



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Who Needs Christmas? / Week 1

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

BOTTOM LINE

The entire world needs Christmas.

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students understand that even when God seems silent, He is still working and can be trusted.

SCRIPTURE

"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2 NIV).

"And all peoples . . ." (Genesis 12:3b).

"I will make you a light to the Gentiles" (Isaiah 49:6b NLT).

"My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me" (Malachi 1:11a NIV).

"But when the set time had fully come . . ." (Galatians 4:4 NIV).

"Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you . . . You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end." (Luke 1:28b, 30b-33 NIV).

CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE

Andy Stanley uses a lot of Scripture from the Old Testament to connect God's promises to Abraham to Jesus' birth. By tracking with God's promises to Abraham and the story of the Jewish people, we see how God used their nation to bring us the hope and light of the world.

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to the birth of Jesus, there's so much hard-to-imagine stuff.

The Christmas story actually begins with God making an unbelievable, *impossible* promise.

The Lord said to Abram, "I want you to leave everything you know."

In other words, God said, "Abram, I'm involving myself in your story in an unstoppable way."

I sincerely don't know how Abraham chose to trust God in that moment, but he did.



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TENSION

It seemed clear that God's promises to Abraham were a cruel joke.

About 1,000 years after God's promises to Abraham, his descendants *finally* form the nation of Israel.

For the first time, Abraham's nation was in a position to do something significant in the world.

David is followed as king by his son Solomon.

300 years later the northern kingdom, which held on to the name Israel, was invaded by Assyria.

Then God sends *another* prophet, Malachi. Like Isaiah, his words seemed impossible.

In every part of the globe where people worshiped, there would be a group of people who recognized the power of God.

God's promise to Abraham seemed as out of reach as it could possibly be.

TRUTH

When everyone had lost hope in God's promises, God was ready to bless every nation.

With no one expecting it, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee.

Just like God's promises to Abraham, what the Angel said next to Mary made no sense.

In the end, God did exactly what He promised Abraham.

The whole time, God was behind the scenes. He was getting ready for the thing He had planned from the moment sin entered the world and people needed a Rescuer.

APPLICATION

So who needs Christmas? God decided that the entire world needs Christmas.

Through Christmas—and the story of Abraham—we're reminded that God is active, even when it seems like He's not.

God didn't just send Jesus to be the Savior of the world. **HE sent Jesus to be the Savior of you and your world.**

LANDING

Christmas is a reminder that even when circumstances seem hopeless, God can be trusted.

The world needs hope. It needs Christmas! It needs a Savior and a light!



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INTERACTIVE

This Interactive happens at the beginning of the Tension. We cover a lot of history in this script. To help students keep track, we're going to create a visual cue. For this Interactive put a table on stage covered by a tablecloth. You'll also need 14 large, clear jars. (Depending on the size of your room, you could use large mason jars or vases.) Label each jar clearly and visibly with one of the names below. You'll also need Christmas M&M candies, confetti, or something else to fill the jars.

1. Abraham
2. Isaac
3. Jacob/Esau
4. Joseph (and 11 brothers)
5. Egypt
6. Moses
7. Kingdom of Israel
8. David
9. Solomon

10. Two Kingdoms
11. One Kingdom
12. Captivity
13. Rome
14. Silence

You'll begin with Abraham's jar on the left (the students' left, your right). As you talk about Abram remind them that his great faith made God's promise seem possible. He believed God. Fill his jar completely with Christmas M&Ms. Then as you mention each moment in Israel's history, add each jar to the table and decrease the amount of M&M's. Talk about how with each season, Israel's hope for God fulfilling His promise dwindled—spiking slightly with David/Solomon—until finally with God's silence, there was very little (if any) left at all. If you add the jars left to right, you'll create visual timeline of Israel's history, making it easier for your students to follow along.



TEACHING SCRIPT

Who Needs Christmas? / Week 1

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BOTTOM LINE

THE ENTIRE WORLD NEEDS CHRISTMAS.

INTRODUCTION

4 MINUTES

When it comes to the birth of Jesus, there's so much hard-to-imagine stuff that a lot of people just don't believe it. I get that.

But if somebody can predict their own death and then their own resurrection, I'm not all that concerned about how they got *into* the world. Maybe this sounds strange, but Christianity doesn't hinge on the story of Jesus' birth. It really hinges on Jesus' *resurrection*.

As unbelievable as the story of Jesus' birth is, when you get the backstory, it actually becomes a *remarkable* story. Because the story of Christmas doesn't begin with Mary and Joseph trying to figure out how they got pregnant.

The Christmas story actually begins with a couple who's worried they'll never get pregnant. It begins with a couple who is confident they're *never* going to have a baby.

