


# Today

Jan/Feb 2018

refresh, refocus, renew

THE WHOLE BIBLE —  
OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS



ALSO: FOLLOWING JESUS: LESSONS FROM LUKE

Friends:

Imagine the Bible, instead of being a thick book with a single cover, as a collection of 66 loose booklets. What would you do with a bunch of little books covering your desk or table? Or, thinking back to ancient times, what if your collection of these books was a basket filled with dozens of scrolls?



In important ways, our Bible is really a library of small books, written and edited by different people over centuries, ranging from historic chronicles, to song lyrics, to legal codes, to epic poetry, to personal letters. If you had all these gathered in a basket, it would be a challenge to keep them in order!

And yet, the Bible is a single document, a single story, a single history. For all its facets, the Bible simply tells the story of God and his people. From beginning to end, it's about how our creator God chose to rescue his wayward creation through a people he calls to himself.

Professor Dean Deppe explores the unity of Scripture with us this January, considering how the Old and New Testaments work together to tell God's story.

Then, in February, Pastor Reggie Smith considers how we can follow Jesus as we enter the season of Lent. Together we'll follow Jesus as he works his way toward the cross in Jerusalem as recounted in the gospel of Luke.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God's Word!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Steven Koster".

—Steven Koster

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**"The Whole Bible—  
Old and New Testaments"**  
**Dean Deppe**



**"Following Jesus:  
Lessons from Luke"**  
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**ReFrame**  
Media

# january

## The Whole Bible—Old and New Testaments

**Dean Deppe**

You may have heard this observation about the Old and New Testaments of the Bible: “The new is in the old concealed; the old is in the new revealed.” This statement, credited to St. Augustine, helpfully suggests that the whole Bible is one amazing revelation from God. It is a single story of how God restores his people. There are glimpses of the New Testament—concerning the good news of Jesus Christ—in the Old Testament, and those glimpses are made clear when we read and understand the New Testament.

This month we will look at several Old Testament Scriptures and see how they are fulfilled in the New Testament. And we will look to Jesus, who is the focus of the entire Bible and the lens through which we learn the true meaning of life.

We hope that these investigations and applications will be both compelling and inspiring. May the reality of your faith be deepened this month!

*Dean Deppe served as the professor of New Testament theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, where he enjoyed teaching the gospels and Greek from 1998 until his retirement in 2017. He has also been a pastor of churches in Michigan, Ohio, and Minnesota. He and his wife have four adult children.*

## THE GOSPEL IN THE GARDEN

*"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."*  
—Genesis 3:15

Guilt, shame, separation, and judgment describe the world we inherited as descendants of Adam and Eve. We cannot stand in the presence of the holy God; our guilt and shame make us impure. Pain in child-bearing, toil involving sweat and tears rather than joy and fulfillment, suffering from all kinds of struggles and temptations—this is our lot.

But worst of all is the enduring conflict between the offspring of the woman and that of the serpent. Because of sin, our human community has been fractured and corrupted.

Even at the dawn of sin, however, God promises a Savior from all our troubles. His good news promising salvation is preached already in the Garden of Eden. To the serpent, God says, "He will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

Through the Savior, the powers of evil will be crushed.

The New Testament fulfills this prophecy. Jesus has paid the price of our sin and has defeated death so that we can have new life. Jesus has freed us from the devil's grip and from our slavery to sin. Through God's grace we can look forward to evil being overthrown. Romans 16:20 even proclaims, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."

Believe the gospel and receive its benefits today!

Almighty God, I need to hear that all guilt, shame, separation, and judgment have been taken out of my life. My heart is filled with praise for your amazing grace in Jesus. Amen.

## CREATION AND THE TRINITY

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*  
—John 1:1

In Genesis, God spoke, and creation came into being.

The New Testament explains that God's very Word was Christ Jesus. Christ brought light into being, not only as a spiritual metaphor for sinful people being able once again to walk with God, but also literal, physical light.

In addition, the wind of God's Spirit moved over creation so that our world increased in beauty, complexity, and maturity. God the Holy Spirit breathed life into our world, creating you and me in the very image of God.

The triune God created a world in which we as human beings can flourish. Christians recognize that the words "Let us make mankind in our image" reflect the three-personed God, the Trinity, working together in creating all things, including us.

And Scripture shows how God continues to sustain us, restore us, and guide us in his love and will. So every time you see majestic mountains or a magnificent sunset or the intricacies of a beautiful flower, lift your eyes to heaven and praise the triune God who created them. And when you need a word from God to dispel doubt, soothe despair, or infuse your life with meaning, turn to the Word of God, Jesus himself, who speaks compassionately to your every need.

Triune God, you are the Lord Almighty above us, the incarnate Jesus who walked among us, and the Spirit of life and power in us that we need every day. Fill us with your divine presence today. Amen.

## FROM THE TRIBE OF JUDAH

*"The scepter will not depart from Judah . . . until he to whom it belongs shall come."*  
—Genesis 49:10

God often works in ways we do not understand. He often does not follow human logic.

On his deathbed the patriarch Jacob predicted that the ruler of his descendants would come from the tribe of Judah, not from that of his oldest son.

