

The Book of ISAIAH – Chapters 1-39

Catholic Scripture Study

Memory Verse: Isaiah 9:6

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government will be upon his shoulder,
and his name will be called
"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."*

Unto Us a Child is Born (Isaiah 9:1-7)

I. OVERVIEW (9:1-7)

Isaiah 9:1-7 is one of the best known messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

A. Background

Zebulun and **Naphtali** were two of the twelve tribes of Israel, and were the first tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel to be invaded and deported by the Assyrians.

The land named after them formed a region of northern Palestine bounded by the Mediterranean to the west, and the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee to the east.

They were first invaded by Assyria around 732 BC, and Samaria (the capital of the Northern Kingdom) was captured in 721 BC. Judah, except for Jerusalem, was taken by 701 BC.

Choosing their own way rather than God's way, trusting in human glory rather than in God, the nation plunged itself into darkness.

Instead of having God's protective canopy over them and his light to guide them, they fell into confusion and darkness, the prey of the very nations they trusted in.

However, that is not where God intends to leave them. In the very areas where the Assyrian conquests began (the land of Naphtali and Zebulun – **Galilee of the nations**), there God promises that the light will dawn.

- The people of Israel have done nothing to deserve this; it is nothing but God's grace.

Isaiah foresees that in the future these once-devastated areas will see a great light. The Lord will bring them a reason for joy with a generous harvest and freedom from the yoke of the Assyrians that burdened them.

Their oppressors will be smashed, **as on the day of Midian**.

Historical Note: "**The day of Midian**" is an allusion to the sensational victory of Gideon and his three hundred men over 120,000 Midianites (see Judges 6-8).

II. FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

Chapter 8 ended bleakly; "**and they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.**"

Chapter 9, however, brings a bright ray of hope for Israel! "**But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish.**"

God promises that just as these people have experienced the grief and despair of conquest, they will also experience the joy and triumph of victory (9:3-5).

A. A Child is Born

But how will God accomplish this great feat?

He will do it through the birth of a child (9:6) who will be a new ruler – actually a “king” – whose kingdom will be eternal (9:7).

For the third time in as many chapters, the birth of a child is filled with momentous significance and meaning.

- In 7:14 the child's birth was a sign that it was unnecessary for Judah to trust in Assyria for deliverance from Syria and Israel.
- In 8:3 the child's birth was the sign of the same thing, but also that Judah's misplaced trust was going to result in disaster for the nation.
- Now this birth carries the message another step forward. Out of the disaster God will yet bring final victory.

The repetition of birth and the close connection in the meaning of the three signs suggests that all three point to Immanuel. Maher-shalal-hash-baz was the *immediate* fulfillment of the sign, but this new child is its *ultimate* fulfillment.

- God will keep his promises both to Israel and to the house of David (9:7). But who is this child?

B. Who is this Child?

The titles given to him argue forcefully against the child being any human, such as Hezekiah (the son and successor of Ahaz).

Hezekiah was one of the few good kings of Judah, but no Israelite or Judean king was ever identified as **“Mighty God.”**

Clearly the person being referred to here is the promised Messiah, who will reign over God's people with the kind of justice and righteousness no mere human descendant of David ever achieved.

Furthermore, the government and the social and personal peace he will produce will be eternal (9:7). This is not Hezekiah, or any other merely human son of David.

Read: Isaiah 9:1-7

[1] But there will be no gloom for her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

[2] The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined.

[3] Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before thee as with joy at the harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

[4] For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, thou hast broken as on the day of Midian.

[5] For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

[6] For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called

**"Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."**

**[7] Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom,
to establish it, and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and for evermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**

C. From Anguish to Glory (9:1)

The time of distress was **the former time**, **the latter time** is one of glory, and the way of the sea, the way along the western side of the Sea of Galilee, **Galilee of the nations**, is to be honored.

God will intervene and reverse the situation. The intervention will be made by the birth of a child who will be a new ruler. Light will replace darkness.

The sense of this passage (Isaiah 9:1–2) is a defeat of the enemy that will be as overwhelming as Gideon's defeat of the Midianites (Judges 6:1-8:17).

This despised region, despised even in New Testament times, was glorified when God honored it, as foretold by Isaiah. The fulfillment of the prophecy occurred when Jesus Christ, the Son of God, dwelt in Nazareth and Capernaum in the region of Galilee – the land of Zebulun and Naphtali.

- All these events are manifestly in the future from Isaiah's point of view.

D. A Light Shines in the Darkness (9:2)

The inhabitants of Galilee are walking in darkness. Their manner and course of life, their very existence, is one that is in darkness.

- Darkness without and darkness within, ignorance, distress, misery and sin!

To these people, walking in darkness, a great light appears. Light indicates the presence of God – in this case the light is Immanuel the Messiah — God is with us.

When the prophet wrote, they had not yet seen this light, but its occurrence was so certain and vivid to Isaiah's mind that he described it as though it had already dawned.

E. Joy Sweeps the Nation (9:3)

Joy fills the people at the thought of the blessed light shining in and overcoming the darkness. The source of the light is, of course, the Lord, in whose light alone we may see light.