The backstory of Christmas doesn't begin with angels announcing that Jesus was born in a barn. It actually begins with God making an unbelievable, *impossible* promise.

And the person who received this promise couldn't have made sense of it in his culture. But that promise, made 2,000 years before Jesus was born, is found in a document we still have copies of today. And *that*, my friends, is part of what makes Christmas believable!

This document, called *Genesis*, tells us how the Jewish nation began. And it existed long before the Bible as we know it today. God made an extraordinary promise to a man named Abram, who Christians call "Father Abraham." Christmas began with him. Check this out . . .

The Lord said to Abram, "I want you to leave everything you know."

In ancient times, this was a very dangerous command because safety and security had everything to do with your tribe, family, and relatives. But God was telling Abram to leave all of that.

TEACHING SCRIPT



Uhhh, for what? Well, instructions would come later.

Then the promises begin. God says:

"I will make you into a great nation" (Genesis 12:2a NIV).

When he heard this, Abram was about 75 years old. Oh yeah, and he had no kids.

"Really, God? A great nation? I'm not even a grandpa! You know how this works, don't you?"

The promises continue . . .

"And I will bless you; I will make your name great" (Genesis 12:2b NIV).

This is like God saying, "Abram, I'm going to make you famous." Hard to believe for a guy who was a childless senior citizen.

But God's not done yet:

"And you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:2c NIV).

At this time, Abram was surrounded by extraordinary violence. People didn't bless anybody that wasn't a family member (and Abram was lacking in that department). Despite that, God told Abram that He would bless people who blessed him, and curse people who cursed Him.

In other words, God said, "Abram, I'm involving myself in your story in an unstoppable way. Good luck to anyone who tries to stop it!"

And then God gets to the completely unbelievable, incoherent part of the promise.

God says, *"And all peoples," (Genesis 12:3b)* as in, plural. All people groups, tribes, gatherings of families, nations, the list goes on and on. **"Every single person on Earth will ultimately be impacted by your life."** They will know your name, and they will be affected, directly or indirectly, by what I'm about to do through you.

Again, this was unheard of in an every-man-for-himself world. People didn't *bless*; they *defended* and *protected* their own.

I sincerely don't know how Abraham chose to trust God in that moment, but he did. He basically responded to God by saying, "I don't know how this can work. I'm old and childless. But you're the boss. If this is the impossible promise You've made, I choose to believe it."

TENSION

5 MINUTES



INTERACTIVE

The Interactive for this message happens right here in the script. Check out the Communicator Guide that precedes this script to find out what to do here.

- Then, Abraham and his wife Sarah had a son named Isaac. The miracle baby!
- Many years later, Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. (FYI, a *lot* of family dysfunction between those two!)
- Eventually, Jacob had 12 sons. Ten of those sons didn't like their brother Joseph. So after plotting to kill him, they conceded to sell him into slavery, simply because they could make some money by getting rid of him. (Suddenly your siblings don't seem so bad, do they?)
- Joseph ends up in Egypt. And dramatically, he rose to power during a time of great global famine. Because of that, all of his brothers and their families migrate there. And they become a nation, but it's a nation of slaves. And for several hundred years, Abraham's people—the people who were supposed to be the nation that was "blessed" by God in order to bless others, lived at the bottom of the barrel.

It seemed clear that God's promises to Abraham were a cruel joke.

But that wasn't the end of their story. God sent a deliverer, Moses, to lead them out of Egypt.

From Egypt, they SLOWLY made their way into the promised land, Canaan.

About 1,000 after God's promises to Abraham, his descendants *finally* form the nation of Israel. And eventually under the rule of King David, a warrior king, peace treaties were formed with surrounding nations in this part of the world. And for the first time, Abraham's nation was in a position to do something significant in the world.

David is followed by his son Solomon. Solomon was not only a builder king, but was also extraordinarily wise. As Solomon expanded the reach of the nation, people from all over the world came to see the wonders of his construction and listen to his wisdom. It all seemed to be coming together! NOW Israel, with all their wealth and influence, was positioned to be a blessing to the rest of the world.

But instead of blessing the world, Solomon chose to marry the daughters of foreign nations and worship their gods. God warned Solomon and threatened to divide the nation, but Solomon didn't listen. And after he died, Israel was divided, which meant a split of money, resources, and military power. For the next couple hundred years, there was chaos in both kingdoms.

TEACHING SCRIPT



300 years later the northern kingdom, which held on to the name Israel, was invaded by Assyria. People were spread out all over the Assyrian empire, and Israel was basically non-existent.

The southern kingdom, known as Judah, was on the verge of Assyrian invasion as well. God sent a prophet named Isaiah, who told the people:

"I will make you a light to the Gentiles" (Isaiah 49:6b NLT).

