

# JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

DEVOTIONAL READING: Isaiah 9:1-7

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:1-7

TODAY'S SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 9:2-7

## I. The Great Reversal

Isaiah 9:2-5

**2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.**

**3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.**

**4 For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian.**

**5 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.**

2. This prophetic word was so certain that Isaiah spoke of the prophecy as having already been fulfilled. *The people* had continued to walk as if in the darkest part of the night. These were the Lord's own people, whose ways the Lord had instructed Isaiah not to adopt (Isaiah 8:11). They apparently had no desire to walk in the light. They preferred *the land of the shadow of death*, a deep darkness of mind and spirit, bereft of God's presence.

Yet it is on people who seem to prefer darkness that a *great light* comes. They *have*

*seen* (personal experience) this light and *upon them hath the light shined* (objective fact). Light is a figure of speech for God himself or for His divine presence.

3a. *The nation* of Israel would be *multiplied* many times over in terms of both population and boundaries. Following Jesus' ministry, this expansion was caused by the great influx of Gentiles into the kingdom of God, not of David, in fulfillment of the first promise of God to Abraham.

And it did not happen overnight. The fulfillment of this verse was neither in national Judah nor in the northern kingdom of divided Israel. Judah was weak compared to the world powers and was never a powerful nation after Assyria consolidated control over the region. Even after the return from Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC, times were very difficult. The multiplying of the nation must refer to a spiritual reality.

3b. The rapid shift from the positive "thou hast multiplied the nation" of verse 3a to the negative *and not increased the joy* here is startling. One interpretation proposes that the prophet was foreseeing different times in history.

The word for *not* in Hebrew sounds exactly like the word for *to it* (a homonym). Thus it would be easy for a copyist of Hebrew to write *not* when another person actually is saying *to it* (or vice versa) during

verbal dictation. If *to it* was the original intent, then the idea is something like, “To it [the nation] you have increased the joy!” This uncertainty between *not* and *to it* (or *to him*) occurs over a dozen times in the Old Testament Hebrew text. Context usually makes clear which is intended, but the case before us is a difficult one.

3c. To the situation just noted, Isaiah compared the future joy from the light to two of the greatest occasions for joy in the ancient world: *harvest* time and the victorious end of war, indicated by *the spoil* thereof. Both events are considered gifts from God (see Deuteronomy 28:2-8). The outcomes of harvest and war were matters of life and death. No wonder Isaiah used these as comparisons for the forthcoming joy when the light would arrive!

4. The analogy in view is freedom from foreign domination. *The day of Midian* refers to Gideon’s defeat of the Midianites, over 400 years in the past at this point (Judges 6–8). Gideon’s actions triggered knowledge that his victory could only have been an act of God (7:2-14). No one expected victory in Gideon’s day, and no one would expect it in Jesus’ day.

The imagery is of a disenfranchised, subjugated people. This would be the status of the Jews under Roman rule in the time of Jesus. But Jesus came to grant deliverance from bondage to a different, more oppressive master: sin.

5a. *Garments rolled in blood* represents the dead and wounded. Imagine thousands of soldiers engaged in hand-to-hand combat with weapons such as spears, swords, and cudgels. The suffering would be immense.

5b. The end of warfare is another reason for great rejoicing. Once the people are liberated, a spreading peace will allow the *burning* of the blood-stained garments of the previous statement. There will be no more need for these. This outcome match-

es what the prophet foresees in Isaiah 2:4 (compare Psalm 46:9; Zechariah 9:10).

## II. The Promised Child Isaiah 9:6-7

**6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.**

**7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.**

6a. The ultimate reason for joy is the birth of an extraordinary *child*. He is *given* to us by God. This is not said of other births, although this child was to have been a sign to Ahaz—a sign he refused!

Isaiah 7:14 requires us to conclude that this child is to be the coming Emmanuel (“God with us”). The role of this *son* is to administer *the government*. The greatest promise of God is not merely the end of a short-term crisis. Rather, God promises to send a King who will surpass what His people have seen in their rulers. As with Psalm 89, the language here about the birth of a son reminds us of the promises to the patriarchs and to David of sons through whom God would bring promised blessings. The Son will bear the burden of responsibility for the rule and dominion over the Lord’s people. When His shoulder bears the rule of government, it frees the people from the violence they had endured.

