

## **An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Jesus in the Old Testament — The Child**

**Isaiah 9:1-7**

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If you have your Bibles, I'd invite you to turn with me to Isaiah chapter 9. We're going to give special attention to verses 6 and 7, but I want to read Isaiah 9:1-7 so that you have an appreciation of the context. Last Sunday morning we began our series, "An Ancient Christmas: The Coming of Jesus in the Old Testament," by looking at the story of Adam and Eve's fall in Genesis 3. And I think that if you look at Genesis 3 and the passage that we looked at last Lord's Day Evening, Isaiah 7, and then again Isaiah 9 this morning and Isaiah 11 this evening, you'll begin to see a pattern develop. And I want to say by way of introduction what to look for in regard to this pattern.

When we looked at the story of Adam and Eve's fall in Genesis 3, we saw in the midst of the wreckage of human sin and the misery that it brought, the first proclamation of the Gospel, the first foretelling of a coming Savior. And so you have this combination of a background of disaster and a promise of hope. But even the promise of hope is surprising. Do you remember how we emphasized in the very last clause of Genesis 3:15 the victory that that coming Savior, the descendent of the woman, was going to win was going to cost Him His life. The serpent was going to strike His heel and He was going to die. So the victory that was going to come through the descendent of the woman was going to come at the price of death. So you have a backdrop of desolation, you have a promise of hope, but the promise of hope itself is fulfilled in a surprising way. You're not expecting this victory to be gained at the price of death.

Well fast forward several thousand years to Isaiah 7 verse 14 in the promise that, "Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son," and that promise that a virgin will conceive comes in the backdrop of God's promises to David. You remember in 2 Samuel 7 God had told David that he would never lack a man from his line to sit on the throne of his kingdom. But since that time the northern kingdom is in trouble, overrun, and its kingship would end, and soon the southern kingdom itself will be carried off into exile and the line of David will end. And this is a crisis for all the later prophets. How could it be that God's promise to David would fail?

Well, in Isaiah 7 you know a very specific challenge, a specific crisis is facing God's people. Two kings in the north have united in an alliance against the wicked King Ahaz who is the king of Judah. And Ahaz, in order to resist their

invasion, has decided that he is going to form an alliance with Assyria, the most powerful kingdom in the region. God had told His kings not to form alliances with pagan nations because those pagan nations would infect the children of Israel with their unbelief and their idolatry and lead the children of Israel astray. And so God sends Isaiah to Ahaz and He says, "Ahaz, pick a sign, any sign. I'll show you a sign that I'm not going to let these two kings to the north defeat you and therefore you should not form this alliance with Assyria." Well you remember the story. Ahaz won't ask for the sign because he's already made up his mind what he's going to do. He wants to do what he wants to do and he doesn't want a sign from God.

Well what is that sign of a virgin bearing a child supposed to mean, after all? Well here's what that sign is supposed to mean. In the backdrop of the pressure on Judah from these two kings that are attacking it, Isaiah wants Ahaz and God wants Ahaz to trust God not Assyria. And the sign of a virgin being born is a sign that God is ready, even if He has to do it miraculously, to preserve the line of David, the kingship of Judah, and the heritage of His people. You remember, God had promised David, "David, you'll always have a man on the throne. Your kingdom will never end." And God is saying through Isaiah, "If God has to bring a descendent of David into this world through a virgin in order to fulfill His promise to David, He's prepared to do it." The promise is designed to show Ahaz that he needs to trust God, not Assyria. And so once again, we have a backdrop of crisis. Israel threatened with invasion and extinction, the kingship of David's line threatened in its continuation, and God gives this promise of hope, "Behold, a virgin will conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name, Immanuel, God with us." And so that ancient Christmas prophecy has to do with the fulfillment of God's promise to David's line and of course after the angel announces to Joseph and to Mary the coming of Jesus, Matthew quotes from Isaiah 7 and he says, "This was to fulfill the word which was said by the prophet, 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name, Immanuel.'"

Well this morning, we turn to another prophecy in Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 9. And again, there is something important going on. There's a crisis in the background, and really, the passage that Billy read from Jeremiah 8 and 9 graphically depicts the crisis of faith in Israel. Israel is not believing God, Israel is following after idols, there is national judgment on the way, this great nation is going to become a wilderness — did you hear that very strong language that Jeremiah was using? That's the backdrop to the situation that Isaiah is addressing here. If you look at verses 1 and 2 you'll note of Isaiah speaking of the gloom and of the darkness in the land. The people are in gloom and they're in great darkness. They're in a time of tremendous strife. Well what's God's answer to that going to be? Well this passage, the context of that crisis, provides a message of hope. Again, and it's surprising. God's answer to this situation is surprising, just like it was surprising for God to say, "I'm going to preserve the line of David through a virgin bearing a baby," just like it was surprising for Him to say, "I'm going to bring relief to the seed of the woman and protect her from the enemy of her soul by sending a

descendent who's going to die in purchasing a victory against her enemies.” So also we have a surprising answer here.

