

Lesson 8 Isaiah 8:9-9:7 The Word to Judah II

Introduction

What sets you apart from all the people around you when the flood waters rise or when the daylight fades to gloom? Even if you are walking in murky night, do you see with the eyes of faith the sure hope of dawn?

Isaiah did. And he recognized that sure hope to be found in a child. At first, the child seems to serve only as a sign of God's presence. He is a mysterious child without father, born of a virgin, who reaches down from Heaven and up from Hell. By his name, he points us to the fact that God is with us, Immanuel. Isaiah does not see the child only as a sign pointing us to our hope in the imminent presence of God. The child himself is God with us. He is our sure hope. He is the dawn. That is the word to Judah manifested to us more fully through the birth, life, death, resurrection and heavenly reign of Jesus Christ. We wait only for Him to return and establish His eternal reign on Earth.

And we see Isaiah's view on this. 700 years before the birth of Christ, we get this amazing prophetic word to Judah that began in our last lesson with a moment of decision and a judgment. Ahaz King of Judah and Son of David made a decision. He refused to trust God. He put his faith in the power and wealth of Assyria. This was his foreign policy, to invite a lion into his backyard to kill two snakes, Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Aram. Isaiah pronounced judgment. Pekah and Rezin would be judged for seeking to overthrow the house of David. Judah would also suffer. The problem of inviting a lion into your yard is that he might not leave. Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria will decide Judah too tasty a morsel to let go. He will flood down into the land like the mighty Euphrates overflowing her banks, like a bird of prey whose wings cover the breadth of the land. Isaiah says it will be devastating, but it will not be final. The waters will rise to the throat, up to the neck but not cover nose and mouth.

In dark and difficult times like these, what sets the faithful apart from the faithless? That's the third section of this word to Judah. We considered section 1: the moment of decision; section 2; the judgment. Now we will consider section 3: the remnant, and section 4: the glorious hope.

There is an important way the remnant is not set apart. The remnant experiences the calamity that falls on the nation, just like everyone else. We do experience blessings in this life as we walk according to God's way. But we also still live in a broken world. We experience tornado and flood, cancer and heart attack along with everyone else. And we experience the evil that people do to one another and the damage in a morally corrupt society. We are not set apart from suffering.

So, what does set the faithful apart? I like the outline Alec Motyer gives to the remnant section.¹ He recognizes two marks of differentiation, the Lord's presence and a response of faith. Those two things set us apart. The focus on the remnant is in 8:9-22. We will consider first how the Lord's presence differentiates the people of God from all others. That emphasis is in verses 9-15.

The Remnant (Isaiah 8:9-22)

1. The Lord's presence as the point of differentiation (9–15)

⁹ "Be broken, O peoples, and be shattered; Gird yourselves, yet be shattered;	And give ear, all remote places of the earth. Gird yourselves, yet be shattered.
¹⁰ "Devise a plan, but it will be thwarted;	State a proposal, but it will not stand,
For God is with us."	

¹¹ For thus the LORD spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying,

¹² "You are not to say, 'It is a conspiracy!' In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy,	And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it.
¹³ "It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard	And He shall be your fear and he shall be

¹ J. A. Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 92-93.

- as holy.
14 "Then He shall become a sanctuary;²
To both the houses of Israel,
15 "Many will stumble over them,
They will even be snared and caught."
- your dread.
a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,
a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of
Jerusalem.
Then they will fall and be broken;

The first two verses establish a differentiation between the peoples of the world and God's special chosen people. That language is very reminiscent of Psalm 2, a Messianic Psalm. That Psalm begins with peoples scheming against God, rulers taking a stand against the Lord's anointed king. God does not take them seriously. He laughs at their arms raised up against Him. And He says to His anointed one,

You are My Son,
You shall ^abreak them with a rod of iron,
Today I have begotten You.
You shall shatter them like earthenware.

And God says to the nations,

Do homage to the Son, that He may not become angry,
and you perish *in* the way,
For His wrath may soon be kindled.
How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

Here in Isaiah, the people of God are facing this very reality. Other peoples conspire together to overthrow Judah and remove the anointed son of David from the throne. Isaiah's message to the peoples of Aram, and Israel, and Assyria, and to all peoples who plan evil against God's chosen ones.

