



## **Lesson 5: The Promise of the Messiah**

### **Lesson Introduction:**

In the previous lesson we discussed why humanity needed a savior. We saw how perfect obedience was never realized nor actually achievable for fallen humanity. People continuously and frequently sinned. When God gave Israel His law in the wilderness, they understood that perfect obedience was demanded. God and Israel also understood that a method of atonement would be necessary for those unable to keep the law. Thus, the sacrificial system was also given alongside the law to give humanity the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. This system, however, was limited in power and temporary in nature. God had a plan for an ultimate, eternal sacrifice for sins. Therefore, through the law, people became painfully aware of their sin and their need for atonement, temporarily through the blood of animals but ultimately through the blood of Jesus.

After receiving deliverance, law, punishment, and redemption in the desert, Israel finds its way into the Promised Land by the hand of God. They establish their nation and are led by rising and falling heroes in the form of judges, prophets, and warriors. Finally, they ask God to establish a monarchy to rule over them. This monarchy become both a source of problems and promises for Israel as God used it to convey the coming of a Messiah.

**Read the Text:** Isaiah 11:1 – 12:3

### **Understanding the Text:**

#### *The Need for a Messiah*

The first king of Israel, Saul, ended his rule in defeat and failure. The second king, David, also made mistakes but consistently sought to be redeemed and faithful. God promised David that his family would become a royal dynasty for Israel and that his throne would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:16). David's son, Solomon, became the third king of Israel. Solomon was used by God to build the first permanent temple in Jerusalem. Though he was wise and wealthy (1 Kings 10:23), he ultimately moved away from God and allowed idolatry to flourish in Israel (1 Kings 11:1-11).

God warned Israel about many sins but God especially prohibited idolatry (Exodus 20:1-6; Leviticus 26:1). God also specifically instructed Israel not to be influenced by their pagan neighbors to worship idols (Numbers 33:50-56; Deuteronomy 7:1-6; 12:1-4; 29:16-18; 1 Samuel 12:21). Solomon did not heed these instructions so God brought judgement upon Israel. When Solomon's son, Rehoboam, tried to ascend to the throne he found that most of the tribes are not willing to follow him (1 Kings 12). Instead, they make Solomon's servant, Jeroboam, their king. Thus, the Kingdom of Israel divided. Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin stayed with Rehoboam and became the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The others broke away and formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel. This Northern Kingdom, however, adopted idolatry early as an alternative to worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:28-33).

Israel and Judah would commit many sins until their fall but idolatry seemed to be a persistent problem. Throughout the Old Testament books of History and Prophecy, Jewish writers and prophets

record this pattern of sin among the people of God (see 2 Kings 21:11-21; Jeremiah 4:1-2). The prophet Hosea had the unfortunate task of marrying a prostitute in order to vividly convey the attitude of God towards idolatry. Idolatry is as offensive to God as adultery is to a spouse. The product of such persistent activity is God declaring over his own children “not loved” and “not my people” as seen the names of Hosea’s children.

Eventually the sin of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (where Hosea prophesied) became so great that God brought severe judgement onto the nation. In 1 Kings 18:11-12 we see that God used the army of Assyria (a gentile kingdom northeast of Israel) to destroy the nation and exile the people. This happened in 722 BC.

The Southern Kingdom Judah continued to exist after the fall of the North. However, their sin persisted and eventually God also used the army of a foreign kingdom to bring severe judgement upon Judah. In 587-586 BC, the Babylonian Kingdom under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar overcame Jerusalem and destroyed the city and temple. Many people were carried into exile including a young man named Daniel. Looking back over the events, Daniel described the fall of Jerusalem like this: “In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure house of his god (Daniel 1:1-2).<sup>1</sup> The idea that God “delivered” his people into the hands of their enemies is a reference to this event being a judgement from God. Nebuchadnezzar was victorious only because God used him for his purpose of disciplining Judah.

Israel was called to represent God on the earth as a kingdom of priests. Unfortunately, they often represented sin against God as a people of idolatry. Though they had the law of God they did not always keep it. There would be seasons of obedience and seasons of disobedience. Two of David’s Psalms illustrated the condition of Israel.

