



Advent 2025

Session One: Hope

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

Advent is the season of expectation that begins four Sundays before Christmas.

Each week of Advent represents a different focus—hope, peace, joy, and love. Christians mark the weeks using Advent calendars, wreaths, and special Scripture readings.

As we begin this Advent season as a church and in our homes, look for ways you and your family can experience Christ's hope, peace, joy, and love in your lives, as well as ways you can share it with others.

While there are many secular traditions that “count down” to Christmas, Advent has a special meaning for Christians. As we celebrate the first Advent, the Incarnation of Christ on earth, we also await with joy Jesus's second Advent, when He will return for eternity with His people.

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

Psalms 130:5-8; Isaiah 9:2,6-7; Jeremiah 33:14-16

THE MAIN IDEA

Hope is confidence that God works in our lives. It's the trust that, even in difficult circumstances, God's plans are good.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Consider where you are tempted to hope in lesser things. How does reading Jesus's fulfillment of prophecies bring you hope?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Jeremiah 33:14-16 Jeremiah prophesied that Judah would fall to Babylon, and the people would be carried into exile for seventy years. However, he also pointed to a day when God would bring about justice and righteousness through a King born in the line of David—the Messiah. Jeremiah's ministry reminds us of God's faithfulness to keep His promises.

Isaiah 9:2,6-7 Seven hundred years before Jesus's birth, the prophet Isaiah foretold of the Light of the world, coming as a baby, to bring salvation to all the nations. Through the book of Isaiah, we have some of the most important prophecies concerning the coming Messiah—all of which were fulfilled in Christ.

Psalms 130:5-8 Advent is a season of celebrating the first incarnation as well as to look forward to the second Advent, when Christ will return for His people and we will dwell with Him for eternity. What are we to do as we wait? The psalmist paints a picture of joyful expectation as we “strain our eyes” toward eternity, waiting for the Lord.

START HERE

The countdown to Christmas can feel like a never-ending to-do list. With gifts to buy, parties to plan, and school activities to participate in, it is easy for the rush of the holidays to diminish our experience of joy in watching and waiting for Christ. As we dive into this four-week Advent series, be on the lookout for ways to slow down, turn our eyes and affections toward Christ, and prepare our hearts to receive Him this Christmas.

DISCUSS

Conservatively speaking, Jesus fulfilled more than 300 Old Testament prophecies through His birth, life, death, and resurrection. How can reflecting on God's faithfulness to keep His promises give us hope as we enter this season of advent?

REVIEW AND DISCUSS THE TEXT

1. We have hope because God keeps His promises.

Jeremiah 33:14-16:

*"Look, the days are coming"—
this is the LORD's declaration—
"when I will fulfill the good promise
that I have spoken
concerning the house of Israel
and the house of Judah.
In those days and at that time
I will cause a Righteous Branch
to sprout up for David,
and he will administer justice
and righteousness in the land.
In those days Judah will be saved,
and Jerusalem will dwell securely,
and this is what she will be named:
The LORD Is Our Righteousness."*

Unpacking Jeremiah 33:14-16

A common parenting challenge is helping kids learn patience, and nowhere is this more pronounced than in the weeks leading up to Christmas. When shopping centers begin decorating for Christmas right after Halloween, it can feel like an eternity for kids to wait to celebrate Jesus's birth, and, of course, receive presents.

In the mid-19th century, German Advent calendars were first introduced to help families count down the days until Christmas and reflect on Scriptures that point to Jesus's birth. By the 1920s,

German publicist Gerhard Lang, considered the inventor of the Advent calendar, began publishing colorful calendars complete with tiny windows to open revealing little pieces of chocolate to enjoy each day. Today, whether we count down the days to Christmas with Scripture readings, lighting candles, or pieces of chocolate, Advent is the season when we set our hope on the coming of Christ.

