his shoulder: And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (KJV).

A child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (NLT).

Learning Objectives:

- Students will examine Old Testament messianic prophecies and how Jesus fulfilled them.
- Students will appreciate the importance of studying messianic prophecies.
- Students will seek opportunities to share the good news of Jesus with lost people.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: A promise is only as good as the person who made it. People who honor their word gain respect, but it's hard to trust people who go back on their promises.

Discussion Starter—Trust Me

Say: What are some examples of broken promises with major consequences?

Say: Relationships—whether they're personal or business—are built on trust. When trust is broken, the effects can last for a long time, even for the rest of our lives. This explains why people who've been hurt before are less likely to trust others. We could all probably name businesses or people we struggle to trust, because the truth is, people will often disappoint us, even if they have the best intentions.

As God's children, we have been given many marvelous promises by the Creator of the universe. And He has both the unshakable power and the unwavering faithfulness to fulfill them. In this lesson, we will look at some of Isaiah's key messianic prophecies and the ways God's promises were ultimately fulfilled through the birth and life of Jesus.

Part 1—Born of the Virgin

A Virgin Will Conceive

Isaiah 7:1–4, 10–14

Say: In Isaiah 6, the prophet was commissioned after encountering God in a vision. With a new awareness of his own shortcomings and Israel's sins, he was given a message of judgment and a glimmer of hope: "Israel's stump will be a holy seed" (verse 13). Chapter 7 builds on that prophetic expectation.

King Ahaz was ruling Judah during Isaiah's early ministry. Ahaz was an evil king who engaged in pagan worship that even included human sacrifice (2 Chronicles 28:1–4). As a result, God used the Arameans (*Ar-uh-ME-uhns*; also known as Syrians) to defeat Ahaz and Judah (verses 5–8). The Arameans joined with the northern kingdom of Israel and their evil king, Pekah (*PEE-kuh*; 2 Kings 15:27–31), in an attempt to force Ahaz into their alliance against Tiglath-Pileser (*TIG-lath-Puh-LEE-zur*), ruler of the massive Assyrian Empire to the north.

The people of Judah were terrified when Pekah and Rezin (*REE-zin*) attacked Jerusalem (Isaiah 7:1–2), even though their own sin had brought this judgment about. The mention of the house of David in verse 2 (kjv) is significant, because Pekah and Rezin's purpose was not only to make Judah join them, but to overthrow David's dynasty. In this frightful moment, God told Isaiah to take his son, Shear-jashub (*SHEE-ahr-JAY-shub*; meaning "a remnant will return"), as a sign and meet King Ahaz near the aqueduct, where he was presumably checking the city's water supply. Isaiah's message was one of comfort: Ahaz need not worry about these two kings, for they would not defeat him.

After assuring Ahaz that Judah would be safe from Pekah and Rezin, God told him to ask for a sign of confirmation: "Make it as difficult as you want—as high as heaven or as deep as the place of the dead" (verse 11). However, Ahaz refused: "I will not test the Lord like that" (verse 12). Ahaz's response may sound pious, since the Law forbade testing God (Deuteronomy 6:16), but God had instructed him to request a sign. Ultimately, Ahaz was rejecting God's plan. He had decided to ally with Tiglath-pileser and the Assyrians instead (2 Kings 16:7–11), and he refused to submit his authority to God's will.

Frustrated, Isaiah spoke on behalf of God again, expanding the promise to the entire Davidic dynasty. Despite Ahaz's unbelief, "the Lord himself will give you [plural] the sign" (verse 14). A virgin would conceive a son and name him *Immanuel*, meaning "God with us." It is likely that this sign was fulfilled in some way during Ahaz's rule. Some commentators restrict their interpretation of Isaiah 7:14 to say this promise was only for Ahaz's time, but Matthew 1:23 is the final authority: Mary was the virgin who would give birth to Immanuel, Jesus Christ.

Resource Packet Item 1: The Virgin Birth

Students will explore some of the reasons why it mattered that Jesus was born to a virgin and reflect on their own level of humble obedience to God.

Discuss

? Ahaz heard God's promise, but he chose to make his own plans instead of following God's guidance. How are Christians sometimes guilty of this?

? Why do you think God made such a hopeful promise in this context of Ahaz's disobedience and judgment?

This Occurred to Fulfill the Prophecy

Matthew 1:18–23

Say: Matthew 1:18–23 is extremely familiar, since we read it or hear it almost every year at Christmas. But let's not allow familiarity to diminish its impact. These verses are full of miracles, including the fulfillment of a prophecy given more than seven hundred years earlier.

Matthew 1:18–23 informs us of some foundational gospel truths. Jesus is the Messiah who saves people from their sins. His mother, Mary, was a virgin who became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. And an angel visited Mary's betrothed, Joseph, in a dream to explain what had happened and would happen.

Mary and Joseph's engagement was legally binding, but until the wedding ceremony, Mary would have stayed in her parents' house and consummation was not to have taken place. During this period of consecration, Mary "became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit" (verse 18, NLT; "was found with child of the Holy Ghost," KJV), even though she was a virgin. The same Spirit of God that worked in the creation of the world (Genesis 1:1–2) worked in Mary's body in a miraculous way. In that moment, God's grace was acting supernaturally on behalf of humanity.

