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# CBC WEEKLY RESOURCES

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- I. Sermon Recap
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NOVEMBER 30, 2025  
COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH  
3645 Cashiers Rd, Highlands, NC 28741

# I. SERMON RECAP

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In Pastor Joel's sermon on the first Sunday of Advent, he highlighted the significance of the Advent season as a period of hopeful anticipation leading up to Christmas. While expressing a fondness for Thanksgiving's simplicity, Pastor Joel emphasized the unique spiritual importance of Advent, urging the congregation to savor this season of waiting and preparation for Christ's coming, avoiding the rush into Christmas's commercial aspects.

The core of Pastor Joel's message centered on hope, symbolized by the lighting of the hope candle. He shared the story of Abram from Genesis 15, focusing on the profound covenant God made with him. Pastor Joel explained the cultural significance of this ancient ritual, where God alone walked between the animal carcasses, placing the covenant's fulfillment entirely on His shoulders. This act, he noted, serves as a powerful reminder of God's steadfast promises and should inspire a deep trust in His faithfulness.

Concluding with a liturgical tradition, Pastor Joel had the congregation stand and focus on the Gospel's centrality by reading from John 1, which underscores the incarnation of Christ as the ultimate realization of hope. He encouraged the congregation to embrace the Advent season with expectant hearts, filled with hope, joy, and peace. Pastor Joel's closing benediction called for trust in God and an overflow of hope through the Holy Spirit as they carry the message of healing into a fractured world.

## Chapters

### Chapter 1: Understanding Biblical Hope

We explore the difference between casual hope and biblical hope, discovering that true hope is an active, covenant-rooted trust in God rather than a passive wish.

### Chapter 2: Abraham's Covenant of Hope

We examine God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15, where God promises descendants as numerous as the stars and seals the covenant by passing through the sacrificed animals alone.

### Chapter 3: Mystery and Revelation in God's Presence

We discover how the smoking fire pot and flaming torch represent both the mystery and revelation of God, foreshadowing His guidance of Israel through the wilderness.

### Chapter 4: The Word Became Flesh

We celebrate the fulfillment of hope in Jesus Christ through John 1, recognizing that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, bringing light to overcome darkness.

## II. STUDY GUIDE

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### Key Points:

- Hope in our culture is often reduced to passive wishing, but biblical hope is an active, covenant-rooted trust in God
- The Hebrew concept of hope means "to bind together" or "to wait with tension"—suggesting enduring, resilient hope even in bleak circumstances
- In the Abrahamic covenant, God alone passed between the sacrificed animals, making the covenant entirely dependent on God's faithfulness, not human performance
- Our circumstances and emotions do not dictate our theology—hope is based on relationship with God, not knowledge or feelings
- The smoking fire pot and flaming torch represent both God's mystery and revelation, foreshadowing the pillar of cloud and fire that would guide Israel
- Jewish understanding views hope as obligatory—believers are obligated to believe redemption is always possible
- Hope is realized in Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh and made his dwelling among us
- Christians are called to find where God is at work and join Him there, being the hands and feet of Jesus

### Key Scripture

**Genesis 15:1-18 The Abrahamic Covenant (primary text, read extensively).** Specifically, verses 1-6 (God's promise to Abram about descendants). Also see verses 17-21 (The covenant ceremony with fire pot and torch).

**John 1:1-14 The Word Became Flesh (read at conclusion)**

**Romans 15:13 (Benediction)** May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Hebrews 11 Heroes of Faith (mentioned)**

### Alluded To:

**Exodus 13:21-22** By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

**John 17:14-16** I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it.

**Relevant Verses for Main Themes:**

**Psalms 130:5** "I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope."

**Jeremiah 29:11** God's plans for hope and future

**Romans 5:5** "Hope does not put us to shame..."

**1 Peter 1:3** Living hope through the resurrection

**Isaiah 9:6-7** Prophecy of the coming Messiah (Advent theme)

**Luke 2:1-20** The Christmas narrative (implied through Advent discussion)

# III. DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL

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## 5-Day Advent Devotional: Living in Covenant Hope

### Day 1: Hope as Steadfast Expectation

Question: What does it mean practically to live with 'steadfast hope' when our circumstances and emotions seem to contradict God's promises? As Pastor Crawford reminds us, "circumstances and emotions do not dictate theology."

Reading: Genesis 15:1-6

Devotional: Abraham stood beneath a star-filled sky, childless and aging, yet God invited him to count the uncountable. True biblical hope isn't wishful thinking, it's "waiting with tension," a steadfast expectation rooted in relationship with God. The Hebrew understanding reveals hope as binding ourselves to God's promises despite circumstances that scream impossibility. Like Abraham, we're called to active, covenant-rooted trust. Today, your circumstances and emotions don't dictate God's faithfulness.

What impossible promise are you holding? Stand under your own metaphorical stars and choose to believe God's character over your current reality. Hope isn't optimism; it's choosing faithfulness despite uncertainty.

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### Day 2: The One-Sided Covenant

Question: In what ways does God making the covenant with Abraham alone, without requiring Abraham to walk through the split animals, transform our understanding of grace and unconditional promise?

Reading: Genesis 15:7-21

Devotional: In ancient covenant ceremonies, both parties walked between split animals, pledging their lives to the agreement. When Abraham fell into a deep sleep, only God (represented by smoking fire and flaming torch) passed between the sacrifice. This wasn't conditional. God alone bore the weight of the promise. How liberating!

Our salvation doesn't depend on our perfect performance but on God's unchanging character. The pillar of cloud and fire that later guided Israel through the wilderness was foreshadowed here, mystery and revelation combined. God is both present and transcendent, guiding and mysterious.

**Rest today in this truth: God's promises rest entirely on His faithfulness, not yours.**

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### Day 3: The Word Made Flesh

Question: In what ways does the Advent season of waiting and anticipation counter our cultural rush toward Christmas, and how might intentional waiting deepen our spiritual experience?

Reading: John 1:1-14

Devotional: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." The hope Abraham clung to under starlit skies found its ultimate fulfillment in Bethlehem's manger. Jesus didn't remain a distant deity but entered creation, walking dusty roads and experiencing human limitation. This is the scandal and beauty of Advent. The light shines in darkness, and darkness cannot overcome it.

As you prepare for Christmas, resist rushing past this waiting season. Let anticipation build. The God who made a covenant with Abraham kept every promise, culminating in Jesus. You are not hoping in wishful thinking but in the God who literally moved heaven to earth for a relationship with you.

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### Day 4: Partnering with God's Redemptive Work

Question: How does the Jewish concept of teshuva (return or repair) offer hope for healing fractured relationships in our own lives and in our divided world?

Reading: Romans 15:13; Hebrews 11:8-12

Devotional: Jewish tradition teaches that hope is obligatory; we're required to believe redemption is possible, that fractured worlds and hearts can heal. This isn't passive waiting but active participation in God's restoration work. You don't need to manufacture grand purposes; simply look where God is already working and join Him there. Be the hands and feet of Jesus in your grocery store aisle, workplace, or family gathering. Abraham's faithfulness made him a hero, not because he had all the answers but because he maintained a relationship through uncertainty.

Today, where do you see God at work? How might you partner with Him in bringing hope to fractured places around you?

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### Day 5: Hope That Overflows

Question: In what ways does the Advent season of waiting and anticipation counter our cultural rush toward Christmas, and how might intentional waiting deepen our spiritual experience?

Reading: Romans 15:4-13

Devotional: Paul prays that we "overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Overflow; not barely enough, not just sufficient, but abundantly spilling over. This Advent hope isn't limited to our personal salvation but extends to our world's healing. Due to Abraham's covenant faithfulness, because Jesus became flesh, because the Spirit indwells us, we carry hope into every dark space. As you move toward this year's Christmas celebration, remember: God wins. You've read the end of the story. Let this certainty shape how you engage fractured relationships, cultural tensions, and personal uncertainties.

**May you enter and leave each day with hearts full of expectant hope, living as children of the covenant-keeping God.**

# IV. SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

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## Small Group Guide: Hope in Advent

### Opening Prayer

### Icebreaker Question

What is your favorite holiday tradition, and why? How do you typically experience the season between Thanksgiving and Christmas?

### Sermon Summary

Pastor Joel explores the biblical concept of hope through the lens of God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. Unlike our casual use of the word "hope" (hoping for good weather or a favorite team to win), biblical hope is a steadfast, covenant-rooted trust in God. The sermon emphasizes that when God made His covenant with Abraham, He alone passed between the sacrificed animals. This signifies that the covenant depended entirely on God's faithfulness, not Abraham's. This same hope is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.

### Key Takeaways

Biblical hope is different from wishful thinking. It's an active, covenant-rooted trust in God

Hope requires steadfastness - "Waiting with tension" and remaining faithful despite uncertainty.

God's promises depend on His faithfulness, not ours. God alone walked through the covenant ceremony.

Our circumstances don't dictate our theology. Hope remains even when situations look bleak

Hope is realized in Jesus. The Advent season reminds us that God keeps His promises

## Discussion Questions

### Understanding Hope

How do you typically use the word "hope" in everyday conversation? How does that differ from the biblical concept of hope described in the sermon?

The Hebrew understanding of hope includes "waiting with tension." What does it mean to live in tension as believers? Can you share an example from your own life?

Read Genesis 15:1-21.

What stands out to you about God's interaction with Abraham? What would have been going through Abraham's mind during this encounter?

### The Covenant

Why is it significant that only God (represented by the smoking fire pot and flaming torch) passed between the animal sacrifices? What does this tell us about the nature of God's promises?

Pastor Joel said, "When God makes a promise, it's all on him. It's never conditional." How does this truth impact your relationship with God? Your sense of security?

How do you see the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness foreshadowed in Genesis 15? What does this teach us about God's consistency?

### Living with Hope

The sermon mentions that hope is "obligated" in Jewish understanding, believers are obligated to believe redemption is possible. How does this challenge or encourage you?

"Your circumstances and your emotions do not dictate your theology." When have you struggled to remember this truth? How can we help each other maintain hope during difficult seasons?

Pastor Joel emphasized that it's "always about relationship" rather than knowledge. How does focusing on a relationship with God change the way we approach faith and hope?



### Advent Application

How can we intentionally slow down during Advent rather than rushing to Christmas? What practices might help us "wait with anticipation"?

Read John 1:1-14 together.

How does the incarnation of Christ (God becoming flesh) fulfill the hope established in God's covenant with Abraham?

Pastor Joel said, "Go and see where God is at work and join Him in that work." Where do you see God at work around you right now? How can you join Him?

### Practical Applications

#### This Week

Daily Reflection: Each morning, identify one thing you're "hoping for" in the casual sense, then pray about what God wants you to place steadfast hope in instead.

Scripture Memory: Memorize Romans 15:13 - "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

Relationship Focus: Identify one person in your life with whom you can build or deepen relationship, showing them the hope of Christ through your presence.

#### Throughout Advent

Slow Down: Choose one Christmas activity to eliminate or simplify to create space for reflection and anticipation.

Light a Candle: If possible, light an Advent candle at home each week and spend time reflecting on hope, peace, joy, and love.

Journal: Keep an Advent journal, noting moments when you see God at work and where you're learning to wait with hopeful tension

### In Your Relationships

**Practice Tension:** When you have a conversation with someone you disagree with, practice "living in the tension" rather than needing to win the debate

**Be Present:** Like Pastor Joel's example at the grocery store, look for small ways to be a familiar, hopeful face to people in your regular routines

**Share Your Story:** Tell someone about a time when God proved faithful even when circumstances looked bleak

### Closing

End your time by reading John 1:14 together: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

### Pray

**Benediction:** "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

### For Next Week

Prepare for the second week of Advent by reading about the theme of peace. Consider reading Isaiah 9:6-7 and reflecting on what it means that Jesus is the Prince of Peace.