6b. Names are significant throughout Isaiah’s ministry and in his confrontation with kings, especially Ahaz. The set of names we see starting here reminds us of “throne names” used for newly crowned

kings. These names give the nature and character of this child and His perfect rule.

Four paired descriptions mark Him as extraordinary. First is *Wonderful, Counselor*. We have weakened the meaning of *wonderful* in the English language. Today this word means something like “really, really good.” When one experiences the wonderful in this sense, one knows that this is a miraculous work of God Almighty.

To combine this with the function of counselor means that Isaiah foresaw someone who knows all the questions and has all the answers. This can be only God himself. Solomon, David’s son, also was given great wisdom that could be explained only supernaturally. This child perhaps is presented as the “new Solomon,” who gives supernatural counsel to His subjects. Even so, the child is to be greater than Solomon. The child’s wise, supernatural counsel will be the exact opposite of that of the supposedly wise counselors of Isaiah 19:11.

6c. The next prophetic designation amplifies the previous. The descriptive word *mighty* is drawn from the world of war heroes. We might liken this to our term *invincible*, the one who cannot be defeated. The coming child will not be bested by any army, human or otherwise, in the reign of His universal government. *Mighty God* is used also in Isaiah 10:21 to refer to the Lord.

6d. This exact title is found only here in the Old Testament. Indeed, the Old Testament rarely uses the term *Father* to refer to God. It remains for Jesus to teach humans that God is our Father in a universal, loving, and holy way. This title emphasizes the Father’s eternal nature and/or His control over eternity and time itself. The concept of eternity was difficult to grasp in Isaiah’s day and remains so for us.

The eternity of God, however, is a characteristic that sets Him apart in a decisive way. This too seems to ascribe divinity to the child: born into time, He transcends time. The child will bring about conditions in the new government that will fulfill the role of the divine fatherhood of God.

6e. War characterizes earthly kingdoms. The only son of David we know of who did not go to war was Solomon, yet Solomon established his reign with bloodshed. Solomon’s name means “peace,” but the promised child will be the ultimate *Prince of Peace*.

7. The promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 became, at Sinai, the purpose of Israel’s existence. The broader redemptive work through David is found in a promise that his dynasty will never *end*. But the coming child would be in a different category from any earthly monarch. His reign is characterized in five ways that no normal human ruler can ever measure up to.

First, His reign is to be endlessly increasing, as opposed to the rise and fall of empires throughout history. Second, it is to be endlessly peaceful, never at war or preparing for war. It advances because of its *peace*, not in spite of it. Third, it is to be tied to the most beloved ruler of Israel, King David. Fourth, it is to be established on true *justice*, not on brute strength and aggression. Fifth, its existence and increase are guaranteed by *the zeal of the Lord*. This is to be a primary matter for the all-powerful God of Israel.

Jesus’ dominion will be characterized by peace, not war. His agenda will be reconciliation and *shalom*. His *kingdom* is established not just as an end to war, but as positive harmony and goodwill—the kind of peace that Israel had not known. His *government* and peace expand forever because people from all nations will be at peace with God.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

## JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

### Into the Lesson

What is the deepest physical darkness you've ever experienced, and why is complete darkness something we fear?

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What was your darkest spiritual experience, and what was that experience like?

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Today's Scripture text points to the most terrible darkness of all.

### Into the Word

Read Isaiah 9:2-7. What are the "signs of victory" in this Scripture text?

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What are the possible literal meanings of this Scripture text?

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What are the possible spiritual implications of this Scripture text?

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What parts of Isaiah's prophecy would be most difficult to understand if you did not have knowledge of Jesus?

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What parts would be most encouraging in that case?

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Write a job description for Jesus to show Him fulfilling the following titles:

Wonderful, Counsellor: \_\_\_\_\_

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Mighty God: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Everlasting Father: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Prince of Peace \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Into Life

How might the previous titles describe the light that Jesus offers our culture today?

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Which title for Jesus brings the most hope for you personally and why?

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## THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Jesus the King is like no other!