Jeremiah, also known as “the weeping prophet,” knew a thing or two about waiting. God called him as a teenager (Jeremiah 1:6) to reject marriage and family (16:2) and to serve God as a prophet to the crumbling nation of Judah. For more than forty years, Jeremiah pleaded with the people to reject pagan gods and practices, repent, and return to the Lord. Despite his dramatic preaching, the people rejected his words, and, in 586 BCE, Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians, the temple was destroyed, and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were carried away into Babylonian exile for the next seventy years. God’s judgment on the people’s wickedness even impacted the weeping prophet, who spent many years of the exile imprisoned and alone.

However, in the final chapters of Jeremiah we see the prophet look to, and point others to, the consolation that God promised on the other side of His discipline and their exile: *“Look, the days are coming”—this is the LORD’s declaration— “when I will fulfill the good promise that I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah”* (Jeremiah 33:14). Not only did Jeremiah prophesy that God would restore the southern kingdom, but he also envisioned how God would bring about redemption for all His people, including the ten northern tribes of Israel who had been carried away into exile by the Assyrians nearly 150 years before the prophet was born. Ultimately, Jeremiah pointed toward a Savior not just for Judah and Israel, but for the world.

It’s important to remember two things about Old Testament prophecy. First, there was an immediate message for the people of that day. Jeremiah reassured them that even after they were carried away in exile, when they repented, God would forgive and restore them. Even if they had not listened to him during the forty years of ministry when he begged them to repent, it is likely that his words of consolation were a balm to their hearts in exile. After 70 years the people returned to Jerusalem, and from 536-516 BCE the governor Zerubbabel of Judah oversaw their return and the rebuilding of the temple.

Jeremiah’s message also contained a prophecy of far-greater significance for God’s people throughout history. The prophet pointed toward the coming Messiah, from the line of David, who would set things right for all people: *“In those days and at that time I will cause a Righteous Branch to sprout up for David, and he will administer justice and righteousness in the land”* (Jeremiah 33:15).

Perhaps this message could be received with some trepidation. After all, their sin resulted in exile. If God planned to send a righteous leader who would *“administer justice and righteousness,”* who would be able to stand? There might be some of us who feel that way today. As Romans 3:10 says, *“There is no one righteous, not even one.”* If God judges us based

on our own righteousness, we are all destined for eternal exile from Him. Not one of us is worthy to enter His presence.

However, to correctly interpret verse 15, we must read it in context with the next verse. Jeremiah 33:16 says, *“In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely, and this is what she will be named: The LORD Is Our Righteousness.”* The people in Jeremiah’s day looked forward to returning from exile and the leadership of faithful men who would reestablish them as a nation and rebuild the temple. In a greater sense, Jeremiah looked to Jesus, the Branch of David, the Messiah, who *is* our righteousness.

We can have hope because God keeps His promises. He was faithful to the people of Judah to bring them back from exile and to rebuild their temple. And He was faithful to send Jesus, who administers justice and righteousness based not on our righteousness, but on His own. First Corinthians 1:30 says, *“It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption”* (NIV). The Lord is our righteousness, today and forever.

“For every one of God’s promises is ‘Yes’ in him. Therefore, through him we also say ‘Amen’ to the glory of God” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Jesus is the answer to every promise of God. He is the true branch, who brings about justice, salvation, and safety forever, not through our righteousness, but through His.

DISCUSS

- *Do you wait for Christmas with hopeful expectation? If so, how do you maintain that expectancy? If not, what gets in the way of experiencing the hope of Advent?*
- *How did God demonstrate His faithfulness to Judah, even while telling them they would go into exile? How can that be a comfort to us in a season of waiting?*
- *Reflect on 2 Corinthians 1:20. How are all of God’s promises answered in Christ?*

2. We can have hope because Jesus reigns now and forever.

Isaiah 9:2,6-7:

² *The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
a light has dawned
on those living in the land of darkness.*

⁶ *For a child will be born for us,
a son will be given to us,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
He will be named*

*Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
The dominion will be vast,
and its prosperity will never end.
He will reign on the throne of David
and over his kingdom,
to establish and sustain it
with justice and righteousness from now on and forever.
The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.*

Unpacking Isaiah 9:2,6-7

Another common way believers count down the days until Christmas is an Advent wreath and Advent candles. The earliest use of an Advent wreath appears to be in the 1830s when a German Lutheran pastor, Johann Henrich Wichern, created a wreath out of the wheel off an old cart and filled it with candles, to help the children in the urban mission where he taught count down the days until Christmas. While Wichern's wreath used twenty-four candles, the tradition has changed over the years to commonly include four candles—one for each week of Advent, and a center Christ candle for Christmas day.