The first fulfillment of this prophecy was the crowning of King David of Judah. But later, after Judah was conquered and exiled, no other king from Judah ruled.

Had God's scepter departed? No, the eternal King—Jesus—was coming. He is the only one who can claim the scepter of God's kingdom.

In fact, Jesus fulfils the entire prophecy. Today's Scripture asserts, "He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes." The

early church saw in these verses Jesus' triumphal entry on a donkey and Jesus' offering of his blood on Good Friday.

Throughout history, God often works out his plan behind the scenes. He works the same way today. Sometimes we think God is too slow. But in God's perfect timing we must learn to wait. Sometimes we think our circumstances are too normal for God to care about. But God loves to work in the events of everyday life and in our personal relationships.

Are your eyes open to see God at work? Be ready for divine surprises in your life.

O God, open our eyes to see Jesus working in human history, in the church, in our families, and in our lives. Amen.

## A PICTURE OF THE MESSIAH

*"I see him, but not now. . . . A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. . . ."*  
—Numbers 24:17

The Israelites had traveled through the wilderness for many years. As they approached their promised inheritance in the land of Canaan, Balaam, a charismatic prophet, tried to curse Israel on behalf of the king of Moab. Balaam's job was to make the nations of Moab and Edom more powerful than Israel. But the one true God would not let him speak against Israel.

God has the power to turn negatives into positives. Remember this always!

And who was this star or scepter that would rise? Some say it was King David, who fought and overcame many of Israel's enemies. Others say it referred to later kings over God's people. Still others say that Jesus, the Messiah, is both the star and the scepter.

We can see from this example that people have a multitude of interpretations of Scripture, and sometimes it's hard to figure out exactly what the Bible is saying. But Christians understand the New Testament to be a continuation and fulfillment of the Old Testament.

Matthew 2 tells the story of the star that shone over Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth, and in Matthew 4 Jesus says he is the light that has dawned over the people living in darkness (see also Isaiah 9:2). Jesus is the star. Jesus is the scepter that rules over everything forever—ruling even now!

Star of Bethlehem, Light of the World, Ruler of the Universe, we recognize only you as Messiah, Savior, and Lord. Reign in us today, Lord Jesus. Amen.



## THE SON AND SEED OF DAVID

*"Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever."* —2 Samuel 7:16

Filled with the Spirit, the prophet Nathan announced that David's dynasty would last forever. David's son Solomon would take the throne and continue David's kingdom. But eventually Judah fell and was ruled by others.

It was David's descendant Jesus, the Son of God, however, who would establish the forever kingdom for God's people. But what kind of kingdom did Jesus establish? The Jewish leaders in Jesus' day pictured the Messiah as an earthly king who would defeat the Romans and establish Israel as the political heart of the world. They looked for a judge who would drive out sinners in Israel, purge Jerusalem from Gentile outsiders, and destroy wicked nations. They wanted an earthly king who would make them powerful.

But Jesus did not drive away sinners; he welcomed them.

And his ministry anticipated a mission to include the Gentiles rather than destroying them.

Today we too need to think of Jesus correctly. He is not only the Son of David but also the Son of God. He is God in our flesh. Jesus is not just a wise teacher but our Savior from sin whose words offer eternal life. He is not just an earthly friend but also the awesome King of kings and Lord of lords.

How seriously do you take Jesus today? Have you allowed his life and words to shape your thoughts, values, and lifestyle?

Son of David, Son of God, may we see and acknowledge the eternal glory of your divinity. May we encounter the real Jesus today! Amen.

## THE COMING BRANCH AS A VIOLENT KING

*He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.*  
—Isaiah 11:4

Tragically for Israel, the promise of a king who would reign forever suffered a serious setback after the people were taken into captivity. No king from the line of David reigned in Jerusalem again. But God's prophet said a branch would grow from this stump and rule justly over the earth. Christians see that this branch is Jesus.

Descriptions of this branch, though, picture the Messiah doing violent warfare. But this imagery about slaying the wicked with the breath of his mouth hardly fit Jesus' career. Why did Jesus seem to adjust the expectations of the Messiah?

It is important that we know the difference between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Jesus is against violence because the kingdom is no longer represented by a physical country or piece of land. The

enemy is no longer represented by nations who threaten God's people, but by the spiritual forces of evil at work in individuals and in corrupt systems. So Jesus says, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45).

To follow the Messiah today means we must adjust our expectations. Some day Jesus will judge us all, but he is not the warrior who takes our side in every earthly battle we imagine. Jesus is the Prince of Peace who expects us to refuse the path of violence and to wage peace so that our enemies will see his love.

Jesus, may your peaceable kingdom fill our thoughts and relationships and saturate the world. Amen.

## A ROD OF IRON

*"You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery."*  
—Psalm 2:9

Psalm 2 pictures a coming king—the Messiah—who uses violence and destruction to establish his kingdom. Interestingly, the Messiah's use of the rod of iron is always pictured as a future event in the New Testament. It is only at the second coming of Jesus that he strikes the nations with a sharp sword and rules them with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15).

