



Hope



Christmas & Advent

- ❑ *Christmas* is usually defined as “a holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ.”¹ *Advent* comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “arrival” or “coming.” In Christian practice, Advent refers to the period before Christmas (usually starting four Sundays before Christmas day). Advent is not prescribed by the Bible, but various churches and Christians observe it.²

Need of Hope³

- ❑ During the 1st millennium BC, Israel faced trouble and despair. Israel was broken into two kingdoms: the northern kingdom (called “Israel” or “Samaria”) and the southern kingdom (called “Judah”). Almost all of the kings of Israel and Judah were corrupt and did evil. Most of the people turned away from the one true God and worshiped false gods and idols.
- ❑ As a result of their unfaithfulness to God, Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC (*2 Kings 17:7-23*; *2 Chronicles 36:15-20*). The people of Israel and Judah were exiled, outside the Promised Land.⁴

📖 “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off” (*Ezekiel 37:11b, NIV*).⁵

1. We may not face Israel’s physical situation, but do we also have *need of hope* today? Explain.⁶ What difference does hope make?



Reason for Hope

- ❑ During Israel’s time of rebellion and exile, God was still speaking to them through his “prophets.”⁷ The prophets brought both bad news and good news. The bad news was God’s judgment because of their sin. The good news was God’s blessing because of his grace. Both God’s judgment and God’s blessing were demonstrations of his faithfulness to his promises.⁸
- 📖 “Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; your fields are being stripped by foreigners right before you, laid waste as when overthrown by strangers” (*Isaiah 1:7, NIV*).

¹ The word *Christmas* comes from the early English phrase *Christes Masse*, meaning “Christ’s mass.” “Mass” is the name of the Roman Catholic Church’s worship service. The specific celebration of Christ’s birth is not prescribed by the Bible, and the earliest Christians did not observe it. Also, the actual date of Christ’s birth is unknown. For these reasons and others, some Christians do not observe Christmas; but the majority of Christians do celebrate the holiday.

² There are two main “advents” – Christ’s first coming (2000 years ago) and His second coming (in the future). Advent practices vary, but typically involve lighting of candles, Bible reading, reflection & prayer, in preparation for Christmas.

³ “hope” is generally defined as a wish or desire accompanied by confident expectation that it will happen.

⁴ Israel’s possession of the Promised Land was always conditioned on her faithfulness to God (*Joshua 23:6-16*).

⁵ These words are stated in the context of Ezekiel’s prophesy on the valley of dry bones (*37:1-14*), which symbolizes the destruction, exile, and “death” of Israel. Cut off from God’s life-giving presence, they are helpless and hopeless. But God is able and willing to rescue his people and restore them to life and blessing (*37:12-14*).

⁶ Certainly, we live in a world of trouble. People’s deepest needs and desires are unfulfilled. Human “progress” falls short. Believe it or not, everyone who is separate from Christ is “without hope and without God in the world” (*Ephesians 2:12*). Their “bones are dried up” (i.e., they are spiritually dead) and they are cut off from the Source of life and blessing. Even those united with Christ need hope to persevere through this difficult life on earth (*Romans 8:18-25*).

⁷ The prophets were both “forth-tellers” (proclaiming God’s word for the present day) and “fore-tellers” (proclaiming God’s word about the future). For a list of the Bible prophets, and their placement within Israel’s history, ask Jay.

⁸ For the main promises and covenants, see the ICF website, Articles and Studies, “God’s Promise to the Nations – The Promised One.” Or ask Jay for his 4-part study series entitled “The Road to Christmas.”



“And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land” (*Isaiah 6:13, NIV*).

- **Read Isaiah 11:1-10.** This passage and many others speak of a future Messiah,⁹ who will bring salvation, righteousness, justice, peace, and blessing.¹⁰ The Messiah will establish his kingdom, in which everyone will know God and have his law written on their hearts (*Jeremiah 31:31-34*).

“The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is right in the land. In his days, Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness” (*Jeremiah 23:5-6*).



2. In our world today, what do people hope for? What is the basis of their hope? (What is the reason for their hopefulness?) How does this compare to the hope presented in the Bible?¹¹

Realization of Hope

- Around 5 BC,¹² a baby was born in the town of Bethlehem (*Luke 2:4-7; cf. Micah 5:2*). He was given the name “Jesus.” It became obvious that Jesus was the promised Messiah – “the Root of Jesse” (*Isaiah 11:10; Romans 15:12; cf. Revelation 5:5; 22:16*). The Savior has come!



Continuation of Hope

- When we trust in Jesus Christ, we are saved from spiritual death and given a new life. We enter into a relationship with God and become heirs in God’s kingdom of light (*Colossians 1:12-14*). Our hope has been realized, but not fully realized. Hope continues until Christ’s second advent.
3. God’s people in the Old Testament spent many years hoping and waiting for the Messiah and his kingdom. How are our hopes and waits similar and dissimilar to theirs? What can we do to stay encouraged and faithful in our own hopes and waits?¹³

Reflection/Application

- Do you have hope? What is your ultimate (greatest, final) hope? What is the basis of your hope? The only hope that truly delivers is the hope found in Jesus Christ. Have you received Christ?
- As a Christian, are you troubled in this present world? Can you say that you are overflowing with hope? Reflect on Romans 5:1-5, 8:18-25 and 15:13, and ask God to increase your faith.

⁹ “Messiah” comes from the Hebrew word meaning “anointed one.” The Greek word is *Christos*, thus “Christ.”

¹⁰ “According to Alfred Edersheim, an earlier messianic believer and scholar, in some 558 rabbinic writings there are 456 separate Old Testament passages used to refer to the Messiah and the messianic times. More recently, J. Barton Payne cited 574 verses in the Old Testament that were direct, personal messianic predictions.” (Barry Leventhal in *Why I Am a Christian*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman [Grand Rapids, Baker, 2001], p. 207.)

¹¹ The “hopes” of many people are earthly, and are supposedly achieved by human progress. The “hopes” of religions vary, including Nirvana, Moksha, Paradise, etc. But none compare to Biblical (Christian) hope, which is the greatest hope – a full knowledge of the loving Creator enjoyed in his perfect kingdom. This hope is based on God’s revelation – in the Bible, in history, and ultimately in Jesus Christ; which have proven God’s faithfulness to his promises.

¹² We might expect Jesus’ birth to be in year 1 AD (anno Domini – “in the year of the Lord”). However, the calendar established by Dionysius in AD 525 was in error. Most estimates of Jesus’ birthdate are in the range of 6 to 4 BC.

¹³ Our hope is dissimilar to theirs because the Messiah has come (the first time)! However, it is similar to theirs because we too are hoping and waiting for the kingdom of God in its fullness, which will happen when the Messiah returns. As Christians, we can experience much of the blessings of the kingdom now, but the full realization is future.