Joseph was not only righteous, but he was compassionate. Instead of publicly condemning Mary for being unfaithful, he was prepared to end the relationship quietly. However, God spoke to him through an angel, assuring him that Jesus had been conceived by the Holy Spirit. In response, Joseph took Mary as his wife regardless of any potential perceptions, rumors, or questions.

Just as Gabriel had told Mary, the angel told Joseph that the child's name would be Jesus, meaning "Yahweh is salvation" (Luke 1:31; Matthew 1:21). His name explained His ministry—to take people out from under the dominion of sin and lead them into the freedom and joy of living in the Spirit. In verse 23, Matthew clarified Jesus would fulfill God's promise from Isaiah 7:14. He would be Immanuel, God with us.

Resource Packet Item 2: Favor with God

In addition to Mary, several other people in the Bible are described as finding favor with God. Students will read several Scriptures, noting who found favor with God and what faith-filled attitude or action led to that favor.

Discuss

? Of all the people who would ever live, God chose Mary and Joseph to raise His Son. Based on their character traits described in this passage and elsewhere in Scripture, why do you think God chose them?

? Why is it important to know the messianic prophecies about Jesus?

Part 2—Preceded by John the Baptist A Voice in the Wilderness

Isaiah 40:1–5

Say: Theologian Stanley Horton called chapters 40–66 in the Book of Isaiah “The Book of Comfort” because of their focus on redemption, hope, and glory.¹ The title makes sense when you consider the many messianic and end-time prophecies in these chapters.

Isaiah 40 includes one example of how the prophet often delivered ominous words of judgment (chapter 39) followed by comforting words of hope. There is much to be learned by this kind of two-pronged message. God’s warnings are serious, and sin has consequences. But for those who respond to God in faith, hope is never lost.

When God said, “Comfort, comfort my people” (40:1), He was emphatically calling Isaiah and other leaders in Israel to console the people. Jerusalem’s time of paying off the debt for their sins would end, and the penalty would be accepted as sufficient. For Jerusalem’s double punishment, she had received double pardon from God.²

The message being declared in verse 3 was both comforting and critical: “It’s the voice of someone shouting, ‘Clear the way through the wilderness for the LORD! Make a straight highway through the wasteland for our God!’” This image would bring to mind a royal emissary going before a conquering king to prepare the road, making it level and straight.

In terms of Isaiah’s prophecy, this pointed to a message of repentance. This straight, level road would make way for the glory of the Lord to be revealed (verse 5). The full weight of His presence and power—a revelation of who He really is—would be seen and experienced by all people, pointing toward the universal reach and reign of this King.

Looking back, we can recognize the full significance of this call. We know this conquering King and we must each prepare our own hearts to receive Him. We clear the way, getting rid of any obstacles that would separate us from Him. We make whatever changes are necessary—filling valleys, leveling mountains, straightening curves, smoothing rough patches—to make way for Jesus to occupy our hearts. And when God’s glory is revealed in us, everyone will see it.

Discuss

? What is the significance of God’s words of comfort coming just after His words of judgment?

? What are some ways you have prepared your heart for King Jesus?

Prepare the Way of the Lord

Luke 3:1–17

Say: All four Gospel writers describe how John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by calling for repentance. But Luke explains what that means: a total surrender of a person’s soul to God.

Resource Packet Item 3: John the Baptist

Students will learn more about the beginning and end of John’s life and his ministry as the forerunner of the Messiah.

John preached a message of repentance throughout the region of the Jordan River (Luke 3:2–3). His emphasis on forgiveness dovetailed with the ministry of Jesus, whose sacrificial death provided the ultimate atonement for sin.

Luke clarified that John was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of someone crying in the wilderness, “Prepare the way for the LORD’s coming!” (verses 4–6; Isaiah 40:3–5). Then in Luke 3:7–9, the author records John’s words of warning and judgment to the crowds who came to him for baptism. He emphasized personal repentance, explaining that being part of Abraham’s lineage was not enough to escape judgment. In the same way, we each must make our own decision to follow Jesus daily. It’s not enough to attend church or rely on the faith of our parents. As John said, “Every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire” (verse 9).

The various people who came to listen to John’s message all asked the same question: “What should we do?” (verses 10, 12, 14). His words compelled people to act. John explained that people should share with the poor, conduct business ethically, and not abuse their power.

At this time in Jewish history, people were looking for the Messiah. It seems natural that they wondered whether John was the one they had been waiting for (verse 15). But John explained that not only was his baptism inferior to the Messiah’s, but he himself was “not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals” (verse 16). We can learn a great deal from John’s humility here and elsewhere in the Gospels (Matthew 3:13–15; Mark 1:7; John 1:6–8, 29–37; 3:26–31). He did not allow his miraculous birth, his uniquely prophetic role, or his powerful anointing to pull attention from the One he had been set apart to serve.

