

# The Promise of Peace





This week marks the start of our Bassline Advent series, as we explore the promise of peace woven through the Christmas story. Long before Jesus was born, the prophet Isaiah spoke into a world filled with fear and division, promising that God would send a child who would bring lasting peace. In this first session we'll discover how that promise began with the sign of Immanuel, 'God with us', and was fulfilled in Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

#### You will need:

- Flipchart paper and pens
- Jenga set or box of building blocks



#### Say:

Our Bassline Advent series explores the promise of peace woven through the Christmas story. Our focus today is on the prophetic words of Isaiah, spoken hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus.

# Read:

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

- (Isaiah 9:6)



We hear these words from Isaiah every Christmas, but today we're going to discover their context and what was going on at the time they were spoken. Before we do that, we need to travel even further back in time. A long time before Isaiah, the kingdom of Israel split into two: Israel in the north (with Jeroboam as king) and Judah in the south (with Rehoboam as king). That division left God's people vulnerable and fearful, a situation that still shaped Judah's life when Isaiah was alive.

# Leader's notes:

You may want to give the 'Ask' questions ahead of the video so the group can take notes / look out for those answers.

#### Watch:

Jeroboam: A Kingdom Divided - Kings to Captivity - Episode 2 - Lineage (stop at 4:10) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NETdy7DRwo

#### Ask:

- What stood out to you about why the kingdom divided?
  Encourage the group to notice causes such as pride, fear or selfish leadership. They might mention that King Rehoboam rejected wise advice and chose power over compassion, which led the tribes of the north to walk away from him.
- In what ways did King Jeroboam disobey God's commands?
  Help the group recall how Jeroboam built alternative places of worship in the northern kingdom of Israel, with golden calves and appointed priests who were not from the tribe of Levi. Explain that this broke the first and second commandments and led the people into idolatry.
- Where do you see similar kinds of division or rivalry today in our world, schools, online or even within the Christian Church?
   Guide the group to notice that the same human patterns of pride, fear and mistrust often lie behind all kinds of division.

## Say:

God's people were now fractured into two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. That split happened around 930 BC. Fast forward almost 200 years to the time of Isaiah and not much had changed. The people were still divided, and the same fears and rivalries continued.

By the time Isaiah began to speak, around 740 BC, both kingdoms were under threat from the powerful empire of Assyria. The northern kingdom of Israel soon fell completely and Judah was next in line. The people were frightened, their leaders were desperate and peace felt impossible.





## Ask:

Why is it important to discover the background of the Bible verses we read, especially when they are often taken out of their context?



#### Leader's notes:

Throughout this section you may want to jot down key names, places and events on a flipchart to help the young people keep track of what is happening. These details may seem complicated, but they place Isaiah's words about the Messiah within a nation that was deeply divided and surrounded by conflict. In that setting, Isaiah's promise of peace takes on even greater power. The aim is to bring the Scripture to life and help the group hear these words as Isaiah's original audience did. The Amplify section is longer in this session, but the following sections have been adjusted accordingly.

# **Say:**

Isaiah's words about the coming of the Prince of Peace were first spoken into this world of fear and division. His message is still relevant today, because the same human patterns of pride, fear and conflict continue, and the world still longs for real peace. Our story for today starts in Isaiah 7.

#### Leader's notes:

Ask a confident reader in the group to read Isaiah 7:1-9. This passage is confusing with lots of complicated names, so reassure the reader that it's fine if they are finding it challenging.

#### Read:

- <sup>1</sup> When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it.
- <sup>2</sup> Now the house of David was told, 'Aram has allied itself with Ephraim'; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.
- <sup>3</sup> Then the Lord said to Isaiah, 'Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer's Field. <sup>4</sup> Say to him, "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smouldering stubs of firewood because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. <sup>5</sup> Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, <sup>6</sup> 'Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.' <sup>7</sup> Yet this is what the Sovereign Lord says:



'It will not take place, it will not happen,

<sup>8</sup> for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin.

Within sixty-five years

Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.

<sup>9</sup> The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.'

- (Isaiah 7:1-9)

#### Ask:

Does anyone have any idea what is going on in this passage of Scripture?

# Say:

At this point in history, King Ahaz rules over Judah, the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom, Israel (also known as Ephraim), has joined forces with Aram (modern-day Syria) to attack Judah. So, we have one group of God's chosen people, Israel, joining forces with outsiders to attack another group of God's chosen people, Judah.

The people of Judah were terrified. The passage says their hearts were shaken like trees in the wind. Into that fear, God sent Isaiah with a clear message for Ahaz. God promised that these two enemy nations would not succeed. Isaiah also delivered a warning as he told Ahaz that faith would be the deciding factor. If he did not stand firm in his faith, he would not stand at all.

## Ask:

- Why do you think God wanted Isaiah to speak so directly to Ahaz?

# Say:

Ahaz was faced with a choice. He could trust God for peace or look for peace in his own strength. Instead of trusting God, he began planning an alliance with the empire of Assyria, hoping their power would protect him. Even while Ahaz turned away, God still reached out.

#### Read:

- <sup>10</sup> Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, <sup>11</sup> 'Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.'
- 12 But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.'
- <sup>13</sup> Then Isaiah said, 'Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?
- (Isaiah 7:10-13)



### Ask:

- Why do you think God offers to give King Ahaz a clear sign that his kingdom will be safe?
- Why do you think Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign and why is Isaiah so frustrated by his response?