Or put another way, "I'm going to do something through you that will cause the rest of the world to look your direction." People are basically thinking, "Haha. Funny joke. We're not even a light to ourselves!"

And yes, they too are invaded and conquered by Assyria.

300 years go by. Under the rule of a king named Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians come to Jerusalem, tear down parts of the walls, and destroy the city. On top of that, they destroy the temple Solomon built and kidnap some of the best and brightest royal citizens.

Game over, right? The city is in ruins, along with the economy, military, and government.

Then God sends *another* prophet, Malachi. Like Isaiah, his words seemed impossible. Sure, they made you feel better when you heard them, but nobody really believed them. Malachi told the people, "God's name will be great among the nations because of you." This was said to a group of people whose "God" couldn't even protect them from enemies. It sounded like more empty promises and hype.

Malachi wasn't the type of guy who stopped talking when people quit listening. He said, on behalf of God:

"My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me" (Malachi 1:11a NIV).

Essentially this meant that God would be known throughout the world. **In every part of the globe where people worshiped, there would be a group of people who recognized the power of God.**

Nobody bought it, and rightly so. They had already been overrun by Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. Now the Greeks were coming after them. Then, in 63 BC, Rome sent Pompeii, who would conquer village after village, and eventually breach the walls of Jerusalem, conquer the city, and annex the whole area into the republic of Rome.

So yes, God made Abraham's descendants a nation. But only to see them trampled. The Jewish God would certainly *not* be worshiped throughout the world, because nobody's interested in a God who can't take care of His own people.

Let's pause for a moment and take a breath. I realize that I just *bombarded* you with a history lesson. But it's important to know, because it's what makes the story of Christmas so remarkable. **God's promise to Abraham seemed as out of reach as it could possibly be.**

TRUTH

3 MINUTES

Years later, the Apostle Paul wrote:

"But when the set time had fully come . . ." (Galatians 4:4 NIV).

In other words, when God had everything just the way He wanted. When there was peace in Rome and God had a way to get the undivided attention of the world, He put the ultimate plan in motion. **When virtually everyone had lost hope in God's promises to Abraham, God was ready to bless every nation on the planet.**

With no one expecting it, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee. Gabriel visited a virgin teenage girl named Mary who was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David.

The angel said:

"Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you . . . You have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever" (Luke 1:28b, 30b-33a NIV).

Just like God's promises to Abraham, what the Angel said next to Mary made absolutely no sense. He said:

"His kingdom will never end" (Luke 1:33b NIV).

Mary gave birth to Jesus. She and Joseph raised Him. And in the end, God did exactly what He promised Abraham. From Abraham's nation came Jesus. And through Jesus' life, teaching, death, and resurrection, Israel became a light to Gentiles all over the planet.

Every year, tens of thousands of people visit the part of the world where Jesus lived, where the light of His nation began to shine. The Jewish God is worshiped all over the globe. And today, the God we worship is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The reason why we have an Old Testament, and not just a New Testament, is because of the story of the Jewish people, and how their nation brought us the hope and light of the world, a Savior whose Kingdom would last forever.

What makes the Christmas story so believable is that the *entire story* of the nation of Israel is so remarkable. Nobody could have or would have made this up! It stretched over so many years that it seemed impossible. People lost sight—I would have, too, if I walked in their shoes!

But the whole time, God was behind the scenes. He was getting ready for the thing He had planned from the moment sin entered the world and people needed a Rescuer.

TEACHING SCRIPT



The Christmas story really began 2,000 years before the first Christmas. And it continues to unfold 2,000 years later!

APPLICATION

1 MINUTE

So who needs Christmas? God decided this . . .

The entire world needs Christmas.

So He put the story of Christmas on a global stage, involving some of the most significant people ever known in history. People who were footnotes in the Christmas story ultimately changed the world.

The birth of an unknown Jewish carpenter changed the world. Through Him, the Jews became a light to the Gentiles, and the message of Jesus' salvation was carried to every nation, tribe, and people group.

Through Christmas—and the story of Abraham—we're reminded that God is active, even when it seems like He's not. Even when God's silent, He's not still. He's interested in nations, and He's also interested in individuals. And He's always moving.

God didn't just send Jesus to be the Savior of the world. **HE sent Jesus to be the Savior of you and your world.**

LANDING

1 MINUTE

Christmas is a reminder that even when circumstances seem hopeless, God can be trusted. God cares, He's listening, and He keeps His promises. **Even when He's silent, He's not still.** He's moving on your behalf.

The world needs hope. It needs Christmas! It needs a Savior and a light!



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS
