

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ISAIAH
The Trustworthiness of God
Isaiah 9:1-7

Having celebrated Pentecost and Trinity Sunday we return to our exposition of Isaiah. George Frideric Handel's oratorio 'Messiah' made famous for all time Isaiah's magnificent poem prophecy (vv2-7) preceded by a verse of prose in which the gloom and despair associated with the capable yet foolish king Ahaz is dispelled. The area which suffered most at the hands of Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria in 734-733 BC will be the first to experience something glorious that is to come.

Alec Motyer offers the following helpful outline:

1. The hope described (vv1-3)

- i. What God does
A new situation by act of God: as he 'treated with contempt' so now he has 'treated with honour' (v1)
- ii. What his people enjoy
A new situation for God's people: darkness has become light (v2)
- iii. What follows
A new situation between the Lord and his people: he has increased their joy and they rejoice before him (v3)

2. The hope explained (vv4-7)

- i. What God does
The first explanation: God's act of deliverance (v4)
- ii. What his people enjoy
The second explanation: entering into the fruits of victory (v5)
- iii. What follows
The third explanation: the king and his rule (v6)

Ironically the northern territories Zebulun and Naphtali which had borne the brunt of Assyria's initial invasion of Israel, having been 'humbled', God would honour, in that the focal area of Jesus the Messiah's ministry was indeed "Galilee of the nation' (v1). A great light has dispelled the darkness, reminiscent of John 1:5 "the light shines and the darkness has not put it out" and Luke 2:9 the angelic appearance to shepherds heralding the birth of Jesus.

Isaiah reminds us in v4 that God often uses the work and witness of a remnant as in Gideon reducing his army to four hundred men to defeat the Midianites. There he also alludes to Israel's exodus from Egyptian bondage by a mighty act of God. Even the weapons of war will ultimately yield to God (v5).

Thereafter, for the third time, in as many chapters, the birth of a child is filled with significance (7:14 and 8:3). Now this birth carries the message one step further.

Out of disaster, God will bring ultimate victory. But who is this child? The titles 'Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' (v6) cannot simply be human. No Judean king was ever identified as 'Mighty God'. Clearly the person referred to here is the promised Messiah.

Isaiah's prophetic poem combines patient waiting with confident expecting. It is sure hope, so sure that in the Hebrew idiom it is written in the past tense as though it had already happened to the eye of faith. None of this is through human achievement. "The zeal of the Lord [his holy jealousy and holy love] will accomplish this" (v7). Therein lies the hope of the believer: the God who is true to his promise, having sent the Messiah to die for our sins "at just the right time" (Rom 5:6), he will return in glory on that great day.

The question we all need to face is, have we allowed the child-King Immanuel 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 and the abundance that he offers in any other way.

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