

ISAIAH 9 “A CHILD IS BORN” – THE PRINCE OF PEACE! – PART 1

The first words of this chapter plainly refer to the close of the foregoing one, where everything looked black and melancholy. There were threatenings of trouble, darkness, and dimness – very bad indeed, yet they were not so bad that light would never arise in the darkness for the upright (Ps. 112:4). It is a comforting thought that when things are at their darkest, He Who forms the light and creates the darkness (chapter 45:7) has appointed the boundaries of both.

Promises are made here in these first seven verses, and they all point ultimately to the grace of the Gospel. For example, there would be a glorious light (verses 1-2) which would dispel the dimness of the times, so that they would not be as they had once been. They would not be as dark as when the Lord “lightly afflicted” the land of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali; or when more grievous afflictions were sent to the regions “by the way of the sea” and “beyond Jordan, in Galilee.” These were remote areas of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which were among the first to be subjected to captivity at the hands of the nation’s enemies. Well, those were dark times indeed for the land of Zebulun and Naphtali; there certainly was dimness of anguish in Galilee during those days. But that dimness would not prevail nor last forever!

However, this prophecy was to have its full accomplishment when our Lord Jesus began to appear as the Great Prophet, and to preach the Gospel in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. These verses are quoted by Matthew (Matt. 4:14-16), who shows how our Savior was indeed the great Light Who appeared in the land of Galilee. At the end of the eighth chapter, Isaiah had been foretelling the darkness which would overshadow all those who neglected the Word of God. At the time of our Lord’s birth, the whole world (generally speaking) was wrapped in darkness – for the heathen did not possess the Word of God; and the Jews, who *did* possess it, did not love it. They paid much more attention to their own superstitions and traditions. Darkness was indeed covering the earth, but then the Savior suddenly appeared – the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in His wings! (Mal. 3:2) Jesus repeatedly spoke of Himself as the Light (John 8:12); and to people who were sitting in darkness, how welcome this Light must have been! If we can truly say that Christ is precious to us; and if He has raised us up from the darkness in which we once sat, and has caused us to walk in the light of the Lord (chapter 2:5) – then we have a blessed portion indeed! And in due time, we shall reach that city which has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof! (Rev. 21:23)

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ A glorious prophecy of Jesus Christ and His everlasting Kingdom – verses 1-7
- ❖ Dreadful threatenings of judgment upon the rebellious people of Israel, and upon all enemies of the Kingdom of Christ – verses 8-21

Having mentioned the coming of Christ, the prophet goes on to speak of the glorious results which His coming will ultimately accomplish. He describes the joy of Christ's redeemed people as the joy of harvest-time, and as the joy of men who divide up the plunder after a great victory (verse 3). In verse 4, he refers to "the day of Midian" – that is, the great victory which Gideon obtained over the Midianites, who had been oppressing the children of Israel (Jud. 7). In Gideon, we find much that represents Jesus! Gideon was a poor man, and the least in his father's house (Jud. 6:15); and thus he resembled the despised and rejected Savior (chapter 53:3). Gideon commenced his warfare with a small band of warriors; and the weapons with which he armed them were not ordinary weapons of war, but only trumpets and lamps in clay pots. Yet his victory was complete; and before the battle was over, he had employed the sword to complete the destruction of his enemies!

Similarly, it was also a small group of men whom Christ first commissioned to commence the assault upon Satan's kingdom, and the only weapons with which He provided them were the Gospel-trumpet and the lamp of truth –



truly a treasure in clay vessels, so that the excellency of the power might be seen to come from God, and not from man! (2 Cor. 4:7) The Savior's cause has already made great headway in this world, and He will soon come to complete the warfare with a strong hand! On that wonderful day,

His faithful people will rejoice as soldiers do when they divide up battle-booty. But although it will be a joyful day, it will also be a very solemn one; for the battle is not only to be won with noise and blood, but also with burning and fire (verse 5). This is probably a reference to the burning of the enemies' weapons in token of victory, which seems to have been a custom in ancient times (Ps. 46:9; Ezek. 39:8-10); and we are led herein to think of the fiery judgments of the Great Last Day. "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him" (Ps. 50:3). At Christ's first coming, He was a light for the people who sat in darkness; but at His second coming, He shall be revealed in flaming fire, to consume those who have refused the light, and yet choose to continue sitting in darkness (2 Thess. 1:7-8). Those who have not been guided to salvation by the light of His first coming shall be destroyed by the brightness of His second coming (2 Thess. 2:8). For each of us, the light is now shining! Christ offers Himself to us as our gracious Redeemer to guide and cheer us in the pathway to Heaven. He says, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness. While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light!" (John 12:36, 46) (continued in Part 2)

