

**A Child Was Born For You**

As Jesus begins His public ministry of preaching the presence of the “kingdom of heaven” (cf. **Matt. 4:17**) we expect the inauguration of such a special moment in redemptive history to take place in Jerusalem, the epicenter of Israel and her history. Instead, we are told by the Gospel writers that the Messiah begins His vocation in “Galilee of the Gentiles,” named such because of the overwhelming presence of “foreigners,” “Gentiles” which populated the Promised Land of Israel.

As Matthew reveals this tidbit of unexpected knowledge to his reader we are at first mildly interested in the fact that Matthew goes on to say that the fact that Jesus began His ministry there was to fulfill the prophecy spoken through Isaiah (**vv. 14-16**). Now, that makes what Matthew reveals all the more interesting. We always like to hear the Gospel writers make little connections like this, especially ones we can make use of in our evangelistic endeavors. We have here yet another prophetic fulfillment showing that God’s Word has an amazing ability to predict the future with impeccable accuracy. But is that all that is going on here? Do we just make note of this reference for future apologetic encounters and tuck it away neatly into our apologetic arsenal? Can we not discover a little more meaning contained in Matthew’s Isaiah reference?

Well, Matthew tells us that Jesus leaves Nazareth and enters into Capernaum (**vv. 12-13**). Jesus enters into Capernaum, not only to fulfill the prophecy, but also to be far away from the Pharisee’s center of power. This provided a much more tolerant atmosphere and acceptance in the early days of Jesus’ ministry. Capernaum was a fishing community on the Northwestern shores of the Sea of Galilee. It is here that many of the future disciples of Jesus lived. Jesus chooses Capernaum for these reasons as the center of operation for His ministry. Zebulun and Naphtali were tribal districts within Israel’s borders, much like our counties. The city of Capernaum was in the county, or district of Naphtali, which ran along the western coast of the Sea of Galilee. The district of Zebulun was on the southwestern border of Naphtali. Here Jesus begins and performs much of His ministry.

But the fact that Matthew tells us that Jesus went into these districts in order to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet suggests that even more is going on in Matthew’s mind that he, and more importantly the Holy Spirit through Matthew, wishes us to see.

Maybe the term “fulfill” can add a little more to our understanding of what Matthew wants us to see. Without going into much detail, Matthew uses the word not simply to key the reader in, suggesting that we have the referent to which the predictive prophecy was pointing. There is much more going on in Matthew’s use of “fulfill.” We might get at this better by turning the

words around to say that Matthew sees what Jesus is doing here as “filling full” both as reaching the culmination and the fullness of all that God had ultimately promised. Let’s look at another example within Matthew’s Gospel that might help explain what Matthew is doing – see **1:20-25**. Matthew, once again quotes a reference of predictive prophecy from Isaiah and then says that what is taking place here in the appearance of Messiah Jesus fills full what God had promised through Isaiah (**cf. Isa. 7:14**).

However, when we go back to read the actual prophecy in Isaiah the reader is normally shocked to find out that the original prophecy was actually looking forward to something that was fulfilled within a few short years of being given. What do I mean?

Well, before we look back at Isaiah, where I wish to spend the rest of our time this morning, I need to make one more important point. The writers of the New Testament often either quote directly from the Old Testament, or at least make an allusion, by which they are anticipating the reader to either already know the whole passage or that he or she will go back and look up the whole passage in its context to understand the fullness of the original reference. So we don’t want to limit our understanding of the New Testament’s use of the Old Testament quote to that verse alone. Rather, we want to go back to where it is quoting from the Old Testament and study the reference in its larger context.

Let’s turn to **Isaiah 7:1** and work through **9:7**. We begin in **7:1** by being told that the king of Syria has joined the king of northern Israel in an alliance to overthrow King Ahaz of Judah. As a result, the whole house of David is shaking in terror (**7:2**). So God sends Isaiah to King Ahaz to assure the king that “God is with His people,” or “Immanuel” (**7:3-9**). God tells Isaiah to tell the King, “Do not be afraid. God is with you.”

But that wasn’t enough for the king. He was still frightened. So God offered to give the king a sign, any sign he asked for, to assure him of God’s love and protection of His people. The king refused God’s offer so God gave him a sign of God’s own choosing (**7:13-16**). Now, exactly when was this sign of God’s promise fulfilled? **See 8:3-4**.

As far as Isaiah could discern, with the birth of his own child God had fulfilled His promise to the house of David. Through Isaiah’s son, God had proved faithful to be “Immanuel” in their darkest hour. God was with His people and Judah’s enemies were in fact carried away (Syria in 732 B.C. and Ephraim in 722 B.C.) within a few short years as God had promised. But was this the **complete** fulfillment of the larger promise of God being with His people (the Immanuel promise) to bring them the ultimate salvation to be given? Or, was this a mere foretaste of something far greater (far more special, superior) than any of the prophets of old could have anticipated in their day? The writers of the New Testament tell us that the prophets of the Old Testament often spoke of greater fulfillments than even they could fully grasp at the time of their writing, which can be

truly “seen” only after the moment in salvation history when God fills full all that He has promised in Jesus. Peter for instance said:

**1 Peter 1:10-12** <sup>10</sup> ¶ As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, <sup>11</sup> seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. <sup>12</sup> It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.

It is only after Messiah Jesus has come and fulfilled the promises of God and after He has poured out His Spirit upon the church that we can now look back at these Old Testament stories with that “Aha” moment of how God has gloriously put all things back together in Jesus.

