

Justice and Righteousness Reign

Printed Text • Isaiah 9:2–7

Devotional Reading • Micah 6:1–8

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will ANALYZE the importance of this prophecy for the people of God in Isaiah's time and today; CELEBRATE the justice, righteousness, and peace that Jesus brings to God's people; and SHARE with others the hope of eternal peace and justice found in Jesus' reign.

In Focus

Maxine's teenage daughter Taneisha was excited because they were leaving Detroit for Christmas to spend time with her grandmother in Memphis. Taneisha had never been on a plane before. When they arrived at Detroit's Metro International Airport, Maxine had to all but threaten Taneisha to calm down so they could hear their flight being announced.

Later, as Northwest Airlines flight #743 took off from Detroit, Taneisha became a chatterbox. She talked to Maxine all the way to Memphis. A few hours later, when Maxine and Taneisha stepped off the plane, Maxine's mother was there to meet them. Taneisha ran and jumped into her grandmother's arms, laughing and squealing all the way.

After Maxine had unpacked and settled in front of the fireplace and Christmas tree with a cup of cocoa, she thought about her daughter's excitement and the day's events. Maxine truly loved Taneisha. But as the girl slept soundly in bed, Maxine valued the peace and quiet she now enjoyed while she sat looking at the fire dance around the logs. Now that they were with their family for Christmas, she could slow down and thank God for sending His blessing of peace on earth.

Peace was a treasured commodity that Maxine did not often get to enjoy. Her fast-paced job and Taneisha's full school schedule created tension and fatigue in their lives. However, Maxine also knew they needed to take time out to enjoy the simple things in life, so that they could experience tranquility and peace in the midst of the chaos.

How does Jesus help you experience true and lasting peace in your personal life?

Keep In Mind

"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." (Isaiah 9:7, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Shadow of Death (Isaiah 9:2) *tsalmaveth* (Heb.) — Distress or extreme danger

B. Yoke (v. 4) *'ol* (Heb.) — A condition of servitude or slavery

Say It Correctly

Gideon. GID-ee-uhn

Hezekiah. heh-zuh-KI-uh

Jotham. JOH-thuhm

Midian. MID-ee-uhn

Tiglath-pileser. TI-glath puh-LEE-zuhr

Zebulun. ZEB-yuh-luhn

KJV

Isaiah 9:2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

³Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

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

⁵For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

⁶For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

⁷Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

NLT

Isaiah 9:2 The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.

³You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder.

⁴For you will break the yoke of their slavery and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders. You will break the oppressor's rod, just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian.

⁵The boots of the warrior and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all be burned. They will be fuel for the fire.

⁶For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, ^[c] Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen!

The People, Places, and Times

Isaiah. One of the most influential Old Testament prophets, Isaiah lived and ministered in the Southern Kingdom of Judah for 58 years. Isaiah lived through one of his nation's most turbulent periods, during which he witnessed Judah's defeat by the Babylonian Empire and actually saw his fellow citizens taken into captivity. He prophesies during the reigns of five kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Manasseh. His free access to the palace in Jerusalem and his familiarity with court life imply that Isaiah belonged to Judah's wealthy class and may have been related to the ruling

family. However, this did not keep Isaiah from verbally attacking the aristocracy in defense of the common people. Scripture refers to his wife as a “prophetess” and identifies him as the father of at least two sons: Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isaiah 7:1–3; 8:1–3).

Background

Much of Isaiah’s writings strongly criticizes the people of Judah for their sinfulness and unwillingness to be faithful to the one true God. During the reign of King Ahaz of Judah, the kings of Israel and Damascus waged war against him. Instead of looking to God for support, Ahaz foolishly allied himself with the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser. Judah soon found itself a vassal state under the Assyrians. Later, the Assyrians invaded Judah and demanded great amounts of tribute. Ahaz’s successor and son, King Hezekiah, rebelled, but his revolt was squashed out. Isaiah warned that their continued refusal to be faithful to God would result in disaster for the entire nation. King Hezekiah refused to heed the prophet, and Judah was almost destroyed before the people turned back to God and begged Him to come to their aide.

