

SESSION 14

GOD SENT JOHN TO GET ISRAEL READY FOR THE RESCUER

About 340 years before the Romans arrived, God sent one of his prophets to the Jews. His name was Malachi. Malachi was the last prophet who had his words written down in the Old Testament. Through Malachi, God reminded the Jewish people of his promise to send a Rescuer. He said that the Promised One would come soon.



MALACHI 3:1,2

¹ “Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

² “But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes.

But God said that just before the Rescuer would come, another prophet would come first. He would bring a message from God that would get the people ready for the Rescuer’s arrival.



MALACHI 4:5,6

⁵ “Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. ⁶ His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

HIS STORY: THE RESCUE

After Malachi died, God did not send another prophet for 400 years. God did not talk to his people for 400 years. He wanted them to wait for the Rescuer to come.

The first part of God's story that we call the Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language. The Old Testament ends with the words of God's prophet, Malachi. The second part of God's story is called the New Testament. We will hear more about the men who wrote down the words of God in the New Testament later. The New Testament was written in the Greek language.

Many things happened in the world in the 400 years after Malachi. The Greek language spread throughout the whole region.¹⁶⁶ Many groups of people could now talk to each other in Greek. Because of that, many ideas spread very far. Also, the Romans built many, many roads. It became easier for people to go from city to city. During this time, the Hebrew people spread out and settled in many places around the Mediterranean Sea. They took God's story with them. They took the idea that there is one God, not many gods. Many small towns and cities had Jewish people living in them. They knew God's true story that told about God's promises about the Rescuer. Other people heard about God's true story because the Jewish people were living among them.

Now we will read in God's story what happened next. The land of Israel and Judah had been under the rule of the Romans for a long time. The Jewish people were waiting for the Rescuer to come. They called him *Messiah*. In the Hebrew language, Messiah means 'God's promised Rescuer.'

Two of the Jewish people waiting for the Messiah were a man called Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth.



LUKE 1:5-25

⁵ When Herod was king of Judea, there was a Jewish priest named Zechariah. He was a member of the priestly order of Abijah, and his wife, Elizabeth, was also from the priestly line of Aaron. ⁶ Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in God's eyes, careful to obey all of the Lord's commandments and regulations. ⁷ They had no children because Elizabeth was unable to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ One day Zechariah was serving God in the Temple, for his order was on duty that week. ⁹ As was the custom of the priests, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ While the incense was being burned, a great crowd stood outside, praying.

¹¹ While Zechariah was in the sanctuary, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the incense altar.

¹² Zechariah was shaken and overwhelmed with fear when he saw him. ¹³ But the angel said, "Don't be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. ¹⁴ You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the eyes of the Lord. He must never touch wine or other alcoholic drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even before his birth. ¹⁶ And he will turn many

166. region - a large area with many countries and groups of people

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Israelites to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly.”

¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, “How can I be sure this will happen? I’m an old man now, and my wife is also well along in years.”

¹⁹ Then the angel said, “I am Gabriel! I stand in the very presence of God. It was he who sent me to bring you this good news! ²⁰ But now, since you didn’t believe what I said, you will be silent and unable to speak until the child is born. For my words will certainly be fulfilled at the proper time.”

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah to come out of the sanctuary, wondering why he was taking so long.

²² When he finally did come out, he couldn’t speak to them. Then they realized from his gestures and his silence that he must have seen a vision in the sanctuary.

²³ When Zechariah’s week of service in the Temple was over, he returned home.

²⁴ Soon afterward his wife, Elizabeth, became pregnant and went into seclusion for five months. ²⁵ “How kind the Lord is!” she exclaimed. “He has taken away my disgrace of having no children.”

Zechariah was a priest in the temple. One day, he was doing his work there. One of God’s spirit messengers, an angel, came to talk to him. The angel showed himself in human form to speak to Zechariah. The angel said that Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a son and that they should call him John. In the Hebrew and Aramaic languages, John means ‘God has shown grace.’¹⁶⁷

The angel told Zechariah what John’s work would be. John was the prophet that Malachi said would come just before the Rescuer came. John’s message would help people to get ready for the Promised One. The angel said, *he will prepare¹⁶⁸ the people for the coming of the Lord*. The angel said that the Rescuer would be the Lord himself. Somehow, God would appear among his people in a special way. How would he do that?