The purple “hope” candle, or “prophet’s candle” is the first candle of Advent. It represents the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah and reminds believers to place their hope in Christ to fulfill His promises. In the first week of December, when we light the hope candle, we are reminded of the words of Isaiah the prophet, *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in the land of darkness.”*

How can we define *hope*? We might say hope is confidence that God works in our lives. It is the trust that, even in difficult circumstances, God’s plans are good, and God is always at work. In John 5, when Jesus performed a miracle on the sabbath, he told the teachers of the law, *“My Father is still working, and I am working also”* (John 5:17). God is working out His plans for the world, and for our individual lives, even when we cannot see it. Scripture assures us He is working out His plans for the good of all those who belong to Him (Romans 8:28).

Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah, between 739 and 681 BCE. While his ministry was mostly to the South, he prophesied during the years that the Northern Kingdom fell, and warned Judah that they would face the same consequence if they did not repent. However, his ministry was not without hope. More than any other Old Testament prophet, Isaiah’s words pointed most clearly to the coming Messiah. He assured the nation of Judah that even though they would go into exile for seventy years, God would restore and rebuild them, and through the tribe of Judah and the line of David, God would send the Messiah who would restore and rebuild lives for eternity.

Isaiah repeatedly warned Judah about the impending danger of Assyria and Babylon. However, in chapter 9, the prophet gave a glimpse of how God would restore them by sending the Savior. *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; a light has dawned on those living in*

the land of darkness" (Isaiah 9:2). Christ brings light into the dark places of our lives. As He said in John 8:12, *"I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."* Our hope as believers is not only that God is working out His plans for our lives, but that His presence goes with us, lighting up the darkness as we follow Him. We don't have to face the hard parts of life alone.

Isaiah described the kind of Savior God would send: *"For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace"* (Isaiah 9:6). God's Son would be born as a baby who would go on to give His life for the sins of the world. All powers, including all government, would ultimately rest on His shoulders. This must have been a relief to the tribe of Judah who had faltered under a line of sinful and selfish leaders. Today, we can have hope in Christ's sovereign control over our lives and our nation. Because all authority on heaven and earth belongs to Jesus (Matthew 28:18), we can know the hope and peace of trusting in Him.

Notice how Isaiah described the coming Messiah—*"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."* Jesus rules with wisdom and understanding (1 Corinthians 1:30), He reigns in power at the right hand of God (Hebrews 1:3), He promises us eternal life (John 3:16), and He is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus is our Wonderful Counselor, and the Holy Spirit counsels us (John 14:26). He is both the Son of God, and He is called Mighty God. Isaiah pointed beyond the Messiah's connection to the line of David by attributing to Him the very essence and nature of God.

In verse 7, Isaiah painted a picture of a Messianic rule that would exceed far beyond the Southern Kingdom. The Messiah's dominion would be vast, extending beyond Israel. The coming Messiah would bring prosperity that would never end. As believers today, we understand, perhaps more than the Israelites did, that God's prosperity is more far-reaching than economics. As the apostle John wrote to the elder Gaius, *"Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers."* (3 John 1:2, NKJV) Our souls prosper as we trust Christ to meet our needs—physical, emotional, financial, familial, and spiritual.