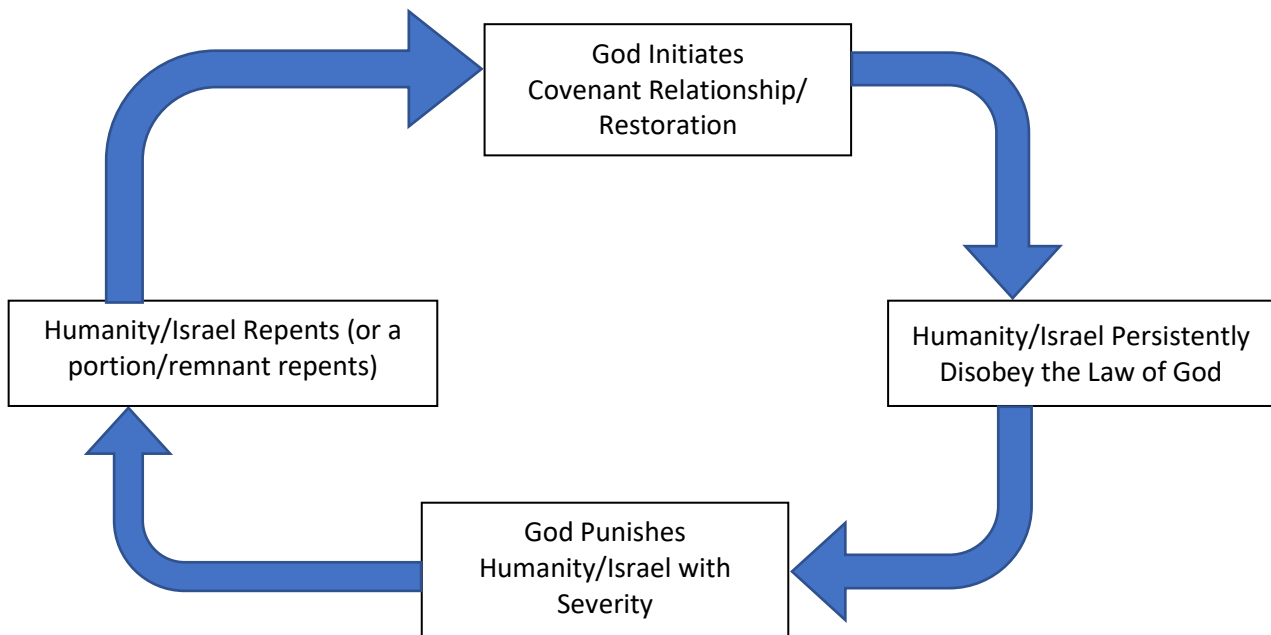
#### **Psalm 119:1-4- The Necessity of Obedience**

Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,  
who walk according to the law of the LORD.  
Blessed are those who keep his statutes  
and seek him with all their heart—  
they do no wrong  
but follow his ways.  
You have laid down precepts  
that are to be fully obeyed.

#### **Psalm 51:1-4– The Sinfulness of Mankind**

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.  
Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.  
For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.  
Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.

In these Psalms, David is communicating what generations will realize after him: that God’s law must be obeyed fully but humanity doesn’t fully obey God’s law. The consequences are severe. The sinful cycle of humanity and Israel can be illustrated as such:



This pattern can be found throughout the Old Testament. Finally, the Old Testament prophets arise to warn the divided kingdoms (and sometimes their Gentile neighbors) about the coming wrath of God and need for repentance. God’s people (and even pagans) periodically repent but persistently disobey. Thus, both kingdoms of Israel and Judah are defeated and exiled. As the above pattern suggests, their near annihilation brings them to repentance. In response, God promises a Messiah who will bring Israel back into right standing with God. This Messiah will come to break the pattern of sin in humanity (we call this deliverance) and bring humanity into right relationship with God (we call this salvation).

#### *The Promise of the Messiah*

As seen above, the Biblical context surrounding many Messianic passages is defeat and exile. The promise of a Messiah is given when the people of God are utterly desolate. They’ve lost their temple, their nation, and many people. God had delivered their ancestors from slavery in a pagan land in order to bring them into a land of promise and blessing on account of His covenant. Now, God had delivered them back into slavery in pagan lands on account of Israel breaking the covenant. Just like Adam and Eve, Israel was chased away from their divinely established land and driven into the harsh terrain beyond. Yet even as God is pouring out wrath he is also making salvific promises:

- As the Northern Kingdom of Israel is falling to the Assyrians, God is speaking to Isaiah about the Messiah who will come to heal (not break) “bruised reeds” and reignite (not snuff out) “smoldering wicks” (Isaiah 42:4). The people of God may be bruised and nearly burned out but God will not abandon his people. An anointed servant (the Messiah) will come to bind up their wounds (Isaiah 30:26) and restore the fire of God among the people (Isaiah 60:1-5). Like a miraculous shoot springing up from dry ground, the Messiah will arise to bring peace and healing even though he himself will be crushed, pierced, afflicted, and slain (Isaiah 53). He will take our sins away and give us his righteousness. This Messiah will come with an anointing to preach good news to the needy, comfort the brokenhearted, release the prisoners, and proclaim the Lord’s favor (Isaiah 61:1-2). As Israel is falling, God is arising to promise salvation through a Messiah (Isaiah 62:11).
- As Jerusalem is falling to Nebuchadnezzar and Judah is being carried away to Babylon, God speaks through Jeremiah about the promised Messiah who will restore the throne of David, rule with justice and righteousness, and bring safety, salvation, and restoration to his people (Jeremiah 23:5-8).