The first coming of Christ as a baby in Bethlehem and his second coming at the end of time call us to know the Messiah as both the crucified one and the triumphant King. The community of God's people at the time of Jesus never expected two comings of the Messiah. But the New Testament reveals what is concealed.

Because Christ in his first coming suffered and endured abuse, Christians must be ready to take

up their cross with Jesus. The early church indeed faced suffering from the rulers of their day. The apostles, for example, were jailed and beaten for preaching about Jesus, but they also stood up to the religious rulers, confessing Jesus as the only Savior (Acts 4-5). Looking ahead and knowing that Christ in his second coming will reign triumphantly, we can overcome any difficult circumstance and experience Jesus' resurrected glory.

I hope you are experiencing both the cross and the resurrection in your Christian life.

God, we praise you that the crucified Christ is also the triumphant King of kings. Lord, may the cross and the crown be a double reality in our lives, and may we faithfully tell others about you. Amen.

## CLAIMING TO BE THE MESSIAH

*"Some time ago Theudas appeared. . . . After him Judas of Galilee . . . led a band of people in revolt."*  
—Acts 5:36-37

The Bible mentions various leaders who claimed to be the Messiah. Our verses for today describe a couple of them. Some wanted to start a political revolution and win freedom from Caesar and the Romans. Speaking about revolts like these as well as a time of great distress before his second coming, Jesus himself warned, "False messiahs and false prophets will appear," and some of them will try to deceive many with "signs and wonders" (Mark 13:22).

But only Jesus is the true Messiah. He fulfilled the ages-old promises of the Old Testament. Like Moses leading Israel during the exodus, Jesus left Egypt (Matthew 2:19-20), sustained the testing of the wilderness (4:1-11), taught his listeners new commandments (5:21-48), calmed the chaos of the water so that his disciples could safely

reach the other side (8:23-27), fed his followers with new manna (14:15-21), and supplied his people with promised rest (11:28). He also promised eternal security for those who love him (28:20).

Those same blessings and more are available for you and me. We are delivered from our slavery to sin. No temptation can overwhelm us. Jesus travels with us through trying times, gives us daily nourishment, shows us how to live abundant lives, and provides rest in the midst of our busyness.

Are you experiencing these gifts of love and grace?

Lord, thank you for your presence and your gracious love and care, both now and forever. Amen.

## LONG AGO AND NOW

*In the past God spoke . . . through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things.* —Hebrews 1:1-2

The expectations about a Messiah changed throughout Israel's history. At first the anointed one was seen as a king who descended from David and ruled over Israel.

Then God's people longed for an ideal kingly Messiah, also of David's line, who would rule justly and establish a meaningful time of peace. This king would be a wonderful counselor and the true representative of almighty God.

Later, after the release from exile, the Medo-Persian rulers would not allow Zerubbabel, the prince descended from David, to be king. Instead they chose the high priest Joshua to be Israel's leader. So then the concept of two anointed ones became the norm.

Another stage began after the Old Testament Scriptures were

complete. When Rome took over Palestine, the people mistakenly began to expect the messiah-king to militarily defeat their Roman oppressors.

Into this situation Jesus of Nazareth arrived. And he fulfilled all the expectations from the Old Testament. Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament law, was the true heir of David, became the suffering servant of Isaiah 42-53, and proved to be our chief prophet, only high priest, and eternal king.

Jesus is all we need. Let him speak to you today.

Messiah, King of kings and Lord of lords, speak to us today so that we can follow you and speak to others, in your name. Amen.

## SOMEONE GREATER THAN WE CAN IMAGINE

*The LORD says to my lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."*  
—Psalm 110:1

In New Testament times, Psalm 110 was understood as spoken by David. Jesus used this assumption to show that the Messiah at God's right hand is superior to David and is even the Lord of David (see Mark 12:35-37).

The New Testament explains that Jesus is superior to every hero in Israel. Jesus is not like any Israelite high priest but is more like Melchizedek, who was both king and priest, and is described in Hebrews 7:3 as being "without beginning of days or end of life." Whereas Adam was made from dust, Jesus is from heaven. "Before Abraham was born, I am!" said Jesus (John 8:58). The gospels describe Jesus as greater than David, Solomon, and Jonah; greater than the temple; and Lord of the Sabbath.

Jesus offers us much more than we can think or imagine. Not

only is he our example and teacher; he is our creator God in our flesh. Not only does he forgive our sins; he also buries them in the deepest sea, remembering them no more. Not only does Jesus help us fight temptation; we also are crucified with him and dead to temptation's power. Not only are we going to heaven; we are also already seated in the heavenly realms with Christ (Ephesians 2:6). Because of his unconditional love, we no longer have to carry our guilt. Because Jesus sits at God's right hand, every enemy of his and ours is under his feet. Praise Jesus for his countless blessings!

Lord Jesus, we praise you for being Lord of everything. Guide and comfort and sustain us today, we pray. Amen.