John was born to Zechariah and Elizabeth even though they were both old. God said they would have a son and that is what happened. A few days after John was born, God the Spirit gave Zechariah the special ability¹⁶⁹ to speak for God.



LUKE 1:67-79

⁶⁷ Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

⁶⁸ “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has visited and redeemed his people.

⁶⁹ He has sent us a mighty Savior

167. **grace** - when God loves people or forgives people or saves people when they have not done anything themselves to earn it or get it

168. **prepare** - to get ready for something

169. **ability** - to be able to do something

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from the royal line of his servant David,
⁷⁰ just as he promised
through his holy prophets long ago.
⁷¹ Now we will be saved from our enemies
and from all who hate us.
⁷² He has been merciful to our ancestors
by remembering his sacred covenant—
⁷³ the covenant he swore with an oath
to our ancestor Abraham.
⁷⁴ We have been rescued from our enemies
so we can serve God without fear,
⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness
for as long as we live.
⁷⁶ “And you, my little son,
will be called the prophet of the Most High,
because you will prepare the way for the Lord.
⁷⁷ You will tell his people how to find salvation
through forgiveness of their sins.
⁷⁸ Because of God’s tender mercy,
the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to
guide us to the path of peace.”

Zechariah said that God’s promises about the Messiah were about to come true. God had made a promise to Abraham that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham’s family. God was going to do what he had said he would do. Zechariah said, “*Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people.*” Redeemed means that someone else has paid the price for something that you owe. Zechariah said that that was what God was going to do.

Zechariah also said that when John grew up, he would tell people about their sins and how they could be forgiven¹⁷⁰ for them. John would get people ready for the Rescuer to come.

Zechariah said that because of God’s mercy, the morning light of heaven was about to come. The light would *give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death*. Since the time that Adam and Eve had listened to the lies of Satan, darkness had ruled the earth. All the people of the earth lived in darkness away from the light of knowing God. They lived in *the shadow of death* because when they died they would go to the place of death. Now God said that his light was about to come.

So far, all through God’s story he has kept trying to speak the truth to people. They could see all the things around them that he had created for them. He had spoken to them many times. He had made an agreement with them and had given them his laws. He had lived among his people, the Israelites. He had sent his prophets, and their words had been written down. But Satan had been

170. **forgiven** - to be made free of a debt that you owe to someone else for doing something wrong to them

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working against God and telling lies about him. And people had chosen to believe Satan and not to believe God.

John's work was to tell the people of Israel that God was about to come. God was going to come into the darkness. He was going to bring light and truth. He was going to show that Satan had told lies to people. And God was going to show who he really is in a way that had never happened before. He was going to come and find those people who would listen to him. He was going to tell his story to them, and to show them who he really is, in a whole new way. This thing that was going to happen soon¹⁷¹ was the most important thing that had ever happened and that will ever happen.

In the northern part of the land of Israel was a town called Nazareth. A young woman called Mary lived there. She was engaged¹⁷² to a man called Joseph. Joseph was a descendant of King David. Mary was a sinner like all people. But Mary knew she was a sinner and that she was separated from God. She knew that she needed God to save her. She was one of the Jewish people who were waiting for the Rescuer to come.

God sent an angel to talk to Mary. He told her that God had chosen her to be the mother of the Rescuer.



LUKE 1:26-33

²⁶ In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. ²⁸ Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

²⁹ Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. ³⁰ "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God! ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!"

The angel told Mary that when her son was born she should give him the name Jesus. Jesus is the English word for the name Yeshua. In the Hebrew language, Yeshua means 'Yahweh saves,' or 'God rescues.' The angel said that Jesus would be the *Son of the Most High*. He would be the Son of God.

Remember before that we said that God is three people in one. He is God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. The angel told Mary that her son would be the Son of God. God is a spirit, and does not have a body. God can be at any time or at any place he wants to be. God is the all-powerful Creator. Now the angel told Mary that God was going to be born as a human baby. Jesus would be a human baby but he would not be like any other baby before. This baby would be God. The angel also told Mary that her son would reign¹⁷³ as a king forever.