But we are not finished with Isaiah and King Ahaz just yet. Sadly, because King Ahaz didn’t trust the LORD God, God promised to punish Judah for their lack of faith in God. If they refused to know their God, then God was really going to hide His face from them (**see Isaiah 8:5-8**). Further, when they cry out for help all they will find is the deepest, darkest wasteland with absolutely no hope of a Savior. Isaiah describes their despair and hopelessness in **Isaiah 8:21-22**.

But as God always is – He is faithful, even when we are unfaithful (**cf. Lam. 3:23; 2 Tim. 2:13**) – He provides hope for a chosen remnant within the nation. Into the darkness of fear and gloom, a great light will shine brightly (**9:1-2**). Note especially the location of the appearance of this light – in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali (**9:1**). Why are these lands special? Think of where they are located. They are in the far north of Israel – they would have been the territories where Assyria, and later Babylon, would have first ravaged Israel. The people living in these districts would have been the first to be attacked and carried away into captivity. Think of what it must have felt like for Israel to lose her homeland. There are probably not many things more tragic or demoralizing for a nation than to lose possession of her land. Without a land there is no hope of rebuilding; of starting over.

Isaiah describes the people of Israel as “walking” or “wandering” (Isaiah) “sitting” (Matthew) in darkness – as “dwelling” in deep darkness (Matthew – the “shadow of death”) (**Isa. 9:2; Matt. 4:16**). God now promises to those who were first devastated that God will bring light to them first. It is highly significant then that Jesus begins His ministry of preaching the coming of the kingdom of God here first. What Matthew is saying in His Gospel is that what God promised in **Isaiah 9:1-2** of the great light of God’s appearance to His people in darkness has been filled full as Jesus leaves Nazareth and settles in Capernaum (**Matt. 4:13**).

Isaiah describes this day of hope with resounding jubilation:

1. The remnant will be multiplied to once again become a great nation (v. 3a). This is especially significant that this promise takes place in the land “beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles” (v. 2). God will make the promise through Isaiah:

**Isaiah 49:5-6** <sup>5</sup> And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength), <sup>6</sup> He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

This is all especially in fulfillment of what God promised Israel in **Isa. 2:3-5**.

2. Isaiah goes on to describe their joy as “increased” “intensified” “eschatological” or “escalated” – as a farmer might experience at the joy of a new harvest or as warriors might experience as they divide up the spoils of war (9:3).

Why such joy? Why such jubilation? Or more importantly where does God fix our attention to the location of this joy?

Isaiah gives us a threefold “for” to explain this overwhelming joy, but all three are located in a person – or more specifically in “the birth of a child” (vv. 4, 5, 6-7) – “for unto us a child is born, to us a son is given” – the emphasis is both upon God’s sovereign initiative to “give us” (cf. v. 7b) and “a child is born” or “a son is given”. God holds up for us a child upon which we are to hope. As Moses held up the serpent in the wilderness so God holds up this child as the center of the world’s hope (cf. **Num. 21:9; John 3:14-15**). The location Israel’s and all nations hope is located in the mere fact that God will give this child as a gift. And through this son, God will:

1. God breaks all human oppression (v. 4) - God will remove all who oppress His people and give them peace from all her warfare as in the days when God destroyed the Midianites through Gideon (**Judges 6-7**).
2. God will destroy all vestiges of warfare (v. 5) - Even the remnants of her warfare (all remembrance) will be taken away, similarly to when God promises:

**Revelation 21:3-4** "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, <sup>4</sup> and He will

wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

3. God will rest the government of His Kingdom on the shoulders of this child to be born (v. 6). Further, we can take great comfort that He (the promised child) will be able to carry the full weight of the government because of who He is (cf. how Paul does this in **Eph. 1:19-23; Col. 1:15-18**). His name (which points to His character; each needs to be unpacked)
  - a. Wonderful Counselor – a wise governor/leader who will rule with true wisdom unlike the current king Ahaz (cf. **11:2; 28:29**); His wisdom will lead Him to make wise plans to bring about peace;
  - b. Mighty God – the title of God Himself as the Divine Warrior who fights for His people who will defeat all of His people's enemies (cf. **Dan. 7:23-27; Isa. 10:20-21; Neh. 9:32; Jer. 32:18**);
  - c. Everlasting Father – don't think of first person of the Trinity here; Messiah is a "father" to His people as the beneficent protector and provider (cf. **Isa. 22:21; Job 29:16**). He will be the ideal king/shepherd of His people and will care for His people the way God cares for His people (cf. **Ezek. 34:23-24; Isa. 63:16; 64:9; 103:13**);
  - d. Prince of Peace – as a result of His destruction of the enemies of God's people He will establish His reign of peace, which will finally result in just and wise decisions (cf. **Isa. 2:4; 11:6-9; 42:4; 49:7; 52:15**);
4. God will sustain this Kingdom forever with justice and righteousness (v. 7) in fulfillment of His promise to David (cf. **2 Sam. 7:12-16**). Even the best of the Davidic kings would never measure up to this king. The picture here is not a continuation of the Davidic dynasty of one king replacing another but of One Divine King who will be a man (born) who will sit on the throne forever (i.e., there will be no other successor).

This promise is so certain that God gives it to Israel with past tense verbs (**vv. 2-3**). Matthew then points to this child-Messiah-King who will be born to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, an everlasting Kingdom that God Himself (the zeal of the LORD) will establish. It is this Kingdom that Jesus now enters into our world to proclaim (**Matt. 4:17**), the Kingdom which He will seal with His own blood, who upon being raised from death to life to take up His throne at His Father right hand where every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Messiah Jesus is LORD, to the glory of God the Father.           **Amen! –SDG-**