The light of God's presence through his Messiah brings many blessings to the nation:

- Instead of a declining population and devastation of the land (7:20-23), the nation increases in number - ***“Thou hast multiplied the nation.”***
- Instead of the harvest being meager, it is abundant.
- Instead of becoming spoil themselves, they will ***rejoice when they divide the spoil.***

F. The Cause for Rejoicing (9:4)

The people rejoice because God has brought about a mighty deliverance – a mighty victory over Israel's oppressor. This oppressor (v.4) was first of all the Assyrian enemy, but in the far deeper sense it was the bondage which sin itself had caused.

The salvation of sinners produces exaltation in the hearts of God's people, and such jubilation is a gift of God himself – the gift of a marvelous joy.

The victory is a mighty one, so great that it may be compared with the victory of Gideon over Midian. Human strength in that day had been useless, and Gideon recognized that the battle was the Lord's, to be won only by his power.

G. A Period of Peace (9:5)

There is another reason for rejoicing. Following the victory which has just been mentioned (Gideon over Midian; grace over sin), there is to be complete peace.

This thought is expressed in a negative manner, in that the trappings of warfare will be utterly consumed. ***For every boot of the tramping warrior . . . and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.***

All these will be destroyed because they will no longer be needed in a time of peace.

H. Prince of Peace (9:6)

But who will bring this peace? Who will put an end to war and oppression?

- A child - a very special child – a son!

Some think that this child may have been Hezekiah (the son of Ahaz), but the titles given him suggest forcefully that this child is no mere human such as Hezekiah.

- No Israelite or Judean king was ever identified as ***“Mighty God.”***

Clearly the person being referred to here is the promised Messiah who will reign over God's people with the kind of justice and righteousness that no mere human descendent of David ever achieved.

Furthermore, if the government and the societal and personal peace he will produce will be eternal this is not Hezekiah or any other merely human son of David.

I. Prophecy Fulfilled

The spiritual sense of Isaiah 9:2-7 is that the child, the Son of God, is Jesus. *“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there will be no end”* (Luke 1:32-33).

III. APPLICATION (9:1-7)

This passage (9:1-7) teaches us several things about the character and purpose of God and about the ultimate significance of Immanuel.

A. He Humbles only to Exalt

It teaches initially about God's grace. If God has “humbled” a person or a nation, it is for the final purpose of giving that person or nation “honor” (9:1).

He brings us down only because, given our sinfulness, that is the only way he can raise us up.

- He does not ever wish simply to destroy.

In some cases that is the final result, but not because God wishes it to be so.

God wants light, joy, abundance, liberty, and cessation of hostility (9:2-5) – not only for his own people but for all people (25:6-9).

B. The Character of the Messiah

This passage also teaches some rather startling things about the character and attributes of the Messiah. We can imagine Isaiah asking God what is the meaning of the things he has been inspired to say.

- We are told that the Messiah will come as a child.

God's answer to the oppression and hostility of this proud and cruel world is not to come as a jack-booted warrior to smash the opposition.

Somehow, although we are not told how here, he will shatter the "yoke that burdens" his people without becoming a greater oppressor than the enemy.

C. Contradiction or Paradox?

- We are also told that this Messiah will be a son, although we are not told whose son he is.
- He will be the **Mighty God**, but he will reign from David's throne.
- And although David's throne is in Jerusalem, yet his light will dawn in Galilee.

And in all these events the Lord of heaven's armies (Lord of Hosts) will be passionately involved (***The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this***).

Taken together these various statements seem incapable of resolution. But of course they have been resolved, and we know how.

D. God with Us

"God with Us" has its foundation as a historical fact.

The good news is that the God who is with us is a God who wants to turn our darkness into light, our conflict into peace, our loss into abundance, our despair into joy.

But how can He be with us?

If he is transcendent, if he is all holy, if he is infinite, if he is eternal, how can he be with us who are created, sinful, finite, and mortal?

This passage (9:1-7) sets the stage for the most astounding event in history.

The transcendent becomes one of the created; the all holy God experiences what it is to have sinned (while being sinless), the infinite becomes finite, the immortal experiences mortality.

He is with us!

- The “child” born of the virgin is the son of David, but he is also the Son of God.
- The bulk of his ministry was in Galilee, but he was “enthroned” on a cross in Jerusalem.
- By taking into himself the sin and oppression, the horror and tragedy of this world, he was able to give back righteousness and freedom, hope and fulfillment.

In fact, it is hard to think of another way in which the apparent contradictions of Isaiah 9:1-7 could have been resolved than in a way in which they actually were in Jesus Christ.

The meaning of this passage of Scripture for us today comes down to this:

- Have we allowed the Child-King to take over the government of our lives?

Only then can we know the benefits of “God with us.” We cannot have the light, the honour, the joy, the abundance, the wholeness that he offers in any other way.

With Isaiah 7:7 the so-called “Book of Immanuel” closes, but the theological reflection on Ahaz’s refusal to trust does not.

Preparation for Isaiah Week 10 - The Fall of the Northern Kingdom

1. Read Isaiah, Chapter 9:8-10:4
2. Read Chapter 3 in *Come and See Catholic Bible Study – Isaiah*.
3. Answer questions 6-8 in *Come and See* pg 30.