## O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

*"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old. . . ." —Micah 5:2*

Many Old Testament passages point ahead to Jesus. We need to see that Jesus is the one "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

The early church pointed to Isaiah 1:3 as evidence for Jesus' birth among animals: "The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." Sadly, though animals witnessed Jesus' birth and saw him lying in their manger (Luke 2:7), Israel's leaders remained blind.

The early church also saw the coming of the Magi predicted in Isaiah 60: "Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn . . . camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD." Again Jerusalem missed it.

Bethlehem was small, but God often uses the little things of life to work out his plans. A great ruler from tiny Bethlehem was promised in Micah 5:2. Matthew 2:6 emphasizes Bethlehem's importance, declaring, "You, Bethlehem . . . are *by no means* least among the rulers of Judah."

It is life-changing to realize that God is involved in the minute details of our lives. So be attentive. Where do you see God working in your everyday life?

Thank you, God, for your work even in the everyday details of our lives. May we praise our Savior from Bethlehem in all we do! Amen.

## BORN OF A VIRGIN

*"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."*  
—Isaiah 7:14

In the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, the Assyrians destroyed Samaria and took the northern tribes of Israel captive. Later, they were at the gates of Jerusalem. In mockery the Assyrian field commander derided the people: "Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?" (2 Kings 18:33). All the people of Jerusalem were terrified. But Isaiah had prophesied earlier, "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." In other words, the people needed to trust that God was with them—that's what *Immanuel* means.

Jesus' followers today see the first coming of Jesus in this prophesy. Jesus was both born of a virgin and is "God with us," *Immanuel*. God's angel delivered Israel from the Assyrians

(2 Kings 19:35-36), and Jesus delivers us from the tyranny of the devil, from the power of our sinful nature, and from the temptations of our fallen world.

The fact that Jesus was born to Mary, a virgin, reveals amazing things about the Lord. Jesus is the Son of God and has the same eternal nature as God. Immanuel is with us; we have nothing to fear. Immanuel is with us—and since God is for us, who can stand against us? Immanuel is with us; in all things we are more than conquerors through Christ, who loves us (Romans 8:31-37).

Lord, your birth fulfills the prophecy; you control history. Take control of my life today, O Immanuel. Thank you. Amen.



## OUT OF EGYPT

*"Out of Egypt I called my son."*

—Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15

The book of Exodus tells of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, in which God, through Moses, led his people out of slavery. In the Old Testament this event was remembered each year in the celebration of the Passover, and in Christianity it is recalled in the same Passover week leading up to Good Friday and Easter. The New Testament shows that Jesus himself became the final Passover sacrifice when he laid down his life to free God's people from their slavery to sin.

Matthew notes the infant Jesus' flight to Egypt to point out that God's Messiah not only would be called out of Egypt, but also would free his people from captivity once and for all.

We remember Egypt as a place of slavery. And in paying the price for our sin, Jesus set us free from our slavery to sin—

whether that be addiction to alcohol or drugs, negative self-talk, a life of constant searching, or plaguing doubts that keep us from experiencing God's love. Jesus sets us free from the tyrannies of sin, whether they be evil inclinations like arrogance, character flaws like deceit, moral failures like sexual infidelities, or selfish actions like greed.

We live no longer as slaves of our sin. Jesus brings us to new life in which we are restored to God and to each other. Welcome to new life in the presence of God because of Jesus!

Lord and God, you have taken us out of Egypt. Now remove from us any remnants of our sinful ways. In Jesus, Amen.

## JESUS, THE SERVANT SAVIOR

*"You are my Son. . . ."*

—Psalm 2:7

*"Here is my servant . . . my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him."*

—Isaiah 42:1

When Jesus was baptized, a voice thundered from heaven: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." And the Spirit descended like a dove and alighted on Jesus.

What was the significance of all this? This event combined insights from two Old Testament passages. "You are my Son" is from Psalm 2, and the references to God's delight and the Spirit of God are from Isaiah 42:1. Isaiah 42 also begins a series of suffering servant passages (see Isaiah 42-53). God was announcing that his Messiah (called *Christ* in Greek) was to be a suffering-servant Savior.

This message was revolutionary because the people expected a military messiah who would set up a political kingdom. But God showed by this voice from heaven that his intention all

along was that the Christ would suffer and die for his people. So in the wilderness temptations that followed, Jesus refused to be a political or self-serving messiah.

The apostle Paul served the true Messiah, confessing, "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Philippians 3:10).

Jesus calls us all to take up our crosses and follow him (see Matthew 16:24-25). Let's be willing to follow our suffering-servant King!

Jesus Messiah, help us to follow you faithfully, being willing to suffer for your sake, that others may come to know you. Amen.

## JESUS, THE KINGDOM MESSENGER

*"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

—Luke 4:21

Isaiah 61 presents a vision of life restored in the kingdom of God. But those promises did not fully take shape until Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his ministry, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Jesus' message was a declaration of grace and forgiveness. "The year of the Lord's favor"—also known as the Year of Jubilee—was an announcement of "liberty throughout the land" (Leviticus 25:10). Those who had sold away their family land or given themselves in slavery because they were poor would have their inheritance returned to them. The oppressed, the prisoners, and slaves to wealth would all experience God's abundant grace.