- 9 "Be broken, O peoples, and be shattered;
Gird yourselves, yet be shattered;
10 "Devise a plan, but it will be thwarted;
State a proposal, but it will not stand,
For God is with us."
- And give ear, all remote places of the earth.
Gird yourselves, yet be shattered.

That's what differentiates the people of God: "For God is with us." That phrase is literally "for Immanuel" (*kî 'immānû 'ēl*). God is with us, even when the flood waters rise.

Verse 11 is a bridging pointing both to this truth from God and the next truth from God.

- 11 For thus the LORD spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of
this people, saying,

In these dark times, God strengthens Isaiah, giving him prophetic words that are both personally edifying and also useful for Isaiah in his ministry to a small group in Judah who do believe. The phrase, "For the Lord spoke to me with mighty power" includes what we have just read. The flood waters may rise but God is with us. Peoples of the Earth, leaders and people of influence will at times make plans to disrupt the people of God. Sometimes, those threats will not materialize. Rezin and Pekah made plans to topple the throne of David. God thwarted that plan. Sometimes, the plans do go into effect. Tiglath-Pileser did overrun Judah. But his plan to conquer Jerusalem did not stand. God does not prevent threat from the unbelieving world. And he does not always prevent the unbelieving world from making inroads, from causing suffering on His people. The people of God are required to live by faith because darkness, and suffering, and pain do come. This is the word God gives Isaiah as light when things are dark – Immanuel, God is with us.

That distinction is applied to all of Israel. In a special way, the whole people of Israel, faithful and faithless, can claim "God is with us." The whole Christian Church today can make a similar claim. God is with us. God is with us in His Church. Still, another distinction must be made. In a more particular way, God is with the remnant. There is a people within the people. There is a church within the

² Alter follows a secondary reading for this verse which does not include the word "sanctuary." The NASB changes the order of the second phrase, moving it after "two houses." I have kept both the words and the order of the Masoretic text.

Church. General promises apply to the institution that is the people of God. Specific promises apply to that smaller group of people who have truly believed in God as their Lord and Savior. The eyes of their hearts have been opened, and they have submitted in faith. They are the remnant. In Isaiah's time that did not include Judah alone. These words are to both houses of Israel, the Southern Kingdom and the Northern Kingdom.

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| <p>¹² "You are not to say, '<i>It is a conspiracy!</i>'
In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy,</p> <p>¹³ "It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard
as holy.</p> <p>¹⁴ "Then He shall become a sanctuary;
To both the houses of Israel,</p> <p>¹⁵ "Many will stumble over them,</p> | <p>And you are not to fear what they fear or be in
dread of <i>it</i>.</p> <p>And He shall be your fear and he shall be
your dread.</p> <p>a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,
a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of
Jerusalem.</p> <p>Then they will fall and be broken;
They will even be snared and caught."</p> |
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This is the test of faith Ahaz failed. The people of Judah were afraid, recognizing the reality of threat and suffering. There is real, significant opposition. There is reason to fear. In the reality of that fear, the person of faith is to lift their eyes higher up. They are not to focus on the conspiracies of unbelievers. They are to fix their eyes on the Lord of hosts and to regard Him as holy. Isaiah needs to remember the vision of his calling described in chapter 6. "You have seen God as high and lifted up, whose glory fills the earth. You have seen God as holy, holy, holy." The message to Isaiah now is to remember that; remember who God is. "He shall be your fear and he shall be your dread." Isaiah had experienced that fear in the presence of God. "I am undone. I have seen God. I am a sinner of unclean lips." Isaiah had also experienced the grace of God to atone for his sin. That right dread of God developed into a holy fear that includes awe and gratitude at the holy goodness of God. Isaiah had an understanding of God's intense purity and God's abundant grace that allowed him to be with God in His holy presence with a right fear. He wasn't afraid to be with God. And that is the first phrase of verse 14. If we lift our eyes up, and we have this right relationship, this right fear but also understanding of grace that covers us, "Then he shall become your sanctuary." After you have turned your eyes to Him as the One you should truly fear, He becomes sanctuary for you.