Continuing, Isaiah assured the Israelites that the Messiah would indeed come through the line of David. In 2 Samuel 7:8-16, God established the Davidic covenant, assuring David that *"Your throne shall be established forever"* (2 Samuel 7:16). Isaiah reassured the people that though they would be carried into exile for a period, God would fulfill His covenant promise to them and to all people through the Messiah. This kingdom would be both established and upheld with justice and righteousness forever. The Israelites had experienced one bad king after another and were constantly at war with their enemies. It must have encouraged them to know that the coming Messiah would rule, not with an iron fist like some of their previous kings but would lead them justly. Today, we experience all kinds of political unrest and uncertainty as various leaders govern in the interest of gaining or maintaining power or pleasing a party base more than seeking the good of the people. Like Israel, it would benefit us to remember that through Christ

we are citizens of an eternal kingdom that will never end, where justice and righteousness will rule forever.

Finally, Isaiah assured the people that this messianic kingdom would not be established through their own efforts or political posturing. God Himself would accomplish it. *“The zeal of the LORD of armies will accomplish this”* (Isaiah 9:7). Here, Isaiah refers to God as *“the LORD of armies.”* This title is used throughout Isaiah and Jeremiah to point to God’s sovereign reign over all creation, both on earth and in heaven. He is ultimately in charge of all things. As Paul wrote of Christ in Colossians 1:17: *“He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.”*

The kingdom Isaiah pointed to would be eternal, established through the line of David, and governed with justice and righteousness. The inauguration of this kingdom would originate and be sustained through God’s power, and not their own. Finally, it would be the *“zeal of the LORD of armies”* who would accomplish it. This word zeal is more often translated “jealousy” in the Old Testament and frequently refers to a husband’s jealousy for his wife. The prophets, particularly Isaiah and Ezekiel, used it to describe God’s righteous jealousy for His people. He longs to be our highest affection and is jealous for anything that would steal our love and devotion away from Him. His jealousy is not unhealthy or abusive. Just as Judah was serving God from a divided and wayward heart, we too choose other affections over Christ. God’s jealousy, born of His love, longs for us to experience the fullness and intimacy of walking closely with Him. Christ’s holy jealousy, His desire to be first in our hearts and lives, is what led Him to the cross. His love for us is so great that He would not allow sin to come between us. Ultimately, we can have hope because just as God kept His promises to Israel, He keeps His promises to us. Regardless of our circumstances, He has been and will continue to be faithful.

DISCUSS

- *In what ways were the Israelites “walking in darkness”? How can we walk in the light of this Advent season?*
- *Which name for the Jesus (Wonderful counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace) resonates most with you right now? Why?*
- *God kept promises through the prophet Isaiah, fulfilled 700 years later in Jesus. How does knowing God kept His promises to Israel encourage you this Advent season?*

3. We can have hope as we wait on the Lord.

Psalm 130:5-8:

*I wait for the LORD; I wait
and put my hope in his word.
I wait for the Lord*

*more than watchmen for the morning—
more than watchmen for the morning.
Israel, put your hope in the LORD.
For there is faithful love with the LORD,
and with him is redemption in abundance.
And he will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.*

Unpacking Psalm 130:5-8

Advent helps prepare our hearts for Christmas. As we count down the days, we wait with joyful expectation to celebrate Christ's birth. Whether families use Advent calendars to mark off each day leading up to Christmas or use a weekly Advent candle to mark the time, this season of expectation reminds us to hope in Jesus. Not only do we wait for Christmas, but in a larger sense we await a second advent, when Christ will return for His people and we will spend eternity with Him.

The people in Isaiah's day knew something about waiting. Through his ministry Isaiah reminded them that they were waiting for God to fulfill many promises that would not come to fulfillment during their lifetimes. In fact, the messianic messages Isaiah shared were more than 700 years in the making!

Much of Scripture is dedicated to expectant waiting. Noah and his family waited months to exit the ark. Abraham and Sarah waited for a baby. Joseph waited to be exonerated and released from prison. The Hebrews waited four hundred years to be delivered from Egypt, and then they waited forty more years before they inherited the promised land. The Israelites had no idea how long they would await the Messiah, and they certainly could not have predicted the four hundred years of waiting in silence they would experience between the close of Malachi and the birth of Jesus.