Do you ever feel left out of God's plan, removed from the Spirit's presence, or alienated from the abundant grace of

Jesus? This first sermon of Jesus is a divine message for you. Are you discouraged by tragedies in your life? Are you a prisoner to depression or guilt? Are you enslaved to excess appetites, or to your own pride and financial power? Jubilee liberty and freedom are yours in Jesus.

The kingdom of God includes forgiveness of sins, release from captivity, and jubilee joy. Forgive as you have been forgiven, and enjoy the life of grace.

The Year of Jubilee, the time of God's favor, has arrived in Jesus. Thank you, Lord, that our lives can be filled with grace, abundant joy, freedom, and liberty because Jesus' powerful message is a word for today. Amen.

## JESUS PREACHES IN PARABLES

*I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old—things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us.*  
—Psalm 78:2-3

I watch in wonder as my wife picks a children's book off the shelf and wows our granddaughters with its story. I listen with admiration to the adventures of my brother, who starts children's libraries in remote places where schools do not have books, paper, or pencils. Stories are powerful, life-changing, and memorable. That's why Jesus taught in parables.

Sometimes Jesus took stories from the Old Testament, changed a few details, and delivered them with a new thrust to his audience. For example, in Ezekiel 31 and Daniel 4 we find stories about kingdoms portrayed as a tree that grows larger than any other, providing food and shelter for all the earth's creatures. Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed," which starts out small but grows big and

wide, providing shelter like a tree for the birds of the air. This is a picture of how God's good news can spread everywhere and provide refuge for all, making a difference for the entire world.

Jesus' parables present pictures about life in God's kingdom. As parents, grandparents, and mentors, we can retell the Bible's stories to others—young and old—so that they too may grow to "put their trust in God" (Psalm 78:7). We can also tell about God's work in our own lives. Imagine—God can speak even through us!

Lord, guide us to share the good news of your Word through all kinds of stories of your faithfulness, to help others grow in you. Amen.

## JESUS, THE MIRACLE WORKER

*Your God will come. . . . Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.* —Isaiah 35:4-6

It was not always easy to see that Jesus was the Messiah. Even John the Baptist needed confirmation that Jesus was the promised one.

To assure John's disciples, Jesus quoted phrases from Isaiah 35, emphasizing that he clearly showed the mighty signs of God's coming kingdom, and that he had come as the Savior.

Jesus fulfilled many of the miracles of the Old Testament. He fed multitudes of people just as God provided manna to the Israelites in the wilderness (see Exodus 16; Mark 6:30-44; 8:1-9). Jesus healed and even raised people from the dead, as the prophets Elijah and Elisha had done (see 1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4; Luke 8:49-56; John 11). Jesus' greatest act of healing took place at the cross, when he paid the price for our sins (Hebrews 9:28; 10:11-14);

"he took up our pain and bore our suffering" (Isaiah 53:4).

Jesus is still among us to open our eyes and unstop our ears so that we can leap in gratitude and shout for joy. God still does miracles today. We just need to open our eyes to the wonder of creation. We need to unstop our ears to the wonderful testimonies of believers about God's healing. We need to leap for joy that our sins are forgiven and shout this good news for others to hear.

Mighty healer, awesome miracle working Jesus, both your life and your death brought transforming power to us. Continue to pour out your healing for our bodies, souls, and spirits. Amen.

## JESUS, THE COMING KING

*See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. . . . He will proclaim peace to the nations.*  
—Zechariah 9:9-10

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his visit to the temple must have brought vivid reminders to the people who witnessed these events. Historical sources tell us that in a famous parade Alexander the Great was welcomed into Jerusalem with pomp and circumstance. Later Judas Maccabeus attempted to show that he was both king and priest by arriving amid singing and merrymaking with palm branches, followed by a sacrifice in the temple. Jesus, however, was demonstrating that he is our only High Priest and eternal King.

Jesus did not enter Jerusalem on a war horse but on a donkey, a lowly animal of peace that was also known as a princely mount. What kind of king was Jesus? On Palm Sunday, when we quote Zechariah 9 to cele-

brate this day, we often include only verse 9. Jesus is a righteous and victorious king. But verse 10 speaks about removing weapons of war and proclaiming peace to the nations.

So come into the temple of our heart, Jesus. Come into our homes and marriages; come into our relationships; enter our cities and nations and their politics and economic life. Speak a message of peace that we can repeat again and again as individuals, as your church, as the people of your kingdom. Hosanna in the highest!

Lord Jesus, you have all authority in heaven and on earth. May we all hear your message of peace—and may we act with righteousness and justice as you call us to. Amen.

## A DYING AND RISING CHRIST

*Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.*

—1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Two confused disciples were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were struggling with how their long-awaited Messiah could have died by the hands of the Romans instead of powerfully displaying his might over Israel's enemies. Meanwhile the risen Jesus came up and walked with them unrecognized, explaining to them from the Old Testament how God always intended his Messiah to suffer and die for the sake of his people.

When we think of Jesus, *we know* he was the Christ who was sent to die and rise again. But that wasn't what Jesus' earliest followers expected.

