

LESSON ONE

TITLE Advent – Hope

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 2:2-4

MEMORY VERSE

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

MAIN IDEA OF TEXT

Nations come and go but our hope is in the kingdom that God will establish in Zion.

BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.

1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

TEACHER TIP

Start your lesson by telling a story that relates to the main idea of the lesson to grab the attention of your participants. In this section, we have provided you with two options, but feel free to develop your own.

OPTION 1: SCENE FROM RUDY

The 1993 film *Rudy* tells the story of Daniel “Rudy” Ruettinger, a young football player who is lacking in both size and talent. With all he lacks he makes up for with determination and hope to fulfill his lifelong dream – to play football for Notre Dame. His family and friends try to talk Rudy out of his “pipe dream” but he insists that one day he will march on to the football field, wearing Notre Dame blue and gold.

After many failed attempts Rudy is finally accepted into Notre Dame but the road to playing in an actual game only gets harder. His role on the team is nothing more than a tackling dummy at practices but Rudy inspires his teammates and coaches with his unmatched effort and grit.

Rudy’s teammates campaign for him with the team’s head coach to let Rudy dress for his final college football game. Let’s take a look at the final scene of this inspiring true story.

(Play clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zl63g64kDgY>)

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1. What was Rudy setting his mind towards? How did he handle difficulties and discouragement?*
- 2. How can hope encourage us to persevere through difficulties and discouragement in pursuit of something?*
- 3. Consider a trial or hardship when you received hope from God. How did he give you hope and what difference did it make for you?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: Rudy withstood numerous setbacks and difficulties to press on towards his goal. Difficulties and discouragements will come but hope sustains a person. Hope is a major part of advent as we remember the hope that was fulfilled in Christ’s coming and look forward in hope to his return.

Each week for Advent this year we’re going to focus on passages from Isaiah and explore the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love found within them.

OPTION 2: “O HOLY NIGHT”

One of the most revered hymns during Advent season is “O Holy Night,” a hymn brought to us from France in the 1800s. The writer, Placide Cappeau, reflected on the birth of Jesus and the light he brought into the

world as he wrote the hymn's lyrics.

Let's listen to this song and pay special attention to the hope present in the song.

(Play clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIJOfiDOlkc>)

O Holy Night
The stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and e'er pining
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn

Fall on your knees O hear the angels voices.
O night divine O night when Christ was born
O night divine, O night, O night divine.

POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *Look back at the beginning of the hymn. What imagery does the hymn writer use to stir our emotions?*
2. *How does the hymn use contrast to magnify the thrill of hope?*
3. *Where in your life do you need hope right now?*

Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text: Before Jesus' birth the Israelites had waited through 400 years of God's silence and were living under Roman occupation. There seemed little reason to hope that God's promises would be fulfilled until one holy night in Bethlehem the Savior of the world was born. With his arrival came hope for all humanity. Hope that God had not forgotten his people. Hope that his promises would be fulfilled through this child. Hope that the Messiah had come to establish God's kingdom and rule the nations.

Many consider the Book of Isaiah to be a 5th gospel because it is filled with messianic prophecies related to Jesus. From Jesus' birth to his sacrificial death for our sins, Isaiah unveils for the reader the story of Jesus as Messiah and Suffering Servant.

Each week for Advent this year we're going to focus on passages from Isaiah and explore the themes of hope, peace, joy and love found within them.

2

SET THE STAGE

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find the historical, cultural, and literary context you need to properly interpret and apply the text.

OUTLINE

- I. Hope for the future (v. 2)
 - a. God's mountain temple and dwelling place are established and exalted above all others.
 - b. Through the Messiah Christ God's people (the Church) become the final dwelling place of God.
 - c. This temple attracts the nations to come to it.
- II. The response of the nations (v. 3)
 - a. People from among the nations encourage others to join them in going to the temple.
 - b. They are motivated to learn from God about his ways.
 - c. The law will go out to the nations out of Zion (Jerusalem).
- III. Messiah's kingdom reign (v. 4)
 - a. The Messiah will act as judge over the nations.
 - b. Peace and an end to conflict between nations will mark the Messiah's kingdom reign.