171. soon - in a short amount of time

172. engaged - promised to marry someone

173. reign - to rule as a king

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About 600 years before, God had said that these things would happen. Here is what he said through his prophet Isaiah.



ISAIAH 9:6

⁶ For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

God said that *a child is born to us, a son is given to us*. He would be called things that would show he is wonderful, wise, powerful, eternal and that he would bring peace.

Mary did not understand how she could have a baby. She had never had sex with a man. She was a virgin. The angel told her that it would be something that God would make happen.



LUKE 1:34-36

³⁴ Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”
³⁵ The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month.

God was the one who gave life to people in the beginning. He is the only one who can start life. He said he would give Mary a son. He would make the child grow inside of her and it would be born in the normal way. But her baby would not be a normal human child. He would not have a human father. He would not be a descendant of Adam, so he would not be born a sinner like all other people. He would be the perfect Son of God.

Mary listened to what the angel said. She believed that God would do everything just as the angel said he would.

One of God’s storytellers at that time was called Matthew. Matthew wrote about the life of Jesus in the Book of Matthew in the Bible. He started by telling about the family of Jesus. Matthew called him *Jesus the Messiah*.



MATTHEW 1:1

¹ This is a record of the ancestors of Jesus the Messiah, a descendant of David and of Abraham

Remember that in the Hebrew language, Messiah means 'God's promised Rescuer'. So when Matthew called him Jesus the Messiah, he meant that Jesus is God's Promised One, and that he had special work to do.

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Fifteen hundred years before, Moses had given the Israelites a message from God. He said that one day God would bring a prophet from among the Israelites. Remember that a prophet is someone who speaks the words of God.



¹⁵ “Moses continued, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him. ¹⁶ For this is what you yourselves requested of the Lord your God when you were assembled at Mount Sinai. You said, ‘Don’t let us hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore or see this blazing fire, for we will die.’

¹⁷ “Then the Lord said to me, ‘What they have said is right. ¹⁸ I will raise up a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell the people everything I command him.

God said that he would put his words in the mouth of this prophet. He also said that this prophet would tell the people everything that God told him to say. Jesus is the One that God was talking about. Many years before, God said something else about the Promised One who would come. David wrote it down in one of his songs, or psalms.



⁴ The Lord has taken an oath and will not break his vow:
“You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.”

Melchizedek was a special priest who lived in the time of Abraham. David said that the Promised One would also be a special priest. Remember that the work of the high priests was to bring the blood of animals to sprinkle on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. They did this once every year. They had to do it every year, generation after generation, to cover the sins of the people. Later in God’s story we will see that Jesus is God’s special chosen Priest. He would make an offering that was far greater than any other priest had ever given.

About 700 years before Jesus was born, God’s prophet Isaiah wrote this about him.



⁷ His government and its peace
will never end.

He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.

The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies
will make this happen!

Isaiah said that a descendant of David’s would come and rule *with fairness and justice*¹⁷⁴ *from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity*. Jesus was God’s chosen king to rule all of creation. He was the one that Isaiah had written about.

So Jesus, the Christ, would be chosen by God to be his Prophet, Priest and King.

174. justice - to be fair and true

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We have only read here about a few of the things that Moses, David and Isaiah said about Jesus. But there are many other things written about him in the Old Testament. Many things were said about the family of Jesus, about his birth, about his life, about what kind of a person he would be and about how he would die. God does not live in time like we do. He knows what is going to happen in the future. He put those things about Jesus in his story a long time before they happened. God knows everything. And when God says that something will happen, it always does happen.



1. What were some of the things that happened in the world during the 400 years after Malachi?
2. How do you think Zechariah and Elizabeth felt when they heard that the Messiah was about to come?
3. Why did Matthew call him Jesus the Messiah?
4. What are some other things that the Old Testament prophets said about Jesus, the Promised One?



This lesson has been adapted from the book *His Story: The Rescue, The Bible message from Genesis to Christ in easy English* (ISBN: 978-0-9944270-4-5)

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