Jesus' identity was hidden from the two disciples walking to Emmaus that day. But their eyes, along with those of the early Christian community, were soon opened to see

that all of the events of Jesus' life, from his birth to his resurrection, were described in the Hebrew Scriptures all along.

God's actions in our lives are often hidden as well. The Lord is always at work behind the scenes of everyday life. Look again, and ask Jesus to help you see him where you might not expect him. Jesus is with you in your struggles. He is trying to get your attention in your relationships. In your failures Jesus is teaching; in your conflicts Jesus is deepening your character; and in your successes Jesus is applauding. May Jesus be revealed in your life today!

Lord, give us the faith and discernment that we need in order to see your presence and your work in our lives. Amen.

## THE SUFFERING RIGHTEOUS ONE

*Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").*

—Mark 15:34

The psalmist pours forth the anguish of his heart: "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint." The psalmist even accuses God: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? . . . I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest."

In his complaint the psalmist is a righteous sufferer. We can also see Jesus in these descriptions of the suffering righteous one. On the cross, God's beloved Son freely and honestly poured out the agony and distress of his heart. Jesus used the exact words of Psalm 22. Later on the cross he also quoted Psalm 31:5: "Into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

In Jesus, God makes each of us righteous, and like the psalmist we can pour out our anguish to our Father in heaven. As human beings, we often hold

in our negative feelings, which can make us bitter in our heart and soul. But God corrects our thinking and assures us that we can bring our struggles and disappointments to him.

God welcomes our complaints. He already knows how we are feeling. The Almighty can handle them.

So let go of your struggles and anxieties; share your fears with Jesus. He understands.

Lord and Savior, you did not try to hide your agony from the Father. When we feel rejected and forsaken, help us to remember that you took on these challenges for our sake and for our salvation. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.



## THE MESSIAH ENDURED EVIL FOR US

*One of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar . . . and offered it to Jesus to drink.*  
—Matthew 27:48

Psalm 69 contains a wealth of descriptions that Jesus himself experienced. For example, “Zeal for your house consumes me” describes Jesus’ concern for the temple (John 2:13-17). Similarly the references about scorn and mockery and vinegar to drink relate closely to Jesus’ experience on the cross. This is just a small sampling of the many sufferings Jesus endured while he lived and taught among us on this earth. These and other verses weave a descriptive mosaic portraying the events of Jesus’ life.

In some ways we may feel that our experiences in life are similar to the descriptions here. We call out to God for help, and in specific struggles it can be difficult to see God’s providence. We can see God working best when we look back over the big picture of our life.

Because of Jesus, though, we can be assured that there is no human experience, no matter how negative or gruesome, that Jesus did not encounter. Remember that his cross, the instrument of excruciating capital punishment, has become the emblem of Christianity.

From Jesus’ sufferings we learn that there is no human struggle that we have to undergo alone. Jesus promises to be with us always, whatever happens. He walks alongside us every step of the way.

We confess, Lord Jesus, that when negative events occur in our lives, we can feel far away from you. Please assure us of your presence and show yourself in every event of our lives. In your name we pray. Amen.

## THE REJECTED STONE BECOMES PRECIOUS

*"Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.' Salvation is found in no one else." —Acts 4:11-12*

Psalm 118 was the final prayer song in the liturgy of the Passover feast, which celebrated Israel's freedom from slavery. Israel was the stone that the builders of civilization had rejected, but God made his people the cornerstone of his plan for the world.

The apostles referred to Jesus also as the stone that was rejected, and he is now the all-important cornerstone of God's kingdom. Jesus is the Messiah who rode into Jerusalem as Israel's king. Though rejected by the Jews, he became the foundation stone for a new temple. And he will come again as the heavenly sovereign Judge. He ultimately is the one who says, "I will not die but live."

Jesus the Messiah rises from the depths to the heights, and in the process he takes us along with him. The rejected stone

becomes the new cornerstone, and we become living stones essential to God's new building (1 Peter 2:5). The word for "cornerstone" can also be interpreted as "capstone," indicating that Jesus becomes the crowning glory of the building that is the temple or the kingdom of God, and we will share in his glory (Romans 8:17).

No longer rejected but precious; no longer worthless but important—that's our new identity in Christ.

Thank you, Jesus, for turning human plans upside down and making a new reality through your death and resurrection. Enliven your church today so that we are a truly faithful house built on your solid foundation. Amen.

## JESUS, THE SUFFERING SERVANT

*He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities.*  
—Isaiah 53:5

Did God's promised Messiah really have to die? Christians today point to Isaiah 53 as the primary witness to the suffering-servant Messiah, who withstood immeasurable suffering and grief on our behalf.

When we understand Isaiah 53 rightly, we see the truth that Christ suffered for us. We also learn how to respond when we are reviled as Jesus was. In 1 Peter 2:24 we read, "He himself bore our sins' in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; 'by his wounds you have been healed.'"

In addition, this section in Isaiah reveals the inclusion of people from all nations into the family of God, and it mentions the Messiah's death and burial with sinners. What a powerful series of fulfillments in this amazing passage!