## Say:

Ahaz's refusal showed that his mind was already made up. He wanted safety, but on his own terms. Even though Ahaz refused the offer, Isaiah shared the sign from God anyway.

# Read:

<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

- (Isaiah 7: 14)

# Say:

The name Immanuel means 'God with us'. Isaiah's prophecy offers both an immediate and a future hope. In Ahaz's time, it was a reminder that God was still present with his people, even when their leaders were faithless. Isaiah's words also reached far beyond that moment as they looked ahead to the birth of a child who would one day bring true peace. Later, in Isaiah 9, the prophet continued his description of the coming Messiah.

## Read:

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called

Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it

establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and for ever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

- (Isaiah 9:6-7)

## Ask:

- What kind of peace do you think this passage describes?
- How is this promise of peace different from the temporary peace King Ahaz wanted?





For the people of Judah, these words were a reminder that God's plan had not been destroyed by their king's fear. The promise of a coming child showed that God's peace would arrive in an unexpected way. Power and control had failed to save them, but God would act through humility, love and righteousness. Centuries later, the child described by Isaiah was born into our world as the Prince of Peace. Isaiah then continued his message of hope with another vision, describing what this future king would be like.

# Read:

- The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
   the Spirit of counsel and of might,
   the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord 
  and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
- (Isaiah 11:2-3)

## Ask:

What qualities stand out to you about this Spirit-filled king?

# Say:

This final prophecy gives a picture of perfect peace – not peace that comes from political strength, but peace that flows from the Spirit of God. For the people of Judah, this vision reminded them that God's plan was still alive, even in the middle of their nation's weakness. For us, it points directly to Jesus, the one who fulfilled every promise Isaiah made. We do, however, need to address the elephant in the room!

## Ask:

If Jesus is the promised Prince of Peace, why does our world still feel far from peaceful?

# Say:

Isaiah's words show us that God's peace comes in two stages. When Jesus came into the world, he began the work of peace by restoring people's relationship with God and with one another. That peace can be real in our lives today. Isaiah's promise also points forward to a time when God will complete his work and bring perfect peace to all creation.

Advent reminds us that we live between these two moments. The Prince of Peace has already come, and his Spirit brings peace into our hearts even when the world around us is unsettled. Yet we still wait and hope for the day when his peace will fill the earth completely.





## Ask:

How does knowing the background to Isaiah's prophecies help you to understand the message of Christmas in a new way?



# Say:

After reflecting on Isaiah's prophecy, we're going to explore what the Bible means when it talks about peace.

#### Watch:

Shalom - Peace Bible Project (stop at 3:29) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLYORLZOaZE

#### Ask:

- What words or pictures stood out for you from the clip?
- What does the Bible mean when it talks about peace?

## Say:

In the clip, peace was described as a complete wall with no missing bricks. When one brick is missing or cracked, the whole wall is weaker.

## Leader's notes:

For this activity you will need a Jenga set or a box of building blocks, permanent markers or sticky labels and a flat surface to build on. If you have a large group, divide them into smaller teams, each with their own set of blocks.

Each person will write one word or short phrase on a block that represents something that helps build peace or restores what is broken. It could be kindness, forgiveness, patience, justice, honesty, listening or trust.

Invite everyone to place their block into the wall, interlocking them as a bricklayer would. As they do, ask them to read their word aloud. If a block falls or does not fit easily, use the moment to reflect on how peace sometimes takes effort and care to rebuild.

When the wall is complete, ask everyone to stand back and look at it together.

#### Ask:

- What did you notice as the wall took shape?





- What happens when one piece is missing or broken?
- How does this picture help us understand what God's peace looks like?
- Which words or actions are hardest to keep in place in everyday life? Which ones rob us of our peace?

Real peace is not about perfection; it is about learning the lesson King Ahaz failed to learn. Instead of searching for our peace elsewhere, we can trust in the promise of peace found in Jesus Christ.



#### Ask

What is your response to the following quote?

'Peace is not the absence of trouble, but the presence of Christ.'

- Sheila Walsh



#### Sau:

Let's take a moment to be still and look at the wall we have built. Each block represents something that helps bring peace or restore what is broken. When the pieces fit together, they form something strong and whole.

This is what the Bible means by peace. It is not about everything being perfect, but about God putting things back together through his love. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and he invites us to take part in building his peace in the world around us.

As the music plays, reflect on the words shown on the wall of peace.

## Watch:

Matt Maher - 'Glory (Let There Be Peace)' - (Official Lyric Video) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QW4c6DcxgGc

## Ask:

- As you listened to the song, what line stood out for you?
- How might peace begin in you this week?



If you would like to take one of the blocks home, then choose a word that will remind you to pray for peace. Let it remind you that peace is not just something we wait for, but something we build every day.



## Say:

In a piece of music, the coda brings the different aspects of the melody, harmonies and bassline to a conclusion. It pulls together the different themes and often, but not always, brings resolution to a piece of music.

#### Ask:

As you reflect on everything you have learned today, what is your coda?

What is the one thing you will take away from this session about the promise of peace found in the words of Isaiah?

## Leader's notes:

Give the young people a moment to think about your question and briefly share their coda with the group before the session comes to an end.

