

Today, we complete our survey of the Old Testament looking at five things God revealed about the promised Savior, His Son, Jesus Christ, to the generations who came before His birth. First, God’s promise to Adam and Eve right after they ate the forbidden fruit that one of Eve’s descendants would crush the serpent’s head, referring to Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross that would deal a mortal blow to Satan and the devastating effects of his temptation.

Then about 2000 BC came Abraham who raised a knife to sacrifice his son Isaac as God had commanded. But then at the last moment the Lord provided a substitute ram trapped in a thicket of thorns by its horns, and Abraham offered that ram in Isaac’s place. This foreshadowed Jesus dying on the cross, wearing a crown of thorns, as our Substitute.

Next around 1500 BC, God raised Moses to free Israel from their slavery in Egypt. God sent an angel to slay all the firstborn in Egypt, but when the blood of the Passover lamb marked an Israelite’s doorway, the angel of death passed over. In the same way, when a believer is baptized, we are marked by the blood of Christ. So on Judgment Day, the angel of death will pass over us, and we will live with Christ in paradise forever.

Then last week, we looked at around 1000 BC when David went alone against Goliath the giant to deliver Israel—pointing ahead to Jesus defeating the giant Satan, delivering us from slavery and death.

Today, we will zip forward through another five hundred years to around 500 BC. But first, what happened after David defeated Goliath? When King Saul died, the Lord made David king. David wasn’t a perfect king, but he repented of his sins and trusted in God’s forgiveness for the sake of the coming Savior. God announced to David that one of his sons would reign on His throne forever. David knew that Son was the promised Savior who would be called the Son of David. Sadly, not all David’s descendants before the Christ were so faithful.

His son Solomon started his reign faithfully. After David’s death, Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, on the same mountain where God stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. But as Solomon grew older, he married many, many foreign wives, and his love for them turned his heart

from the Lord. He even built temples for their false gods. Because of Solomon's unfaithfulness, God said he would snatch ten tribes from Solomon's son Rehoboam.

After Solomon died, God divided Israel into two kingdoms—ten tribes to the north formed Israel. Only two tribes remained for David's descendants. They made up the kingdom of Judah in the south. The Northern Kingdom was led by a series of kings who all did evil and led the people of Israel away from God. In time, God handed them over to the Assyrian Empire who took them into exile, dispersed them across their territory, and the Northern Kingdom totally disappeared.

The Southern Kingdom fared a little better. Among David's descendants, there were some decent men and two very remarkable men of faith—Hezekiah and Josiah. But for the most part, wicked, unbelieving descendants from David's line dragged the Southern Kingdom down a path of disobedience and idolatry that eventually resulted in God handing them over to the Babylonian Empire. This empire conquered Jerusalem looted the temple and burned it to the ground. They tore down Jerusalem's walls and took most of the survivors into exile where they lived for roughly seventy years. Just like their brothers and sisters in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, Judah deserved nothing but to disappear from the pages of history forever.

You and I are no different. Day after day, we sin. And when we do that we reject God and run after people and things we think will make our lives thrilling and fulfilling. Like Judah, we deserve to be driven from God's presence, exiles suffering in chains in the fires of hell forever.

But God loves His lost children—you and me and all the children of Judah. He remembered His promise to raise up one of David's sons—the promised Messiah. So, He watched over the exiles of Judah, sending them great prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel and a remarkable leader and prophet named Daniel.

The Babylonians took promising young exiles and trained them to be political leaders who would represent the conquered people and help keep them in line. So, Daniel and his three friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who have also been called "Your-shack, My-shack, and a

bungalow”) went into strict training to become wise men, scholars who would be magistrates and advisors to the king. Another name for wise men is magi, which might remind you of the wise men who about five centuries later would travel to Bethlehem to bring their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to worship the young child Jesus.