CONTEXT

Isaiah ministered as the Assyrian army began to threaten God's people. Isaiah gave a picture of how the Lord would restore his people. The people needed to look for a messiah to come to help God's people live long in the Promised Land. Messiah was the hope of the people of God.

FALLEN CONDITION & GOSPEL RESPONSE

FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

We look to the world for hope and its rulers and nations promise us hope.

GOSPEL RESPONSE

Eternal hope is found in experiencing the presence of God today and looking forward to his future kingdom reign.

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your class through the process of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the teacher, work through all the exercises below to ensure you gain a good understanding of the text.

Isaiah was a prophet during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah (Isa. 1:1). The Book of Isaiah spans three time periods: 1) during Isaiah's lifetime in the late 8th century B.C. (chapters 1–39), 2) the Jewish exile in Babylon (chapters 40–55) and 3) the return of the exiles to Jerusalem (chapters 56–66).

Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 2:2–4 takes place in "the last days" (v. 2), which can refer to 1) the distant future, 2) the Church age or 3) the end of the age.

2 In the last days

the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established
as the highest of the mountains;
it will be exalted above the hills,
and all nations will stream to it.

3 Many peoples will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the temple of the God of Jacob.

He will teach us his ways,
so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion,
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

4 He will judge between the nations

and will settle disputes for many peoples.

They will beat their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not take up sword against nation,
nor will they train for war anymore.

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?**OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: IDENTIFYING KEY WORDS AND PHRASES**

Read slowly through these verses three times. On the third time, circle the keywords and phrases. List those words and phrases below.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Re-read Isaiah 2:2–4 and write down the different ways Isaiah describes the character of God in the passage. List the imagery that helps you come to the characteristic.

OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: RECOGNIZING PARALLELS

Look up the following passages that refer to the Mountain of the Lord.

What repeated words and phrases do you see? Write them down or circle them.

Ezekiel 20:20

Micah 4:1-5

Zechariah 8:3

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: KEY WORDS AND PHRASES

Define below the keywords or phrases that you identified in the Observation section by consulting a commentary or the glossary at the end of the lesson. (Hint: There are at least three.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: SYNTHESIZE KEY THEMES

How would you summarize the main theme of this passage in one short phrase?

How did the imagery and character of God impact your main theme?

INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: SETTING THE CONTEXT

Scripture needs to be understood in context. Go back and read Isaiah 1:21-31 which precedes this week's passage. How does God, speaking through Isaiah, contrast the present condition of God's people in Jerusalem with what he will do in the future? What does this say about God's grace and mercy toward sinners?

APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?

QUESTION 1: What could you do this week to help you remember the present and future hope you have in Jesus?

QUESTION 2: Many attributes and images are used to describe God. How might reflecting on God's sovereignty, strength, and justice as king and ruler over the nations give you hope in your present circumstances?

TEACHER TIP

In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God is calling them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.

QUESTION 3: One day the nations will flow into Zion in order to follow God learn his ways. What's the most important thing you're learning from God right now and how is he challenging you to act on it?

QUESTION 4: Life in God's kingdom can be described as "life as it was meant to be lived." Jesus inaugurated his kingdom reign during his first coming and will finally establish it during his second coming. The Sermon on the Mount also gives us a guide for living in God's kingdom (Matt. 5-7). What's one thing you to change in your attitude or behavior that would be more in line with the kingdom life Jesus calls you to live?

QUESTION 5: Think of someone in your life who needs to hear a word of hope. What could you do or say to remind this person that God offers us hope that is true and certain?

4

CHALLENGE

TEACHER TIP

End your time of study with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.

It's easy to look at the current state of the world and despair. Despite the progress we as humans have made over the span of time, it hasn't eradicated the sin that is – and always has been – present in every human heart. We still go to war against one another. We're yet to get rid of racism in many corners of society. Lust and the craving for more leave many unfulfilled and unsatisfied. Even the best of us isn't immune from harboring jealousy, resentment and hate toward others.

And yet there is hope. But how? Because God has a plan for his people and for history. That plan was foretold long ago by Isaiah and other prophets. A Messiah (Jesus) would come and establish himself as king over God's kingdom and bring with him hope for salvation and a new beginning for God's people. While nations rise and fall, Jesus would reign forever on his throne as King of kings and Lord of lords.