Sanctuary may include the idea of safe haven. Sanctuary in this context primarily means, "a holy place." Those who have seen God with the eyes of faith and submitted to Him as Lord and Savior experience the presence of God in this special way. They are able to be with Him in His holiness. And that further sets them apart. They are the people within the people, or the Church within the Church. I do not mean that there is this kind of super-spiritual, special class of Christian. I mean simply that they are those who have entered into relationship with God through simply faith. In New Covenant language, they are those who have been born again. They have a personal relationship with God, based on receiving His grace through faith.

The first distinction of "God with us" was a general distinction between Israel the chosen people, and the nations of the Earth. This second distinction differentiates between all Jews and those Jews who have truly believed in Yahweh. I do need to be careful applying this distinction to the Church. Using the word "Church" in one way I may refer to everybody who has truly placed their faith in Jesus, to all who have been born again. If that is what I mean by "Church," and it is usually the way I use the word "Church," then my language of Church in a Church does not work here. The idea of Church within a Church is helpful when we think about our social reality. Lots of people in society claim to be Christian. They claim to be part of the Church. In some countries there is a national sense of Christianity, often Catholic or Orthodox. In other countries there are long established Protestant churches. Kids grow up Methodist, or Baptist, or Assembly of God, or Moravian. Lots of people are traditionally or culturally Christian. Using that broad cultural definition of the word "Church," the idea of a Church within a Church becomes a lot more helpful. Jesus expressed the idea in His parable about wheat and tares. Tares are weeds that look like wheat. You do not recognize them as tares

until harvest time when you see they don't have any fruit. Sometimes it is quite clear when people claiming to be a Christian have no real, personal relationship with God. At other times, it is difficult determining whether a person who claims the title "Christian" is truly born again. Jesus' parable is telling us that we have to live with that ambiguity. You are going to have to wait and let the angels sort that out. At the same time, the parable also affirms distinction. There are wheat and there are tares in our Christian communities.

The majority who are culturally religious will speak as though they believe and yet not yield their heart to God, to walk in the ways of God and so they won't experience the fruit of God's holy presence in their lives. God won't truly be sanctuary to them. In fact, the true vision of God that Isaiah preaches becomes a stumbling block. If you were to preach the simple message of Jesus in many churches today and call people to live in submissive obedience to God's revealed will in the Bible, that message would trip up a lot of people. A lot of people in church! So, in rejecting the basic Gospel message and in rejecting the basic morality of faith, they stumble and fall even while claiming to be Christian. Isaiah brings together tightly this idea of how God's presence among His people is either sanctuary or stumbling block.

<p>¹⁴ "Then He shall become a sanctuary; To both the houses of Israel,</p> <p>¹⁵ "Many will stumble over them,</p>	<p>a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.</p> <p>Then they will fall and be broken; They will even be snared and caught."</p>
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These verses make a distinction based on God's presence. How is the remnant different? The remnant is different because God is with us. He is with us both in the general sense of keeping His promise to Israel and to the Church. He is also with us in the very personal sense of being our present sanctuary, our holy place. We stand with God in grace. Isaiah moves on to a second mark of distinction. In defining that first distinction, I have already talked about the second distinction. It is the response of faith. Isaiah develops that distinction in a contrast between the way of faith and the way of faithlessness. The way of faith is in 16-18 and the way of faithlessness is in 19-22. This is the way of faith, Isaiah 8:16-19.

2. Faith as the mark of differentiation (16-22)

The Way of Faith

¹⁶ Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. ¹⁷ And I will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will even look eagerly for Him. ¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

This is the way of faith. The testimony here is the testimony of God, the witness He communicates about Himself and about our reality. Law here is literally "torah," though the word "torah" has a broader meaning of instruction. Isaiah's disciples are to bind and seal the words he is delivering from God. They are not to add to, or change the revealed Word of God. They are to act on that word by waiting for the Lord. "Waiting here" is another word for "faith." It is a patient dependence on God. And I can ask myself, "Is that what faith looks like in me? In dark times and struggling times, do I have this patience, confidence awaiting for God to reveal Himself?" Isaiah says he is waiting while God hides His face. That's a reference to the punishment about to fall on Israel and Judah. The face of God shines, giving light to those who believe. That light has gone out. God has pulled His presence back. The way of the faithful is to wait and look eagerly even when God's presence does not seem apparent.