Throughout his ministry, Isaiah repeatedly called on the nation to rely on God, rather than military strength or political alliances. The Northern Kingdom had refused to listen to their prophets, Amos and Hosea. Instead, Israel had resorted to military might to assert their nationhood, and as a result had been soundly defeated and no longer existed as a nation. By the grace of God, Judah was for a time spared.

How does Isaiah’s prophecy show that God’s plans are better than a king’s plans?

At-A-Glance

1. End of the Darkness (Isaiah 9:2–5)
2. Gift of Forthcoming Peace (v. 6–7)

In Depth

1. End of the Darkness (Isaiah 9:2–5)

During the time Isaiah lived, Assyria was a major military force that was defeating many countries. It is understandable that the future appeared foreboding and hopeless to the people of Judah. Judah was in a state of spiritual darkness and political distress as it helplessly watched the scorched earth policy of the invading Assyrians.

It is onto this scene that the prophet Isaiah introduces a wonderful prophecy of hope. Isaiah makes it clear that he is addressing Judah, the people who had walked in “darkness” and dwelled “in the land of the shadow of death” (Isaiah 9:2). This kind of darkness is a frightening but apt description of sin. This spiritual darkness contributes to the encompassing sense of hopelessness and helplessness.

Conversely, God’s presence is equated with light. God declares that Israel will receive His light—His life and wisdom—in the midst of chaos and confusion. The great light that will appear is Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Seven hundred years later, Jesus would begin His ministry and bring light into this very land that is now plunged into darkness (John 8:12). Isaiah insists that because a Messiah is coming, there will be “joy” instead of the gloom (Isaiah 9:3). The hope of the people is to be placed in the Lord, not in reliance on military strength or political savvy.

Present-day saints should be reminded that we are not bound by our present circumstances; we can rejoice in our hope in the only One who can remove the gloom from our lives. From a Roman prison, the Apostle Paul rejoiced in his chains: "Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

Isaiah likens the time of Israel's ultimate deliverance to the time when God used Gideon to free Israel from the Midianites (see Judges 7:1–25). Like Gideon, the Deliverer will lead God's people from the battle with their enemies with full assurance of victory on their side. Isaiah also states that the "warrior's garments" would be "rolled in blood" (v. 5). Jesus would pay the highest price for our freedom from darkness and bondage: His death on the Cross.

Whom do you see today standing against the darkness and helping shine God's light?

2. Gift of Forthcoming Peace (v. 6–7)

How wonderful it is to Christians to note that the birth of this Child, introduced by Isaiah, is a gift to us from God Himself. Isaiah stresses that He will "be given" (Isaiah 9:6). Here, Isaiah's prophecy recognizes that the Messiah will be a legitimate heir to the Davidic throne, a point of paramount importance to the people living in the time of this writing.

When Jesus came to redeem Israel, He became the focal point of a new and better "government" (v. 6). His kingdom is eternal, and all who come to God through Him in humble submission will be a part of His government, of which He is the head (Ephesians 5:23). When we read "the government will rest on his shoulders" (9:6, NLT), we see Isaiah's poetic description of the Messiah as a capable and sovereign ruler, not to be confused with a mere human king.

Isaiah further identifies the Messiah as "Wonderful, Counsellor" (v. 6). Here, we are assured that the Messiah will rule with infinite wisdom that exceeds human limitations. He will be efficient and effective in the planning and implementation of His divine plans. When we affirm Jesus as our greatest counselor, we will cease our desire to lean on human understanding and reasoning for solutions to life's problems.

The prophet's description of the Messiah as "Mighty God" recognizes the full omnipotence and absolute deity of the Savior (v. 6). The qualities of eternal tenderness and protection are evoked with the title "Everlasting Father." Jesus offers us the same compassion and provision that the loving and caring Father shows toward His children who love, fear, and obey Him.