But why would we need a Messiah who would die? Jesus' contemporaries considered Rome their chief enemy, but God knew that sin and death were the real enemies from which we all needed deliverance, through Jesus' death and resurrection.

Do you believe that Jesus suffered and died for you? Believe, and be forever grateful that his suffering and death took our place so that we might live forever with God.

Thank you, Lord, for your divine plan that the Messiah would die for our sins. Through Christ's death our otherwise invincible enemies of sin and death have been conquered. The sting of death is removed. Eternal life is ours. In Jesus, Amen.

## JESUS, THE LIVING MESSIAH

*You will not abandon me to the realm of the dead. . . . You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*  
—Psalm 16:10-11

The wind of the Spirit howled on Pentecost. The fire of the Spirit burned brightly for everyone to see. People from every nation heard the wonders of God in their own languages. Why was God doing all this? He wanted to convince Israel that Jesus “was handed over to [them] by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge.”

The Messiah had to die, but he did not stay buried in a tomb; he was resurrected from the dead and exalted to the Father’s right hand. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter explained, “God raised [Jesus] . . . freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.”

In our scientific age many insist that life after death is just a fairy tale from an ignorant time. But the multitude of witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection and the

powerful effects that millions of people have credited to the living Jesus reveal the truth of the resurrection. If you believe, God will not abandon you to “the realm of the dead.”

When people heard Peter’s message at Pentecost, they repented and asked the Spirit of Jesus to live in them. This is the appropriate response for everyone. Repent! Leave the concerns, vices, and failings of your old life behind. Receive the Spirit! Jesus offers you his resurrection power, his new mindset, and his daily presence as a guarantee of eternal life!

Lord, I believe in the resurrection of the dead. Through your Spirit fill me with your new life today. Amen.

## JESUS FULFILLS ALL OF SCRIPTURE

*"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms."* —Luke 24:44

For 21st-century people today the fulfillment of Old Testament texts in the New Testament may seem a bit farfetched. Yes, there are some similarities in the references to 30 pieces of silver in Zechariah 11 and Matthew 27. But there are also many differences. In the New Testament it is Judas and not the shepherd who throws thirty pieces of silver into the temple. So, does Zechariah really point to Jesus in this passage?

As we read these passages today, we certainly can note the similarities in them. And we know that the entire Bible has been inspired by God (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17) and written for us to learn, to be blessed, and to believe.

What is unique about Jesus is that he fulfills every type of literature in the Old Testament. Jesus is greater than Moses,

Joshua, David, and Elijah in the historical literature. Jesus fulfills the predictions of the prophets. Jesus is clearly visible in both the messianic kingly psalms as well as the suffering-servant songs.

Wherever we are reading in the Old Testament, we can see that it points forward to the One who has provided salvation for us. The whole of Scripture is one story. Jesus is all we need. So let that be our confession today: "Jesus is all we need."

Father, we confess that from time to time we question your Word, and we wonder about your promises. Reassure us today that Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings, the promised Messiah. And may we confess, "Jesus is all we need." Amen.

## JESUS BECAME A CURSE FOR US

*Anyone who is hung on a pole is under God's curse.*

—Deuteronomy 21:23

Taking this Old Testament Scripture literally seems to imply that Jesus is cursed by God because he was crucified on a pole (also translated as “tree”).

However, Paul offers a clarifying interpretation in Galatians 3:13: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’” Here Paul teaches us to read the Old Testament through the lens of Jesus’ cross and resurrection. In his death, Jesus represents every human being. He took the curse of God on himself so that every believer would be blessed rather than cursed. Then Paul explains further, “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.” The blessing given to Abraham— that he was credited

with righteousness for believing God’s promises—is now for people of all nations (the Gentiles). We can be similarly blessed by having faith in Christ.

Jesus became a curse for us all so that all our sins could be forgiven. Jesus experienced hell and separation from God so that we would never be separated from God. Jesus became a curse so that we could be redeemed from the curse of the law.

What a tremendous blessing for all who believe in Jesus as their Savior from sin. Do you believe in him?

Thank you, Jesus, for taking the curse of the law upon yourself, redeeming us from our slavery to sin. You have set us free and given us new life! Amen.

## JESUS, THE SEED OF ABRAHAM, AND US

*The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land."*  
—Genesis 12:7

Almighty God appeared to Abram (before renaming him Abraham) and spoke to him about his future seed (descendants). And in the New Testament Paul explains that all believers through Christ are Abraham's seed, and therefore are God's children and heirs. The old covenant with Abraham is fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

So what does this mean for us? Paul exclaims, "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." All the promises that God made to Abraham are fulfilled by Jesus and given to us.

We are first of all heirs of a promised land. In the New Testament this is not physical property but a meaningful life filled with spiritual blessings and intimacy with God.

Second, the promise includes a multitude of descendants

(Genesis 13:16). God promises us the community of his kingdom family to share in life's journey.

Third, the promise entails a life of faith rather than being enslaved to the law. Believers are set free from every weight that holds them back from their full potential.