You can live with hope for today and for tomorrow because Jesus is king. Time and history march on under the care and oversight of an all-good, sovereign-over-everything God. He keeps all his promises and there is no ruler or spiritual power that is able to keep him from accomplishing all that he seeks to do to glorify his name among the nations and his people. He came once to fulfill the hope of the promises of God and he will come again to fulfill our ultimate hope in him. What a thrill of hope we look forward to in our messiah who will come again!

LET'S PRAY

GLOSSARY

MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

The mountain of the LORD'S temple refers to the mount where the temple was built (and where the millennial temple will be built, Ezek. 40-43). Often in the Scriptures mountains denote governmental authorities (Dan. 2:35; Amos 4:1). Here God's rule from the temple will be preeminent (chief). The theme of the prominence of the temple mount in Jerusalem is repeated often in Isaiah's prophecies all the way to the end of the book (Isa. 11:9; 25:6-7; 27:13; 30:29; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11, 25; 66:20).

MOUNTAINS

Mountains played an important part in the religions of Israel's neighbors. They were the points where heaven and earth were thought to meet and were therefore highly favored as sites for altars and temples. The Canaanites worshipped their gods at the 'high places', and these became a snare to the Israelites. Even when such high places were removed from within Israel's borders in times of religious reform, the surrounding nations continued to worship their gods on their holy mountains.

JUDGE

Moses served as the judge of Israel, both deciding between persons and teaching Israel God's statutes (Exod. 18:15-16). At Jethro's suggestion Moses himself served as the people's advocate before God and their instructor in the law (18:19-20) and appointed subordinate judges to decide minor cases (18:21-23; Num. 11:16-17; Deut. 1:12-17; 16:18-20). Elders of a community frequently served as judges at the city gate (Deut. 22:15; 25:7; Ruth 4:1-9; Job 29:7-8). Difficult cases were referred to the priests or to the supreme judge (Deut. 17:8-13; cp. Num. 5:12-31, a case involving no witnesses). During the monarchy the king served as the supreme judge (2 Sam. 15:2-3) and appointed local judges (1 Chron. 23:4; 2 Chron. 19:5), along with an appeals process (2 Chron. 19:8-11). Following the exile Artaxerxes gave the priest Ezra the authority to appoint judges in Judea (Ezra 7:25).

Complaints against judges are frequent in the OT literature. Absalom took advantage of discontent with the legal system to instigate revolt (2 Sam. 15:4). Judges are accused of showing partiality (Prov. 24:23), of taking bribes (Isa. 61:8; Mic. 7:3; cp. Exod. 23:2-9), and of failing to defend the interest of the powerless (Isa. 10:2; Jer. 5:28). Zephaniah described the judges of Jerusalem as wolves on the prowl (3:3).

God is the ultimate Judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25; Isa. 33:22; James 4:12). As God's representative Christ functions as Judge as well (John 8:16; James 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:5).

COMMENTARY

ISAIAH 2:2-4

Understanding the theme and sub-themes in books of the Bible is essential in understanding the overall message of each book. In summarizing Isaiah for *The ESV Study Bible*, Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. states that “the central theme of Isaiah is God himself, who does all things for his own sake” (48:11).

Isaiah defines everything else by its relation to God, whether it is rightly adjusted to him as the gloriously central figure in all of reality (45:22–25). God is the Holy One of Israel (1:4), the One who is high and lifted up but who also dwells down among the “contrite and lowly” (57:15), the Sovereign over the whole world (13:1–27:13) whose wrath is fierce (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4) but whose cleansing touch atones for sin (6:7), whose salvation flows in endless supply (12:3), whose gospel is “good news of happiness” (52:7), who is moving history toward the blessing of his people (43:3–7) and the exclusive worship due him (2:2–4). He is the only Savior (43:10–13), and the whole world will know it (49:26). To rest in the promises of this God is his people’s only strength (30:15); to delight themselves in his word is their refreshing feast (55:1–2); to serve his cause is their worthy devotion (ch. 62); but to rebel against him is endless death (66:24).