So let's pray and ask for God's blessing as we read His Word and prepare to study this passage together.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word. We ask that You would teach us from it, that we would understand it and that we would hear with hearing ears and see with seeing eyes and understand with understanding hearts this message. It's a message that we need to believe, it's a message that we need to trust God, it's a message that You're sending the Savior that we need — that You've sent the Savior that we need — and that we can trust in Him. So bless us as we consider it together, for we ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.*

Isaiah chapter 9 beginning in verse 1. This is the Word of God:

But there will be no gloom for her who 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 has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on 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 forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.”

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy, inspired, and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

What's Israel to do? Where is Israel's hope? Surrounded by nations that would devour her, led by a wicked king who does not worship God, who does not reign in righteousness — where is the hope? Isaiah says in a child. “A child will be born, Israel. Hope, for a child is going to be born and the government is going to be placed on his shoulders and he is going to reign on David's throne forever and ever and we're going to call him, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Notice two or three things about this passage before we begin its exposition. The first thing I want you to notice is it's written in the past tense. Did you catch that? It's a prophetic idiom that Hebrew prophets use. They speak of the future in the past tense as if the future has already happened to show the certainty of the promise that the Lord is revealing to His people through the prophet. You see their current circumstances in verses 1 and 2. They are in gloom and they are in darkness, but he speaks in the past tense of the joy that he is going to bring. Look at verse 3. "You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy." He doesn't say, "You will multiply the nation and you will increase its joy;" he speaks as if it's already happened. This prophetic past tense is designed to assure the children of Israel that though their circumstances now are grim and though their hope may be dim within their hearts, the fulfillment of God's promise of rescue to them is certain and so he uses this language.

The second thing I want you to notice is their rescue comes in a child that is born for them. There's a child who is going to do vicarious work for them, work on their behalf. Look at the language that's used of him in verse 6. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given." It's very similar, isn't it, to Isaiah 7:14? "The Lord will give you a sign — a virgin will be with child and bear a son." And then of course Luke picks up on the same language in Luke 2:11. "Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior." This child's birth is for His people, for the wellbeing of His people, for the saving of His people. We need this child to be born!

And then notice, thirdly, not only is the language in the past tense as if it's already happened, not only is a child going to be born for you to work on your behalf, notice that this child has a kingly work to do. The language that is used in verse 6 is, "the government will rest on His shoulders." The government will rest on His shoulders. So a child — what's the answer to the crisis that the people of God face? A wicked king surrounded by nations like jackals waiting to pounce on them for prey - what's the answer? It is certain that a child will be born who will bear the kingship of God's people and will deliver them. And He's described, isn't He, right at the end of verse 6. And I want you to look at four things that are said about this child who is to come.

## **WONDERFUL COUNSELOR**

First of all, we're told that this child will be called, "Wonderful Counselor." What does that mean? It means that He will be endowed with supernatural wisdom. The word that's used here to describe Him, "Wonderful Counselor," is about as close as you can get in Hebrew to calling something or someone supernatural. And of course the point is obvious. Whereas Ahaz trusts in the human wisdom of forming an alliance with a pagan nation which is going to prove to be disastrous for Israel — in other words, Ahaz is not wise — this child who is going to be born

is going to be possessed of heavenly wisdom. The prophet kept saying to Ahaz, "Don't make an alliance with Assyria in order to be spared from these two kings to the north. God is not going to let you fall to these two kings to the north." Ahaz ignored that council and guess who Israel fell to? Not the two kings to the north but to Assyria! You see, his human wisdom made him think that he was smarter than God. "Oh Isaiah, you're a prophet. You don't know anything about warfare, you don't know anything about politics, you don't know anything about military alliances, you don't know about strategic political confederations. I do! I'm a king! This is my business. This is the way I'm going to preserve my throne, it's going to be the way I preserve the dynasty of David, it's going to be the way that I preserve the nation of Israel." And what happened? He lost his throne, the dynasty of David, and the nation, because of his human wisdom. He wouldn't trust God. But this child who is going to be born is going to be "Wonderful Counselor." He is going to be possessed of spiritual wisdom.

It's similar, isn't it, to the prophecy in Jeremiah 23:5, "Behold, the days are coming when I will raise up for David a righteous branch and He will reign as a king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land." And it's also similar to what Isaiah says about the servant who will come in Isaiah 53:11. And he says, "By His knowledge He will justify many." In other words, this "Wonderful Counselor" knows exactly what we need to be saved. He knows exactly what to do to save us. He knows exactly what needs to be known in order to save sinners. He is a wonderful counselor.