Children here is another way to refer to disciples or believers. In this context, that word also reminds us of Isaiah's two sons and their prophetic names, "a remnant shall return", and "swift is the booty, speedy is the prey." In contrast to Ahaz, who rejected God's offer of a sign, Isaiah and those who walk with him look for the signs God has promised. They expect wonders from God. They expect God

to do the supernatural. And they are prepared to wait for it during this dark time while God has His face turned away.

This way of faith is contrasted by the way of faithlessness in 19-22.

The Way of the Faithless

¹⁹ When they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? *Should they consult* the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

²¹ They will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. ²² Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and *they will be driven away into darkness.*

Ahaz gave us an example of culturally religious spirituality. He gave lip service to God without submitting to the word of God. “Who am I to ask for a sign? I’m spiritual!” Yeah, but then if we turn over to 2 Kings 16 we see where this takes Ahaz. His way of cultural religion devolved as he adopted what he believed to be superior forms of spirituality defined and practiced outside of Biblical revelation. He was over-awed, not by God. He was enamored by the great king Tiglath-Pileser. He exchanged the word of God for an Assyrian mode of worship, an Assyrian altar to put in God’s Temple.

People do not remain spiritually neutral. We walk with God, or we drift away from God. In this passage, Isaiah challenges the traditionally religious Jews who have made that natural shift away from Biblical practice. They haven’t held tightly to God’s way revealed in Scripture so they naturally kind of shift towards the culture. And they consult mediums and spiritists, because that is what people did in ancient Near Eastern culture. That’s one way to get what you want, to gain power, to gain control, to have insight. Isaiah points to the irony of those who claim to believe in God, and yet they do not seek His face. They seek the dead. The same charge is relevant in our day as people who claim to hold to Christian faith turn to all kinds of alternatives to get the peace, and the joy, and the love promised by God but they are not feeling in their lives. Influencers offer peace, and joy, and satisfaction through a plethora of options. You can choose it through Buddhism or angels, through yoga or minimalism, through good health or self-acceptance, through relationships or job success, through defining yourself however you want to define yourself, through traveling around the world, through saints or horoscope, through the convenience and safety of a perfectly tuned automated home monitoring system. Peace, joy, and satisfaction are yours: just try this.

Ok. With some of those things there is definitely some good mixed in. So I’m not trying to trash everything that our culture offers. But even if we were to take all the best parts of cultural practices, it is not possible to experience the fruits of an abundant life without orienting your life around patient faith in God and consistent obedience to His Word.

I think, especially at Christmas time, people want the fruit of abiding of Christ. They want love, they want joy, they want peace, they want hope. But they don’t want to do the work of abiding in Christ: consistent faith; to love God through obedience; to be in His Word; to depend on the Holy Spirit. And there are others, who are striving to do these right religious things, the religious works of abiding to get the joy and peace and love, but they are missing the heart. It has got to come back to this patient faith, this awe of God, this loving gratitude for God. And it really is in that order. You want love, and joy, and peace, you want that kind of fruit, it starts in a heart of faith. It starts in the heart. But then it requires some action, some consistent obedience, some being in the Word, some patient waiting. And that is going to result in the fruit of the Spirit. When we hold on kind of this cultural religiosity and things are dark or troubling, whether outside of us or inside of us, then we are naturally set up to look for spiritual forms or ways to get satisfaction in the culture, outside and apart from the Word of God.

Isaiah calls the people of God back to the way of faith. “To the law and to the testimony!” Those who refuse to trust God have no dawn. They cannot walk with the eyes of waiting faith that see ahead to a new day. They do not hope in the realization of God’s plans and the triumph of grace. They pass through the land of Judah downtrodden. The suffering they experience is also experienced by the faithful, but unlike the faithful, when they look up from their suffering, they do not receive comfort from God. They shake their fists in bitterness. Having spent their energy cursing God and cursing king – “It’s God’s fault! It’s the politicians’ fault! Life sucks!”, and they gaze and turn downward again in despair. “Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and *they will be* driven away into darkness.”