A microcosm of the book’s message appears in 1:2–2:5. The Lord announces his basic charge against the people: they have received so much privilege from God and ought to be grateful children, but “they have despised the Holy One of Israel” (1:2–4). He describes the purpose of the various judgments they face, namely, to bring them to repentance, or at least to preserve a remnant who will repent (1:5–9). Judah is very diligent to observe the divinely appointed sacrifices, but the people’s hearts are far from God, as their unwillingness to protect their own weakest members exhibits (1:10–20). The Lord called his people to be the embodiment of faithfulness in this world, and yet they are now filled with rampant unfaithfulness at every level (personal, religious, and social); but God intends to purge Zion of its sinful members and set her up as a beacon of light for the whole world. In view of this glorious future, Isaiah’s contemporaries should commit themselves afresh to walking “in the light of the LORD” (1:21–2:5).

Isaiah presents a vision for God’s future kingdom and what he will do in Zion. This vision, as Gary V. Smith states in his commentary, presents the reader with a choice: to be a part of God’s plan or reject it.

Isaiah described what will take place “in the last days,” a phrase filled with eschatological significance in this context. This new era will inaugurate a series of new relationships between (a) God and his dwelling place in Zion, (b) God and the people who come to hear him teach, and (c) God and various warring nations. God will transform the present world by his presence, his teaching, and his just judgment.

The new Zion will have great prominence as the “highest, chief” (rôš) mountain in order to symbolize the new importance given to the dwelling place of God (2:2; Ezek. 40:2). The geographical setting of the historical city of Jerusalem is located on a lower mountain than the Mount of Olives to the east, which might imply something of an inferior status in the eyes of some ancient people. In the ancient Near Eastern world temples were usually built on the highest place available, so they would be closer to heaven. This new exaltation of God’s dwelling place will symbolically demonstrate to the nations

the superior glory and greatness of God. Although the city of Jerusalem was an important political place with a great deal of gold and military strength during the reign of Uzziah (2:7), at that time the glories of God's dwelling place were not valued as highly as the accomplishments of mankind (2:6-22). In the future that situation will change when the majestic glory of God comes to dwell on his throne, removes every false source of trust and pride, and God alone is exalted (2:11, 17).

Surprisingly, Isaiah does not focus on Judah's response to God's glorious presence in Zion, but on the nations coming to hear God's words (2:2b-3; see also 19:19-25). God's plans for mankind always included his desire to reach the whole world, not just the small nation of Judah (45:22-23; 49:26; 60:3).

While the Messiah is not specifically identified in Isa. 2:2-4 Geoffrey W. Grogan notes in his commentary that:

There is no reference to the messianic king in this passage, but the word "established" reminds us of Psalm 2:6 ("I have installed my king on Zion, my holy hill"). Both the hill and the king are secure because they are in the center of God's purpose for his people. In Isaiah 1:7 foreigners in Jerusalem's environs greedily strip the fields of their crops. How different the picture here! They now come not for plunder but in peace, not to rob but to learn. The analogy of streams is particularly apt because the major traditional oppressors of Israel were associated with great rivers—the Nile, the Tigris, and the Euphrates (cf. 8:6-8).

What will it be like at the end of the age when Christ reigns over the nations? John A. Martin gives us a picture of it in his reflections on Isa. 2:4:

This is one of the more familiar verses in the Book of Isaiah. God will have a worldwide ministry of judging and settling disputes. He will require nations and peoples everywhere to abstain from warfare. Universal peace, with no military conflict or training, will prevail because the implements of warfare (swords and spears) will be turned into implements of agriculture (plowshares and hooks; cf. Joel 3:10). At this time of worldwide peace the nations will go to Jerusalem to learn from God (Isa. 2:2). Peace will come not by human achievement but because of God's presence and work in Jerusalem. At that time Israel will be filled with God's Spirit (Ezek. 36:24-30) and her sins will be forgiven (Jer. 31:31-34).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs-Isaiah.

John A. Martin, *Isaiah*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures.

Raymond C. Ortlund, *Isaiah*, The ESV Study Bible.

Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, The New American Commentary.