John’s water baptism was important—it signified the repentance Jesus would require—but the One to come would baptize “with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Luke 3:16). That fire is (in part, at least) a reference to God’s judgment upon the unrepentant (verse 17). But elsewhere in Scripture, fire also signifies the Messiah’s purifying power (Malachi 3:1–3) and the Holy Spirit baptism He would promise (Matthew 3:11; Acts 2:1–4). Believers still are baptized in water to show their repentance and their decision to follow

Jesus Christ. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is also available to every Christian (Acts 2:39).

Discuss

? Why do you think John told the tax collectors and soldiers to show integrity in their work rather than find new jobs?

Part 3—Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace

A Light Will Shine

Isaiah 9:1–5

Say: Just as we’ve seen elsewhere in Isaiah, God can bring visions of hope out of the deepest darkness. As we’ll see in Isaiah 9, there is no greater hope than the light our Savior brings.

Isaiah 9:1 begins with *nevertheless*. When we see a connecting word like this in Scripture, we should carefully look at what comes before it. Looking back at Isaiah 8:16–22, we find “trouble and anguish and dark despair” (verse 22). God’s people are rebellious and lost, “completely in the dark” (verse 20).

But in 9:1, Isaiah shifts to a message of messianic hope: “That time of darkness and despair will not go on forever.” Assyrian armies would devastate Naphtali (*NAF-tuh-ligh*) and Zebulun (*ZEB-yoo-luhn*), tribes west and north of Galilee, roughly twelve years after Isaiah’s prophecy (around 733 BC). But after being humbled, these tribal lands would be honored. As we know, most of Jesus’ life and ministry happened in the region of Galilee, meaning the land was truly “filled with glory” (verse 1). This region experienced the deepest darkness in Isaiah’s day because of Assyria (verse 2), but they would experience the brightest hope when the Messiah arrived.

In verses 4–5, Isaiah possibly recalled two great events in Israel’s history: the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 12 to 15) and Gideon’s victory against the Midianites (Judges 7). From a human perspective, victory and deliverance were unimaginable in both cases. But God was not limited by what seemed possible. When the prophesied One came, His deliverance exceeded both.

Discuss

? Describe a time when God miraculously delivered you.

? How is the Messiah’s light still shining on people living in deep darkness?

A Child Is Born

Isaiah 9:6–7

Say: You’ve probably heard the famous words of Isaiah 9:6 sung already this Christmas season. And while our focus is on the Child who was born, we shouldn’t forget that He was born “unto us.” Jesus came to earth for our sake, a selfless act of love and grace that deserves our praise every day of the year.

Isaiah 9:6 refers back to the child called Immanuel in 7:14, our ultimate Messiah.

- “A child is born” emphasizes the Messiah’s humanity.
- “A son is given” highlights His royal lineage as a descendant of David and the fact God gave Him freely.
- “The government will rest on his shoulders” explains that He would carry the burden of leading Israel (22:22). A scepter on the king’s shoulder symbolized kingship in that culture.
- The names given to the Messiah describe some of His key characteristics. We can see how they were fulfilled in Jesus:
 - » *Wonderful*: Jesus worked many miracles during His earthly ministry. (Note: Hebrew scholars separate “wonderful” and “counselor.”)
 - » *Counselor*: Jesus offered significant guidance during His earthly life. This term translated as “counselor” refers to one giving direction.
 - » *Mighty God*: More than a divine representative or godly hero, Jesus is God (John 20:26–28).
 - » *Everlasting Father*: Jesus is the eternal Word, the One through whom God made everything (John 1:3; Hebrews 1:2).
 - » *Prince of Peace*: Jesus brings true peace through salvation (Romans 5:1) that will take full effect in His millennial reign (Isaiah 11:6–9; Micah 4:3–4).

Isaiah 9:7 describes the ultimate reign of Jesus, a time of absolute justice. There’s no need to wonder how—or whether—this will come about. Isaiah tells us, “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (KJV). What a marvelous promise for every believer!

Discuss

? In what sense is Jesus a gift to humanity?

? Which of Jesus’ titles from Isaiah 9:6 resonates with you the most? Why?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Isaiah, Mary, John the Baptist, and so many other faithful servants of God played vital roles in preparing the way for the Messiah. And so do we. We prepare the way for Jesus in two ways: living out His commands and sharing the gospel with others. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we can do our part to advance His kingdom on earth until He comes the second time.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Brainstorm creative ways to share the gospel with your community.
- Commit to helping each other follow Jesus with ongoing prayer and encouragement.
- Pray that your church will be a light to this dark world.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Virgin Birth Foretold.

Luke 1:26–38

Tuesday:

Virgin Birth Celebrated.

Luke 2:4–14

Wednesday:

John the Baptist Ministers.

Matthew 3:1–12

Thursday:

John Baptizes Jesus.

Matthew 3:13–17

Friday:

Jesus Gives Peace.

John 14:23–27

Saturday:

Peace with God.

Romans 5:1–5

1. Stanley M. Horton, *Isaiah: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2000), 298.

2. Horton, 299.