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The prophet has spoken of the glory and the judgments of Christ's second coming; but in verses 6 and 7, he returns to the subject of verse 2 – namely, our Savior's first coming. Perhaps no two verses in the whole Bible contain a more full and glorious description of our Lord Jesus. He is a Child born to us, and a Son given to us; and yet He is also the mighty God, and the everlasting Father! Well may His name be called Wonderful! “Unto us a child is born!” These are almost the very words which the angels used when they announced Christ's birth to the shepherds (Luke 2:11). “Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!”

But this is not all – for “the government shall be upon his shoulder!” “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand” (John 3:35). “All things are delivered unto me of my Father,” Jesus said (Matt. 11:27). And the gracious purpose for which the Father has thus given the government of the world to His Son is explained in John 17:2: “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him!” Power is given to Christ as the God-Man Mediator so that He may use it for the salvation of His Church. It is a blessing to thus realize the power of Christ, as well as His love. When our difficulties are great, our temptations strong, our perplexities numerous, and our cares heavy – let us remember that the government is upon His shoulder! Let us call to mind His words: “All power is given unto me in heaven and earth!” And let us also remember the other words which He added immediately thereafter: “Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world!”

We are further told that the Savior is to be called Counselor – first, because He takes counsel with His Father; and second, because He gives good counsel to mankind. In regard to both the work of creation and the work of redemption, Christ took counsel with His Father (Zech. 6:13; Prov. 8:27; Ps. 40:7-8). And it is the believer's daily happiness to recognize the Lord Jesus as his own Counselor. “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory,” sings the Psalmist (Ps. 73:24).

Yet another name is given to the Savior: the Prince of Peace! (Eph. 2:14) By His life and death of suffering, He endured all the curse and punishment of sin. Therefore, those who believe in Him are now freely forgiven and perfectly justified, and so they have peace with God through Him (Rom. 5:1). If our minds are restless and disturbed, if the consciousness of sin troubles us, if the fear of death harasses us, or if we are uncertain about our standing before God –

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then let us think of Christ as the Prince of Peace, and ask Him to fulfill to us His gracious promise: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you!" (John 14:27)

Isaiah's thoughts had been carried forward to Christ's coming, and to the glory of His kingdom. But now, in verse 8, he returns to speak of the people and events of his own day. The Northern Kingdom of Israel, as we learned in chapter 7, had joined itself with Syria to attack the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Here now, in verses 9 and 10, Isaiah prophesies the destruction of Israel and its capital, Samaria. And in verses 11 and 12, he foretells the destruction of the Syrians. All enemies of the Kingdom of Christ will meet the same kind of end.

In the remainder of the chapter, the prophet describes more fully the sin of Israel (verses 13, 16, 17), as well as the woeful punishment which it brought (verses 14-15, 17-21). Let us pay careful attention to the expression in verse 13: "The people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord." It is our duty, when God smites us, to turn to Him. He sends affliction in order to turn us to Himself; and if one affliction does not succeed, we may expect Him to send another, and yet another – just as we read in Amos 4:6-11. It is very probable that at some time or another, God has smitten each one of us. Perhaps He has caused some accident to happen to us, or maybe He has sent us some illness, or it could be that He has taken from us some much-beloved friend or relative. In short, we have surely had some sort of affliction. And when God has thus smitten us, have we turned to Him? At this very moment, as we look back, can we honestly say – as David did – "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word"? (Ps. 119:67) It is a serious thing to trifle with our afflictions, and to lose the benefit which God intends them to bring.

Verse 18 may remind us of what we have already read in chapter 1:31. There, the wicked are compared to tow, and their work or wickedness is compared to the spark which kindles it. But here, the wicked are compared to thorns, which their own wickedness shall eventually consume. In several other places of Scripture, we find the wicked compared with thorns. The thorns and thistles (Gen. 3:18) which the earth has brought forth since Adam's sin are a picture of sinners in their harsh and piercing character – as well as in their uselessness, and in their fitness only for burning. The people of God, however, are beautifully described as lilies among thorns (Song of Sol. 2:2) – pure, bright, and inoffensive among the rude and hardened enemies of the Gospel in this world! Let each one of us pray that we may be given grace to exhibit this emblem in our own character!

Lord Jesus, we praise You for fulfilling the character of every marvelous name which You are called in this chapter: Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace! Amen.

