

# Unto Us

25 Advent Devotions  
about the Messiah

EDITED *by*

WINFREE BRISLEY  
& JARED KENNEDY



Unto Us: 25 Advent Devotions about the Messiah  
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Published by The Gospel Coalition

The Gospel Coalition  
P.O. Box 1637  
Columbia, Missouri 65205

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Cover Design: Brannon McAllister  
Typesetting: Ryan Leichty

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ISBN:  
978-1-956593-12-9 (paperback)  
978-1-956593-13-6 (ebook)  
978-1-956593-14-3 (kindle)

*Printed in the United States of America*

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# Introduction

Christmas is a paradox of longing and fulfillment for Christians. We sing “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus” on the very holiday that celebrates his incarnation. We know Christ has already come, yet we long for him to come again. In fact, the reality that God is with us fuels our longing for his second advent.

Throughout December, we look back at God’s Old Testament promises to send the Messiah to save his people. Then we see in the Gospel accounts how he did exactly what he said he’d do, down to the last detail. So as we read Jesus’s New Testament promise to come again, we eagerly await the final day when our rescue will be complete.

Or maybe we don’t. Perhaps we’re so distracted by the cares of daily life that we don’t give much thought to Christ’s return. Maybe we’re so used to relying on ourselves that we don’t feel our need for the Savior. Maybe our satisfaction with worldly treasures has dulled our longing for the better portion. How can we rekindle our longing for Christ this Advent season? How can we prepare for his return with expectant hope?

John the Baptist prepared God’s people for the Messiah’s first coming and announced his arrival. Were that job assigned to us today, we’d likely design a marketing strategy, implement a social media campaign, or line up

a string of podcast interviews. But John's approach was simple: he bore witness. He proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). John exhorted others to take a good look at Jesus, to see he was the Promised One, the Messiah they'd been waiting for.

The results were astonishing: "The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus" (v. 37). Simply by beholding Jesus, they were compelled to follow him—and to invite others to follow him too. After spending time with Jesus, one of those disciples, Andrew, went and told his brother Simon Peter, "We have found the Messiah" (v. 41).

What drove these men to abandon all and follow? What compelled them to share the good news with others? Meeting Jesus—the Son born *unto us* to be our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

Whether we're entering this Advent season distracted or weary, anxious or doubting, hoping or hurting, we need to take a good look at Jesus. We need to remember he is the Messiah who came and is coming again. In Christ, our longings are both satisfied and stirred.

## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

To help us look to Christ this Advent season, The Gospel Coalition's staff has written devotions that reflect on the Scripture texts in the Christmas section of Handel's *Messiah*. You've likely heard the music of this well-known oratorio, particularly the famous "Hallelujah" chorus. But you may not realize all the lyrics are Scripture passages arranged to tell the story of Christ as the long-awaited Savior.

We've included 25 devotions so you can begin on December 1 and work through one reading per day until Christmas. Each devotion includes a brief Scripture reading, a devotional reflection, and questions for response. We encourage you to find a recording of Handel's *Messiah* and listen to the corresponding movement for each day.

You may choose to use this devotional individually, asking the Spirit to satisfy and stir your longing for Christ. But we also encourage you to consider, as the disciples did, who you can invite to behold Jesus along with you. These devotions can be used for family worship, with a group from your church, or with an unbelieving neighbor or friend.

However you use it, we pray this devotional will help you reflect on the wonder and glory not of a beautiful piece of music but of the Messiah it celebrates. May it stir in our hearts a longing to join our voices with that great multitude John describes in Revelation 19:6–7, which cries out,

Hallelujah!  
For the Lord our God  
the Almighty reigns.  
Let us rejoice and exult  
and give him the glory.

Surely he alone is worthy of all glory and honor and praise. Join us as we meditate on the Messiah this Christmas season. May we remember with fresh wonder that a Savior has been born *unto us*.

*Winfrey Brisley*





PART I

# Salvation Promised



DAY 1

# Exodus from Exile

JARED KENNEDY

READ

“Thus says the LORD,  
    who makes a way in the sea,  
    a path in the mighty waters,  
who brings forth chariot and horse,  
    army and warrior;  
they lie down, they cannot rise,  
    they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:  
‘Remember not the former things,  
    nor consider the things of old.  
Behold, I am doing a new thing;  
    now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
    and rivers in the desert.’” (Isa. 43:16–19)

## REFLECT

As the calendar nears December, we pull the lights out of the garage and the boxes of decorations from the attic. We set up the tree, hang the stockings, and start the annual Advent countdown. We bookmark the holiday playlist, finish (or begin!) the shopping, and mark down all the party dates. But in our Christmas busyness, do we see how God is at work in our daily lives? Do we remember how he has been at work over the past year?

We can see God working in the past and present, but the prophet Isaiah also saw God at work in the future. He called his firstborn son Shear-jashub (Isa. 7:3), a name that means “a remnant will return.” This name was a surprising choice. After all, when little Shear was born, God’s people still lived in the promised land. Isaiah named his children (and wrote his prophecies) well before Judah’s exile to Babylon. So, on the eighth day after Shear-jashub’s birth, when the boy’s name was announced at his dedication, Isaiah’s Jerusalem neighbors must’ve thought, *Hmm. Return from where?*

The people couldn’t see what God was doing. They were blind to his future purposes (6:9–10). But God gave the prophet faith to see the certainty of the Lord’s plans. Isaiah knew both exile and return loomed on the horizon. The nation’s neglect of God’s law, their busy self-reliance, and their trust in military pacts with foreign powers would end in judgment. To Babylonian exile they would go. But then, just as certainly, the Redeemer would deliver his people again (43:14–15).

What would this future salvation be like? God’s redemptive pattern for Judah’s future had already been

revealed in the past. When the Hebrew people suffered under Egyptian oppression, God made a way of escape through the sea (v. 16). Now, said Isaiah, God would build another highway in the wilderness (v. 19). At the exodus, the Lord snuffed out Pharaoh's army with their chariots and horses (v. 17). Now, God would again do away with the people's worldly securities so they'd put their trust in him alone.

"Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old," said the Lord. "Behold, I am doing a new thing" (vv. 18–19). If only the people could perceive it, they'd see God at work bringing forth his life-giving water (vv. 19–20). Though God's judgment still lay ahead, Isaiah also saw the day when sin would be atoned for and God's perfected people would declare his praise (v. 21).

God is still at work bringing new life today. In Christ, "the old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). Do you see it? Just look back at what he's already done. At the cross, our incarnate Lord took the fullness of God's wrath for our rebellion and gave us his perfect record instead (Isa. 43:25). When we were dead in our transgressions, God made us alive by his Spirit (Eph. 2:1–10). Looking forward with faith, we await Christ's second coming as the final exodus and the fulfillment of all God's promises. We can trust God will work in the future just as he has in the past. He's doing a new thing. May we have eyes to see it.

## RESPOND

As you begin this new holiday season, set aside time to remember Christ's work in your life. What has the Lord

done for you this past year? Did he answer a prayer? Did he bring a friend or family member to faith? Give God praise for the ways you've seen him work, and pray with expectant hope for his continued work in the coming year.