## **MIGHTY GOD**

Secondly, this child, we are told, will be called, "Mighty God." That is, He will be God Almighty, God the Warrior, the Almighty God in the flesh. And here is Isaiah giving testimony to the divinity of the Messiah in full flourish. He doesn't back down. He doesn't say that the child will be like the Mighty God; he says that the child will be called, "Mighty God." And the New Testament gets this. So John will open his Gospel in verse 1 by saying, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Not, like God, not just with God, not similar to God, but God in the flesh. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, as the glory as of the only begotten of God." Paul speaks of this in Titus chapter 2 verse 13, doesn't he, when he speaks of the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." No wonder the author of Hebrews in Hebrews 1 verse 8 says of the Son, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom." The child that Isaiah says we're looking for will be God in the flesh.

## **ETERNAL FATHER**

Third, notice he's not only "Wonderful Counselor" and "Mighty God," He is called,

“Eternal Father.” Now that can be somewhat puzzling. I thought He was the Son and not the Father! Is this identifying the Son as just another name for the Father? Is this saying that the Son is just one mode or manifestation of God? Father is one mode or manifestation, Son is one mode or manifestation, Spirit is one mode or manifestation? No! No, this passage is not confusing the Messiah with God the Father, but attributing the rule of God to Him. In the Old Testament, kings were called fathers. They were spiritual, political fathers of their people. Just like the Ten Commandments call upon us to “Honor our father and our mother,” so also we are to honor those who God has placed in political leadership over us. And in the Old Testament, one way that that was shown was by calling kings “fathers.”

And that He is called “Everlasting Father” means that He will be the ruler of His people, He will be their eternal king, He will be the endless monarch. And so the attributes of God's rule are ascribed to Him in the phrase, “Eternal Father,” or “Everlasting Father.” It means that His reign will know no end. And of course that's emphasized right here in verse 7. “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace and on the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness, from then on and forevermore.” He will be a king and His reign will never ever come to an end. The child will be “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father” — a King whose reign will never end for His people.

## **PRINCE OF PEACE**

But that's not all. He will be called “Prince of Peace.” In verse 6 He is not only the “Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, and the Eternal Father,” but the “Prince of Peace.” That is, He is the one who is going to bring peace for His people. What's the answer to the crisis that the people face — a wicked king, nations attacking them? The answer is — a child who is going to be the “Prince of Peace.” And Micah picks up on this in Micah 5 verses 4 and 5 where it says, “He will arise and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God, and they will remain because at that time he will be great. To the ends of the earth this one will be our peace.”

And again, the New Testament gets that. And listen to how the New Testament speaks of the Son who came into this world, of the child who was born, of the Lord Jesus. In Luke 2 verse 14, do you remember what the angel said about Jesus to the shepherds? “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among men with whom He is pleased.” Or do you remember what Jesus Himself said to His disciples on the night that He was betrayed in John 14 verse 27? “Peace I leave with you. My peace give I unto you. Not as the world gives do I give to you; let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” Or do you remember the preaching in Acts chapter 10 verse 36 where it is said, “The Word which He sent to the sons of Israel preaching peace through Jesus Christ. He is

the Lord of all”? Or do you remember what Paul says in Romans 5 verse 1? “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Or Ephesians 2:14? “For He Himself is our peace.” Or Colossians 1:20? “God reconciled all things to Himself having made peace through the blood of His cross, through Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.” And that’s why the author of Hebrews can end that book with the benediction, “Now the God of peace who brought up from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord.” This child would be the one who would bring His people peace.

## **THE PERSON OF THE SON AND THE ZEAL OF THE LORD**

Now there are two things that I want to say in closing. The first one is, Isaiah makes it clear that Israel's hope has to be focused on the person of this child who is “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.” It would be a shame, wouldn't it, to go through Christmas season and all the beauty and the sentiment attached to it and not believe in the one who is our peace, the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe Him. If you have not done that, do that now! Believe on the person of the Son because the focus of our faith is on the person of this child who is “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace.”

But the second thing I want you to see is this. Look at the very last line of verse 7. This prophecy ends with the Lord making a declaration and that declaration is this. “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.” The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. This is an Old Testament way of saying, “The deliverance I'm going to bring, I'm going to do it. It's going to be by My grace.” Isn't it interesting that God says to His people in Christ is He doesn't say, “Go out and do something valiant and save yourselves. Perform these tasks for your own deliverance.” No, He says, “I'm going to do this. I'm going to do what's necessary for a Savior to be provided for you and for you to be rescued. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. I will bring this child into the world. I will bring about your salvation.” Oh, things were going to get worse for Israel before they got better and Israel was going to have to wait for six hundred years for this prophecy to be fulfilled, but it was, and for everyone who believes on this child there is hope and there is joy.

Let's pray.

*Heavenly Father, we thank You for this child sent into the world for our salvation. Grant us faith in Him and in all of Your promises, now and forevermore. Amen.*

Well let's continue to sing of the child. Take your hymnals in hand and turn to number 213 and we'll sing, “What Child is This?”

Receive now this blessing from the Prince of Peace. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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