

A Look at Advent Through the Old Testament

Help your group explore where the Christmas story really began.

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The Christmas story began in the Old Testament. God's nature didn't change, nor did ours, and he had our redemption in mind all the time. The prophets Jeremiah, Malachi, Zephaniah, and Micah all proclaim the Christ that was to come. Use this Bible study course to lead up to Christmas—or use it Christmas week to make the holiday more meaningful.

Session One - The Power of Hope

Our hope in Jesus will work in and through our lives.

Every day we use that small, magical word—hope. It's tough to live without hope. What is hope? It's a vision for better days that changes us in the present. There's something up ahead, around the corner, in sight, and it's good. But that good future isn't just abstract, because it reaches in and transforms us in the present. At Advent, we are invited to a journey of better days, a journey of real and lasting hope.

Session Two - The Refining Love of God

God allows suffering for our holiness and happiness.

This study focuses on a passage in Scripture from "The Hammer" of the Old Testament. His name is Malachi the prophet, whose message is in the last book of the Old Testament. When God's people were treating their spiritual lives with careless contempt, when they were unmotivated and uninspired, bored and distracted, yawning in the face of God, they needed a serious wake-up call. Or in the words of Malachi, they needed to meet the God who is like a "refiner's fire" (Malachi 3:2). So God sent Malachi to say: You were made for better days. You weren't made to coast in your spiritual apathy. God has better days coming.

Session Three - God's Protection and Delight

Nothing can keep us from the joy of the risen Christ.

Near the back of your Old Testament, you'll find a tiny book called Zephaniah. It may not be your favorite book in the Bible (perhaps you've never even heard of it), but the last half of chapter three contains a wonderful, moving, tender, and fiercely strong description of God's love. According to the philosopher Simone Weil, a brilliant French woman who died in 1943, there are only two things that can crack open the human heart: suffering and beauty. The picture of God's love at the end of this little book is designed to crack open our hearts with its beauty. This is not what

we deserve, but this is the love God offers us. This is the hope of Advent, that God has done something in Christ that changes everything.

Session Four - The Peace Jesus Brings

The Messiah brings shalom and calls us to join him.

The ancient Jews had a word to describe better days. They called it shalom, Hebrew for "peace." In the Bible, God's peace—shalom—meant much more than simply the absence of war. Shalom meant not only inner peace or spiritual peace; it meant wholeness and completeness throughout all creation. It meant the end of injustice. It meant the rich would no longer devour the poor. It meant all brokenness would be set right and healed. It meant that people would love one another. For the Jews, the hope of shalom was wrapped up in a person. Someone is coming, they believed, who will open the door to peace. Who is this bearer of Shalom? Where will he come from? Advent answers those questions.