In many ways, the course of Daniel’s life is a lot like Jacob’s son Joseph whom we talked about in week two of this series. Both were dragged in chains to a foreign, world power. Both went through trials and difficulties and rose to high positions. Both were leaders who conducted themselves with great integrity and honesty, and their emperors appreciated that.

Daniel was able to use his position in the Babylonian government to watch out for the Israelites and bring God glory in various situations. Then about seventy years after the destruction of Jerusalem, the unthinkable happened: Babylon was conquered by the Persian Empire. Suddenly, Daniel was a government official on the wrong side. He could have been executed, but God was with him, and the Persian emperor embraced him and gave him a high position in the Persian Empire. Daniel proved himself so efficient, skilled, and honest the emperor was prepared to raise him to the highest position, administering the whole empire on behalf of the emperor.

Would you be surprised if I told you Daniel’s rivals were not happy playing second fiddle to him? They looked for a way to discredit him and change the emperor’s mind about him. First, they looked for some corruption, some wrong doing in his administration. But Daniel governed with such honesty and integrity there was no corruption to find. They came to realize the only way they would ever be able to trip him up would be to find some way to trap him regarding his unwavering faith in God.

So they buttered up Emperor Darius and cunningly convinced him to enact a law forbidding any subject to pray to any god except him for the next thirty days. Darius’s pride got the best of him, and he signed the legislation into law. And just as they suspected, Daniel refused to break his lifelong habit of praying to his God. They caught him in the act and dragged him before Darius.

Emperor Darius was grieved and troubled that his trusted, hand-picked administrator was on the wrong end of a law he now recognized was foolish. But though he spent the rest of the day searching for a loophole in his law, the emperor couldn't find one. Daniel's enemies had been too clever. Unable to change the law or stop the punishment, Darius gave in and ordered Daniel to be put in with the lions, and his fate was sealed. He told Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" (v.16)

Darius returned to his palace, ate nothing, and allowed no entertaining diversions to be brought to him. After a long, sleepless night, Darius rushed out to the lions' den early the next morning and stood by the den. In an agonizing tone, he asked, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?" (v.20). Daniel replied, "O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before Him; and also, before you, O king, I have done no harm" (vv. 21-22).

Darius was overjoyed! He ordered the stone to be removed from the entrance to the den, and Daniel was lifted out with no injury at all. When the relieved king received him back safe and sound, his wrath turned against those who had accused Daniel. He ordered them to be cast into the lions' den, and the lions killed them all before they even hit the ground.

Then Daniel took his place as Emperor Darius's right hand man, administering the Persian Empire for the benefit of his people Israel. Obviously, this was vitally important for the children of Israel. Daniel remained in a position of influence. Not long after, a royal edict was announced permitting the Jews to return to Jerusalem to reestablish the city and build the temple.

But this event of Daniel and the lions' den was important for another reason. It foreshadowed another aspect of the saving mission of God's Son. Like Daniel, Jesus was accused of violating imperial law—Roman law. Like Darius, the Roman leader, Pontius Pilate, recognized there was no basis for the charges leveled against Jesus. Yet the accusers stuck to

their guns and forced Pilate to grant their wishes. He ordered Jesus' execution and He suffered and died on the cross to take away our sins.

Jesus was buried in a tomb which was sealed by a large stone rolled over the entrance—like the stone that sealed Daniel in the lions' den.

Early on the third morning, God the Father ordered an angel to roll the stone from the entrance of the grave so the women who rushed to the tomb to complete Jesus' burial would find His body missing. Just like Daniel, Jesus left the tomb alive and well. And, just like Daniel ruling under Darius, Jesus took His place at the Father's right hand, to administer the rule of God over all creation for the benefit of His people, the Holy Christian Church.

Now, through five weeks, we've seen five vivid previews God gave His Old Testament people of the saving work their Messiah would accomplish by His death and resurrection. Interestingly, these took place about every 500 years. Next week, we will move forward another 500 years to the change from BC to AD—the birth of God's promised Deliverer, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.