Finally, Isaiah declares that the Messiah is the "Prince of Peace" (v. 6). Not only will He bring peace, but He will rule with peace. As the Prince of Peace, He will provide His children with eternal rest and joy that will be an integral part of His kingdom. Christians have the blessed assurance that at the very moment we place our trust in Jesus, He gives us His perfect peace. This does not mean that all of our problems will go away. Professing Christ will sometimes bring strife as Paul found. However, because he was so steadfast in preaching and believing Christ, Paul also found God's peace to "passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Today too, we can have confidence that we will never face our problems alone—He will always be with us, guiding and providing protection through our darkest hours.

Why does Isaiah use so many different expressions to describe the Messiah?

Search the Scriptures

1. According to Isaiah, where will the government of God reside (v. 6)?
2. How will God's government increase (v. 7)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Do you think that our society is suffering from the effects of spiritual darkness? In what ways?
2. How does God's just kingdom lead us out of and protect us from this spiritual darkness?

Liberating Lesson

The growing number of global military conflicts and economic meltdowns that have left millions jobless and homeless only add to a growing sense of helplessness throughout the world. Alarming crime rates have also left many frightened and insecure. Few, if any, leave their doors unlocked, and many are afraid to travel. Every day we see examples of people with money, power, and position afforded one form of treatment within the judicial system, while the poor and disadvantaged are treated radically different. There are some rich people who steal millions and get away with little more than a slap on the wrist, and there are poor individuals sentenced to prison for stealing a pair of shoes

What can we learn from today's lesson that can help people whose lives are unsettled and dysfunctional because of unjust systems? Develop a specific plan that you can share with people, especially during the holiday season.

Application for Activation

The prophet Isaiah lived in a time of political turmoil and spiritual confusion. The people of Judah were understandably anxious as the powerful Assyrian army gathered at the gates of Jerusalem. Their world was similar to ours in some ways. Many people are stressed and feel powerless, hopeless, and helpless. Similar to Isaiah, reach out to someone this week and let them know that God is still in control. Speak words of comfort to them and let them know that God knows and He cares.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Isaiah 9:2–7

In Isaiah 9:1, God's initial treatment of Zebulun and Naphtali ("he lightly afflicted" them) referred to the first invasion by Assyria's King Tiglath-pileser in 733 or 732 BC, during which the king annexed a large part of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 15:29). Only a decade later, in 722 BC, the Assyrians would return to capture the entire Northern Kingdom. The situation will be so hopeless that they will not be able to find any help. They will be surrounded by utter darkness, and they will even curse their king and their God. Over against this awful situation, Isaiah comes with a message of hope and joy in place of despair; their darkness would be turned to light. This change is figuratively described in the following verses.

2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Although Israel rejected God, directly and through His prophets, He still planned redemption for them—in due time. Matthew did not miss the glorious reality that, in his day, Jesus fulfilled God's promises delivered through Isaiah, even quoting the prophet's words (Matthew 4:15–16; see also Luke 1:79; John 8:12). The Hebrew word for "darkness" here is *khoshek* (kho-SHEK), and it is the same term used at Creation (Genesis 1:2). Isaiah used the term frequently (5:20, 30; 42:7; 60:2); the meaning is clear that this is not just nighttime, but rather dangerous spiritual obscurity at best and the definition of evil at worst. It can refer to misery, destruction, death, ignorance, or sorrow. This darkness is framed in stark contrast with the brightness of God's glory. The Hebrew here for "light" is *'or* (ORE), which also is the same word used in Creation (Genesis 1:3–5). Just as He did at the beginning of time, God will bring order to chaos, peace to strife, and justice to problematic systems.

Note how this prophecy is cast in what is called prophetic perfect tense; Isaiah can prophesy in the present tense because God shows him future events with such certainty.

3 Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

The prophet now addresses God directly. The translation and interpretation of the first part of verse 3 pose some difficulty. While the NLT translates this phrase as "its people will rejoice," the KJV has that God has "not increased the joy" of the people. Many commentators believe that the word "not" should be omitted in the text since it is out of harmony with the rest of the verse, which says that the people do rejoice. If this is the correct reading, then the reason for this joy is made clear in verses 4–5, where the oppressor is defeated and driven out of the land. However, if the word "not" is retained in the text, then we must look at the phrase as referring to the past history of Israel. In this case, the text may be understood, "In the past, Thou hast multiplied this nation's numbers, but not its joy," and the next part of the verse would mean that things will change in the future. Despite the former sorrow, the coming joy will be great. This latter idea is defensible, but the former makes more sense.

