

The Coming Deliverer of Israel

in

Isaiah 9:1-7

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Introduction

Isaiah 9:1-7 is one of the great messianic passages of the Bible. It reflects the Old Testament telescoping principle of referring to the entirety of the Messiah's activity in one view. The Old Testament prophets knew nothing of two comings of Christ. They assumed that when Messiah came He would be accepted by Israel and would establish the kingdom. They knew nothing of the mysteries of the kingdom, that the Lord would propose the kingdom which could be accepted or rejected by Israel. Nor did they know of the time gap between His first coming to die for Israel and mankind and His second coming to establish by His power and authority the righteous Kingdom of God.

I. Deliverance begins in the North (9:1)

I But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.¹

The gloom on the northern section of Israel came because of discipline. God humbled Zebulun and Naphtali for a while. Some believe Isaiah was using these two tribal names to represent the Northern Kingdom. However, Jesus' upbringing and early ministry was in that area near the Sea of Galilee. It was His presence there that brought glory to that area. See Matthew 4:13, 14. In 732 BC this northern portion of Israel became an Assyrian province under Tiglath-Pileser III, thus humbling the people there and putting them in gloom. Under Gentile domination, that area was called "Galilee of the Gentiles."

"The way of the sea" describes a major international highway running through the region. Here is the only place where the Bible used this phrase, but it appears often in Assyrian and Egyptian records. The invading Assyrian soldiers took that route when they invaded the Northern Kingdom. From that area the Messiah will arise and will wipe away the gloom and darkness brought on by Gentile domination. This prophecy was fulfilled in the birth and early ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

II. The Nation will be Delivered from the Oppressor (9:2-5)

A. From Darkness to light (9:2)

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.

Note the antithetical parallelism between darkness and light, a typical Hebrew language method. Matthew applied this passage to Jesus, who began His preaching and healing ministry in that region (Matt. 4:15-16).

B. From Oppression to Joy (9:3-5)

Thou shalt multiply the nation, Thou shalt increase their gladness; They will be glad in Thy presence As with the gladness of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. ⁴ For Thou shalt break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian. ⁵ For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

Thou probably refers to God the Father, who will lead the people from spiritual darkness into light (v. 2) by sending the Child (v. 6), the Messiah.

The light will increase their joy like the joy at harvest time or the joy of winning a battle and dividing the plunder. "Joy," (Heb. *simcha*), sometimes translated "gladness" is used twelve times in the book. With other Hebrew words for happiness, this idea is used over twenty-four times by Isaiah. This

¹ All Scripture quotes are from the New American Standard Bible.

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will be a supernatural work of God much like the nation's deliverance when Gideon defeated Midian (Judges 7:1-24).

It will be like taking a burden off one's back. At that time, after the Child-Messiah will come, the implements of warfare will be destroyed because in His reign of universal peace implements of war will not be needed (cf. 2:4).

III. A Righteous King will Govern Israel (9:6-7)

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

Isaiah records five facts about the coming Messiah:

A. He was to be born a Child.

Note the synthetic parallelism (Child, Son). The Deliverer was to be born into the nation of Israel ("us" refers to Israel, not mankind in general) as a member of the Jewish nation.

B. He will rule over Israel.

"The government will rest on His shoulders" figuratively refers to the kingly robe to be worn by the Messiah. As King, He will be responsible to govern the nation. In Isaiah's day Judah's leaders were incompetent in governing the people. But the Messiah will govern properly.

C. Four names reveal Messiah's character.

1. Wonderful Counselor²

He will be the nation's Wonderful (this could be translated "exceptional" or "distinguished") Counselor, and Israel will gladly listen to Him as the authoritative One. In the kingdom many people will be anxious to hear the Messiah teach God's ways.³

2. The Mighty God

Because the word translated "mighty" (Heb. *gibbor*) is used of human heroes in the Old Testament, some have suggested that this simply means "a godlike person" or hero. But Isaiah meant more than that, for he had already spoken of the Messiah doing what no other person had been able to do (for example, see Isaiah 9:2-5). Isaiah understood that the Messiah was to be God (Heb. *el*), a straightforward reference to the deity of Messiah.

3. Everlasting Father

This Deliverer will also be called the Everlasting Father. Many people are puzzled by this title because the Messiah, God's Son, is distinguished in the Trinity from God the Father. How can the Son be the Father? Three specifics must be noted in this regard:

1. The Messiah, being a Person of the Trinity, is in His essence, God. Therefore He has all the perfections of God, including eternity. Since God is one in essence (not to be confused with the three Persons), the Messiah is God.
2. The title *Everlasting Father* is a Hebrew idiom (Heb. *aviad*, on-going or perpetual Father) used to describe the Messiah's relationship to time, not His relationship to the other members of the Trinity. He is said to be everlasting, just as God (the Father) is called "the Ancient of Days" (Dan. 7:9). The Messiah will be a "fatherly" ruler.

² Some take "wonderful" to be a separate title. But the grammar seems to indicate that the word is an adjective describing the noun "counselor."

³ See Isaiah 2:3.

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3. Isaiah may have had in mind the promise to David (2 Sam. 7:16) about the “foreverness” of the kingdom which God promised would come through David’s line. The Messiah, a descendant of David, will fulfill this promise for which the nation had been waiting.

4. The Prince of Peace

The Messiah will bring in and maintain the time of millennial peace when, through the new covenant, the nation of Israel will be properly related to the Lord. Together, these four titles give a beautiful picture of the coming Messiah’s character.

D. The Messiah, seated on David’s throne⁴, will have an unending rule of peace and justice.

His rule will have no end; it will go on forever. The earthly kingdom will be without end, extending to the new earth.⁵ He will maintain righteousness, because His rule will reflect God’s righteous character and demands.

E. This will all be accomplished by the zeal of the LORD Almighty.

The coming of the millennial kingdom depends on God, not Israel. The Messiah will rule because God promised it and will zealously see that the kingdom comes. Without His sovereign intervention there would be no kingdom for Israel.

⁴ See Luke 1:32,33; Daniel 7:14, 27; Micah 4:7; Rev. 11:15.

⁵ See Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22.