- As the people of God were living in slavery in Babylon, God spoke through Daniel about his plan to send a messiah to establish an everlasting kingdom with Godly authority, power, and glory (Daniel 7:13-14).
- As the remnant of God people began to trickle back into Jerusalem to sift through the rubble of their destroyed Kingdom, God promises through Zechariah to send his Messiah on a donkey (a symbol of peace and humility) to bring righteousness and salvation (Zechariah 9:9).

The promises and coming of the Messiah are meant to help break the pattern of sin in humanity but further display God's pattern of offering gracious mercy and unfailing love to humanity. This was a message of hope to defeated people that God's plan for redemption is not abandoned or revised. God continues to take the initiative to bring salvation to his people. They could not realize redemption through obedience to the law so now they must look for the Messiah to offer the help they need.

### *The Coming of the Messiah*

Messiah and Christ are both referring to same concept. Messiah (from Hebrew) and Christ (from Greek) mean "anointed one."<sup>ii</sup> The Israelites practiced anointing in order to designate people holding special offices in the kingdom like priests or kings. God promised, however, to send an especially anointed person to lead Israel in ways superior to that of any other anointed priest or king. Just as God promised that he would raise up a descendant of Eve in Genesis 3 who would succeed where humanity failed, so in the Messiah God promises to raise up a divinely anointed person to ultimately bring salvation and restoration to God's people.

In Luke 4:18, Jesus directly identifies himself as the promised Messiah by quoting Isaiah 61:1 and ascribing the description of the Messiah to himself. He was the promised man of great anointing. By the time of Jesus, people were still looking for the Messiah but they had put on the Messiah descriptions and expectation which were drawn more from nationalistic zeal than Biblical understanding. Yet Jesus fulfilled the prophecies given to Israel and Judah in times of great distress and condemnation. The Messiah did come and He was Jesus. (We will discuss the significance of this more in a forthcoming lesson).

### **Apply the Text:**

As we move closer to Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday it would be beneficial for us to consider why the Messiah was promised and what he was to accomplish. The Messiah was not sent on a whim or as plan B, C, or D. It was always in the plan of God to send humanity an anointed leader who would not lead an army against enemies of flesh and blood but lead a redeemed people out of bondage to sin and into glorious salvation and redemption. Jesus was not anointed just before he came to the earth but had his special anointing from before the foundations of the earth. God's gracious plan always involved sending Jesus, anointed for salvation.

We, like Israel, should appreciate that even in the mist of our filthy and destruction, God has given us the promise of salvation through the Messiah. Paul says that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Jesus was not only anointed to preach and deliver; he was also anointed to die. This was foreseen by Isaiah but rejected by Peter and the many other disciples. For many followers of Jesus, it seemed incomprehensible that the Messiah would die yet Jesus was clear that this was part of his anointed mission. He would deliver us from death by dying. He would save us by bleeding. He would redeem us by being a sin offering. He would heal us by being wounded. In fulfilling the purpose for which he was anointed, Jesus broke the cycle and power of sin for believers. Now, we do not have to live in a deadly pattern of sin and condemnation. Rather, we can move from glory to glory as we reflect more the person of Christ in our own lives. Though we still make mistakes, we can have victory over the endless loop of sin in which we once lived and now live eternally for God by faith.

Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the anointed one. He was anointed for you, for us. He was anointed to teach, serve, lead, and save but also to die so that we may live.

### **Conclusion:**

As we end this lesson, let us turn our attention back to Psalm 51 and read it now in light of our study of the victorious coming of our Messiah. Let this psalm of lament and hope be our prayer as we continue to prepare ourselves to remember Good Friday and celebrate Easter Sunday.

Psalm 51 (NIV):

Have mercy on me, O God,  
according to your unfailing love;  
according to your great compassion  
blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash away all my iniquity  
and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I know my transgressions,  
and my sin is always before me.

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight;  
so you are right in your verdict  
and justified when you judge.

5 Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

6 Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;  
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

7 Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;  
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;  
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins  
and blot out all my iniquity.

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God,  
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me from your presence  
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
so that sinners will turn back to you.

14 Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
you who are God my Savior,  
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

15 Open my lips, Lord,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.

16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;  
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

17 My sacrifice, O God, is<sup>[b]</sup> a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart  
you, God, will not despise.

18 May it please you to prosper Zion,  
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.

19 Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,  
in burnt offerings offered whole;  
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

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<sup>i</sup> The image we see here of God giving Judah into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar is also found in 2 Kings 14:12-15; 2 Chronicles 36:17-20; Nehemiah 9:26-27; and Jeremiah 12:7. There seemed to be a shared knowledge among the remnant of the fall of Jerusalem that God's hand was at work through the conquest of Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>ii</sup> Michael F. Bird, "Christ" from *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 115-116.