In ancient times, the enlarging of a nation and the goods both from crops and spoils of war were considered signs of God's blessing. Compare this with Isaiah's messianic reference to Jesus' "spoils" (Isaiah 53:12).

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

Multiple comparisons can be made between Isaiah's reference to the Messiah and Gideon's victory over the Midianites. The yoke, staff, and rod are images of oppression (Isaiah 10:5, 24, 27), which in Gideon's case came from an opposing army of 120,000 (Judges 8:10). God reduced the Israelite army from 32,000 to a mere 300, making them outnumbered 400 to one. The whole purpose was so there was no way the Israelites would receive the glory. Clearly, the sovereign God secured the victory (Judges 7:2).

The lesson of Gideon is a lesson of trust and faith in God (Judges 7). God overcame the Midianites and delivered Israel with Gideon's tiny army—in the same way He would ultimately break the power of sin and bring redemption to the world through a tiny infant. This infant would grow to be the One who took everyone's sin and shame. The One who was beaten would deliver humankind from the rod of injustice; the one who bore the yoke of the Cross would deliver people from their impossible burdens.

5 For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.

Along with the theme of light versus darkness, another major theme of Isaiah is the end of war or end of hostilities—the advent of peace. Indeed, “they shall beat their swords into plowshares” (Isaiah 2:4) and “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb” (11:6) are among the prophet's best-loved passages. It must be noted that the end of hostilities is a precondition of peace, but peace is not limited to putting down arms (see 32:17).

The first clause of verse 5 refers to the method of deliverance, which, as in the case of the Midianites, will be achieved through confusion and noise (Judges 7:18ff.). The second part of the verse refers to the future, when there will be no more wars, battles, and violence in the land. The boots and blood-drenched uniforms of the last soldiers will be burned. They are only good for kindling, for the prophesied kingdom of peace has come (see 2:4 and Micah 4:3).

6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

The promise of a child named Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14) is fulfilled by the promised birth in 9:6 of the Son, who was both God and King. It is beyond question that both prophecies foretell Jesus. Isaiah goes on to describe the nature, name, and being of our Messiah. The descriptive words present Him as the great King and Conqueror who has crushed all His enemies, and has liberated His people from the yoke of oppression.

The Child who would bear the righteous rule on His shoulders would remove the burden from the shoulders of the oppressed (v. 4). The phrase “the government shall be upon his shoulder” speaks of Him as the King who is clad with authority (cf. Isaiah 22:22–24). The phrase “upon His shoulder” is similar to how we might say today that someone felt “the weight of the world on their shoulders.” In contrast to the burden and staff that Israel bore on their shoulders under the dominion of their oppressors, this time the staff of power will rest on the Messiah, and He will have dominion. To do this, He is given a five-fold (or four-fold depending on the translation) name that describes the nature and mode of His kingship. First, He will be called “Wonderful” (Heb. *pele'*, PEH-leh), meaning “marvelous, or a miracle or wonder.” Second, He is called “Counselor” (Heb. *ya'ats*, yaw-OTS), which means “to devise, consult, plan, or advise.” The idea is that He will be the Supreme Counselor—the One qualified to give advice and direction to all creation. We should note the difference in translations. While the KJV and NKJV separate “Wonderful” and Counselor” with a comma, many other modern translations string the two words together (to be parallel with the other two word

descriptors of the Messiah). Whether together or separate, these are attributes of Yahweh (see Isaiah 5:19; 25:1). There is a supernatural, extraordinary overtone of divine wisdom and power (see Isaiah 11:2).