Fourth, all barriers between people have been knocked over by Jesus. We are invited to live in a community that has no divisions of nationality, social status, or gender roles. In Christ we are called to bring God's blessing to the world. In what ways can you do that today?

Lord, thank you for every promise and blessing that is ours in Christ. Help us to bless others in Jesus' name. Amen.

## WHO IS THE SON OF MAN?

*What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor.* —Psalm 8:4-5

Our verses for today talk about “human beings,” but the Hebrew word there in Psalm 8 can also mean “son of man.” So who is this passage talking about?

Hebrews 2:8 states, “At present we do not see everything subject to *them*,” applying the passage to all human beings. But other Bible versions have translated this phrase as “subject to *him*.” Interestingly, both statements are true, but one translation cannot capture both truths. Human beings can be crowned with glory and honor only through Christ’s victory over death, disease, the devil, and dominion over all nations.

Jesus often referred to himself as the Son of Man (Mark 14:62). And he is often described as the human son of man, the suffering son of man, and the exalted heavenly Son of Man. Jesus ful-

fills Psalm 8 and becomes our representative.

So along with Jesus as the human son of man we can take our place as the crown of creation. We have authority in this world to reshape politics, economics, art, sports, science, medicine, and religion according to God’s wisdom and righteousness. In addition, we have the privilege of inviting people into God’s kingdom to begin new life in Christ today, anticipating the hope of the world to come.

We praise you, Jesus, that all things in heaven and earth are under your feet. May we join you by living up to our calling as the crown of creation here on the earth today. Amen.



**EVERY KNEE WILL BOW**

*"I am God, and there is no other. . . . Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear."* —Isaiah 45:22-23

The beautiful words of Philippians 2 draw from Isaiah 45 to emphasize the glory and honor given to Jesus, our risen and ascended Savior. To him every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess he is Lord.

The term "Lord" was applied to God in the Old Testament, and Christians now apply this title to Jesus as well, recognizing his exaltation and rule in heaven. The apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8:6, "For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live." God the Father and Jesus Christ are one, along with the Holy Spirit. God and Jesus must be confessed in the same sentence, because Jesus is God.

Peter calls Jesus "our God and Savior" (2 Peter 1:1), and Hebrews 1:3 says he is "the exact representation of [God's] being."

So, today and every day we should take on the mindset of Jesus Christ: "Who, being in very nature God . . . made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant." Today is the day to kneel before Jesus and take on his humility so that we can serve others. Today our plans should align with his will, having our thoughts, words, and deeds cleansed from selfishness and directed by Jesus, our Lord and Savior, "to the glory of God the Father."

Lord Jesus, Savior, Messiah, Word of God, exalted Son of God and King, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, we praise your holy name! Amen.

## JESUS IN THE PSALMS—AND LONG BEFORE

*"Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God."* —Hebrews 10:7 (Psalm 40:6-8)

New Testament writers often point out that Jesus the Messiah and Savior was already speaking in the psalms of Israel before he was born as a human being. As our reading today in Hebrews shows, Christ is the speaker in Psalm 40. As we have noted earlier this month, Jesus is also featured in Psalms 22, 69, 110, and others.

In fact, Jesus as God has been present since before the beginning of time. Colossians 1:16-17 describes his supremacy this way: "In him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth . . . all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

This month we have witnessed how the Old Testament points forward in many ways to the revelation of Jesus as Messiah, Savior, and Lord in the New

Testament. Jesus as God himself was even present at creation and spoke in many ways throughout the Old Testament.

We frequently make Jesus too small, emphasizing his being human more than his being God. In your everyday life, do you treat Jesus as all powerful, everywhere present, and all knowing? When we live our life in the presence of this Savior and King, every moment takes on eternal significance.

Jesus is almighty, alive, and at work over all things today. Do you believe and live by this?

Lord Jesus, your words cross the centuries, your acts are from beginning to end. May every moment of my life be lived in your eternal presence! In your all-powerful name, Amen.

## RECOGNIZING THE TRUE MESSIAH

*He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*  
—Isaiah 9:6

No one except Jesus can fill the description in this passage. He is the only Savior of the world.

So today, if you know Jesus as your Lord and Savior, please pray for people who don't yet know him. Pray that they might recognize him as the Messiah and Savior who is the ruler over all and the Lord of life and peace. Hopefully through these devotions you have developed a concern and compassion for people who have difficulty seeing Jesus in the Old Testament. Be ready to show others how Christians interpret Scripture. Pray that people can overcome intellectual and cultural doubts. Pray that they may realize Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation.

Pray for people who have a limited view of Jesus. Many see him as only an enlightened wisdom teacher and a prophetic human being who struggled

against the evil forces of society. But Jesus rose from the dead, and all who believe in him will also be raised when he comes again.

Jesus is uniquely God and uniquely human. He is the one who walked this earth as a human being and as eternal God at the same time.

Let Jesus be your caring Counselor who speaks to your doubts! Let him be your sufficient Father who cares for your every need! Honor him as the Mighty God who rules over all! See him as the Prince of Peace in this world!

Lord Jesus, may each day of our lives be filled with meaning because we are walking with you, our eternal God! Amen.



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