Psalm 130 also reflects this theme of expectant hope while waiting. Scholars are unclear of the author of this poem. Some attribute it to David during a difficult season in his life, but many others ascribe it to the period during the Babylonian exile. Either way it is classified as a "psalm of ascent," meaning it was recited or sung together in community as the Israelites traveled up to Jerusalem for festivals or holy days.

The psalm begins, *"Out of the depths I call to you, Lord! Lord, listen to my voice; let your ears be attentive to my cry for help."* While we do not know the identity of the psalmist, we can likely identify with his heartfelt petition for rescue. This person is waiting for God's rescue, and unsure when it will arrive. Rather than despair, the psalmist waits, and watches for God's deliverance.

A watchman on a city wall waits eagerly for dawn when he will be relieved of his duties of guarding the city gates. It's easy to imagine his tired eyes straining for the first rays of sunlight, indicating he can go home and get some sleep. In the same way, the psalmist waits on the Lord. While his circumstances are urgent (v. 1), we have a picture of him straining his eyes,

waiting to see the Lord move on his behalf. It is a picture reminiscent of the scene in 1 Kings 18 when Elijah and his servant watched and prayed for God to send rain:

Elijah went up to the summit of Carmel. He bent down on the ground and put his face between his knees. Then he said to his servant, “Go up and look toward the sea.”

So he went up, looked, and said, “There’s nothing.”

Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.”

On the seventh time, he reported, “There’s a cloud as small as a man’s hand coming up from the sea.” (1 Kings 18:42-44).

While Elijah prayed, his servant strained his eyes, scanning the horizon, waiting for the Lord to rescue them. Likewise, the psalmist wrote that he was waiting for God’s deliverance even more than the watchmen waited for the morning.

How did the psalmist find the faith and courage to wait on God during such difficult circumstances? How did he resist the urge to give into fear and doubt as his cries for help appeared to fall on deaf ears? In verse 5 we find out: *“I wait and put my hope in his word.”* The psalmist knew what many believers have found to be true. When we focus on our circumstances, it is difficult to see anything but the depths of our problems. When we put our hope in our own ability to work things out, we are left exhausted and unsuccessful. However, when we hope in God’s Word, we find the strength to keep going, confident that God is faithful to keep His promises.

Biblical hope is more than simply wishing for a better outcome. It is not turning a blind eye to our pain or pretending that our suffering isn’t happening. Biblical hope focuses on the truth of God’s Word, the assurance of His presence, and the confidence that He is working on our behalf. That is why the psalmist encourages others by saying: *“Israel, put your hope in the LORD. For there is faithful love with the LORD, and with him is redemption in abundance. And he will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.”* God’s love is faithful, He redeems and rescues abundantly, and He forgives our sins. He alone is the One in whom we place our hope.

DISCUSS

- *What is the hardest part for you (or your kids) about waiting for Christmas?*
- *Can you relate to the picture of the watchman on the wall waiting for dawn? Have you ever “strained your eyes” waiting to see God’s deliverance? How did that season ultimately help your faith grow?*
- *This psalm ends by saying God will “redeem Israel from all its iniquities.” How does experiencing God’s forgiveness help you find hope in difficult seasons?*



GOSPEL FOCUS

Advent is the four-week season of anticipation leading to the celebration of Christ's birth. Christians all over the world mark these four Sundays as a time of expectant hope in the arrival of the savior. When Isaiah prophesied about Christ's birth, and the salvation that would be available to all people he said, *"the zeal of the LORD will accomplish this"* (Isaiah 9:7). Salvation is not made available to people through our own effort or perseverance. Salvation is made available because Jesus accomplished it on the cross. When He died for our sins, He made a way for us to experience forgiveness, new life, and eternal hope in Him. When we say "yes" to Jesus, we are trusting Him to accomplish salvation for us.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT

DISCUSS

- *How do today's texts help you think about waiting with expectant hope?*
- *Where do you feel particularly in need of hope this year?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT

How could you intentionally watch for the Lord's activity during this Advent season?

APPLY

Is there a situation in your life that feels unresolved? What would it look like to embrace hope and expectation during this season of waiting?

REFERENCES

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