“Mighty God”—in Hebrew this is gibbor 'el (gee–BORE EL), a divine title (see Nehemiah 9:32; Isaiah 10:21; Jeremiah 32:18). This is one of the many places in Scripture where the Messiah is called God (see John 1:1; 20:28; Romans 9:5; Hebrews 1:8; 1 John 5:20). A gibbor is a “strong, valiant champion.” Many people throughout the Hebrew Bible are called 'ish gibbor (EESH gee– BOR), a mighty man. The Messiah, however, is the only gibbor 'el, mighty God.

“Everlasting Father”—in Hebrew this is 'ad 'ab (ODD AWB), a simple phrase with much poetry in its repeated and similar sounds. Yahweh, the divine Father, cares for the orphans and widows (Psalm 68:5) and also loves and cares for all His people (103:13). Isaiah uses similar language later: “thou, O LORD, art our father, our redeemer; thy name is from everlasting” (Isaiah 63:16). He is the unchangeable Father, both in character, exhibiting the true fatherhood and in existence, living from eternity to eternity.

“Prince of Peace”—in Hebrew this is sar shalom (SAR shaw–LOME), another alliterative phrase. This name is the culmination of other names. The word “Prince” is translated from the Hebrew word sar, which is used for military and official terms such as “captain, general, ruler, or governor.” It also means “steward” or “keeper.” He is therefore the chief or captain who is the custodian and keeper of peace. “Peace” here does not necessarily only mean absence or cessation of hostility and violence, but as derived from the Hebrew shalom (shaw–LOME) which speaks of “complete salvation, rest, welfare, happiness, and tranquility.” Shalom can mean many things: contentment or fulfillment (Genesis 15:15); health and well-being (29:6); confidence and freedom from anxiety (1 Samuel 1:17); goodwill, harmony, or tranquility (Exodus 4:18); and favor or peace with God (see Numbers 6:26; also Isaiah 53:5, prophetically speaking of Jesus creating this peace).

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

As an elaboration of the divine names of the Child, the implications also are nothing short of supernatural. A king might enlarge a kingdom (e.g., David, 2 Samuel 8), but only a divine king can enlarge His kingdom infinitely— this kingdom will be so much greater than the kingdom of Israel. His government will continue to increase until one day it fills the entire earth. Likewise, the increase of His peace will be limitless; it will stretch to all parts of the earth. This increase will also have no end in time; when the Messiah returns in His glory to sit on His throne, it will last for eternity.

By sitting on the throne of David and ruling in His kingdom, the Messiah completes a promise made earlier to David (2 Samuel 7:12ff.) and fulfilled in Christ Jesus (Luke 1:32). He will “order it” (Heb. kun, KOON), i.e., set it up or establish it firmly. He will uphold or sustain it with “judgment” (Heb. mishpat, meesh– POT, lawful orders) and with “justice” (Heb. tsedaqah, tseh–daw–KAH, righteousness). Not only that, everything will be built on judgment and justice (see again Isaiah 11:1–9). In other words, He will rule by God’s own set standards, with equity and fairness (1:17) in contrast to the reign of the Jewish rulers both past and present (3:14; 5:7, 23). The prophet again reiterates the permanency of the Messiah’s kingdom, characterized by justice and righteousness, and says that it will be different “from henceforth even for ever.”

All that Isaiah foresees here will be accomplished through the all-powerful and loving zeal of the Lord Almighty. This last phrase removes even the slightest doubt regarding the fulfillment of this

prophecy. The last sentence of verse 7 changes the prior prophetic perfect tense to simple future tense: It will happen— God Himself will make sure of it.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

God's Holy People Live Justly
(Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18)

TUESDAY

Enthroned upon Righteousness and Justice
(Psalm 89:14-21)

WEDNESDAY

Be Content; Pursue Righteousness
(1 Timothy 6:6-12)

THURSDAY

Do Justice, Love Kindness, Walk Humbly
(Micah 6:1-8)

FRIDAY

Seek God's Kingdom and Righteousness
(Matthew 6:25-34)

SATURDAY

God's King Will Judge with Righteousness
(Isaiah 11:1-9)

SUNDAY

God's Light Has Shined
(Isaiah 9:1-7)