

“The Dawn of Unexpected Joy”

Isaiah 9¹⁻⁷

Isaiah was a prophet who lived and worked through the darkest period of Israel’s history (740-681 BC). Throughout his life he was God’s appointed spokesman who challenged and advised the kings of Israel, who, for the most part ignored him and did their own thing. To those who had turned away from God, he offered a voice of judgment. To God’s faithful minority he offered a voice of hope and comfort. In this passage in Isaiah, we hear one of his great messages of hope delivered to a people in desperate need of it.

Introductory Question

Q – For some, Christmas is “the most wonderful time of the year” and for others it’s a “most distressing time of the year”. Why such contrasting experiences of the same season?

What kind of emotions have you experienced (or are experiencing) during this holiday season?

Discussion Questions

- 1) **Read Isaiah 9:1-7.** Where were Zebulun and Naphtali located? What kind of “gloom” and “distress” and humility had they experienced (read Isa 8⁶⁻⁹; 10⁵⁻⁶; 2 Kgs 15²⁹)?
- 2) What kind of future does God have planned for them (vv.1b-3)? What kind of “great light” do you think they were looking for?
- 3) When you think of moments of “great joy” (personally or culturally), what images or experiences come to mind? How do they compare to the images Isaiah uses?
- 4) What reason or reasons does Isaiah give for their coming dramatic change in fortunes?
- 5) What made “the day of Midian’s defeat” so memorable (see Judges 6)? What miraculous story (or stories) of liberation could you add to the one Isaiah chose? (biblical or personal stories)
- 6) What is so special about the child that will be born? Which of his four throne names do you find most significant?
- 7) What proof or assurance did Isaiah give that this vision would come true?
- 8) What evidence and assurance do you think New Testament writers like Matthew had that Jesus was and is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s vision (read Matthew 4¹²⁻¹⁷)?
- 9) Professor John Goldingay says that, “While the beginning of Jesus’ ministry recalls Isaiah 9¹⁻² (Mt. 4¹³⁻¹⁶), the NT does not refer verses 6-7 to Jesus, and a reign of *shalom* and justice does not seem yet to have been implemented in the world—any more than it was in the time of Isaiah.” Do you think Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy (partly? completely?)?
- 10) What dawn of a new day are you hoping for this coming year?