The difference of being in personal relationship with God, experiencing His presence and responding in faith, shows up in dark time. The remnant hopes. The rest despair.

Isaiah shifts now to speak about the glorious hope of the faithful. This is one of the most important Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. I am reading from Isaiah 9:1-7. The verse numbering is different for Bible versions that follow the Hebrew numbering. In the Hebrew numbering the first verse of chapter 9 is the last verse in chapter 8. The text is all the same. It just changes, kind of, the verse numbering. I know this is true in the Croatian text. I don’t know about your language. What I am reading in the English as 9:1-7 may be for you as 8:23-9:6. But it’s still all the same words.

The Glorious Hope (9:1-7)

¹ 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.

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.
³ You shall multiply the nation,	You shall increase their gladness;
They will be glad in Your presence	As with the gladness of harvest,
As men rejoice	when they divide the spoil.
⁴ For You shall 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	And cloak rolled in blood,
in the <i>battle</i> tumult,	
	will be for burning, fuel for the fire.
⁶ 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 <i>His</i>	On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
government or of peace,	
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.

I love that! That’s awesome! As a Christian it is hard to read verse 1 without immediately thinking about Jesus growing up in the town of Nazareth located in this northern region of Israel.

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 the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

There is connection between these regions and the international conflict Judah is currently caught up in. Naphtali extended the territory of Israel to its furthest northern border on the west side of the Jordan river. Zebulun was to the southwest of Naphtali. These regions, along with Gilead, which was on the east side of the Jordan river, were the first to fall to the Assyrians. They were the first Jews to suffer exile. And they were treated with contempt. They were not protected. And they were

incorporated into that empire as three Assyrian provinces. Motyer believes these three territories are what is meant by the three phrases, “the way of the sea,” “the other side of Jordan,” and “Galilee of the Gentiles.” The same provinces that were first put to shame will be later made glorious through the ministry of Jesus Christ.³ He spends most of His time in Galilee.

We should also note the reference to “Galilee of the Gentiles.” And though the region around the Sea of Galilee always did include a mixture of Jew and Gentiles, no other references in the Old Testament to Galilee emphasize the Gentile population. It’s just called “Galilee,” not “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Isaiah, as is his practice, is including Gentiles into the new hope, just as he included Gentiles in his vision of New Jerusalem back in chapter 2.

The way Isaiah describes this glorious hope reminds me of the prologue to the Gospel of John. John starts with two great mysteries of Biblical faith. He starts with the mystery of the Trinity, “The Word was with God, the Word was God.” Then he refers to the mystery of the incarnation, that is, God coming into the world, starting with an abstract reference and moving to a concrete reference. The abstract reference is to light, “There was the true Light which coming into the world, enlightens every man.” And from that reference, unless you know the story, you don’t know that the true light is coming as a human being. The light is in the world. You know, what is that light? Is that a spirit? Is it just truth? The concrete reference reveals this, “The word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory (John 1:9, 14).”

I wonder if John took his cue from Isaiah, who speaks first of this glorious hope first as a great light, and that’s abstract, we don’t know exactly what that is. But then we see it’s a human child, and in the name of the child there is this allusion to the triune nature we have, again, Trinity and incarnation. We start with the glorious hope described in terms of a great light.

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.

Remember, God has hid His face from Jacob, but you are going to have a great light shine on you. The face of God will shine.

³ You shall multiply the nation,	You shall increase their gladness;
They will be glad in Your presence	As with the gladness of harvest,
As men rejoice	when they divide the spoil.

The people of Judah walk in darkness. Those who believe are looking ahead to the dawn of a new hope. And their hope will be satisfied. A light will arise, and the nation will be blessed. And the joy of the people is expressed metaphorically as being like the joy of people gathering in a fruitful harvest. For a moment you can just stop at the scene of this community, and the harvest is good, and we’re gathering in the grain, and the apples, and the wine, and there’s, just, joy. It’s just a happy day. It is also as the joy of warriors dividing the spoil of a conquered people. Isaiah is using that second metaphor of dividing the spoil in the context of ancient Near East turmoil. It is what the nation of Judah is about to experience. They look like easy pickings to the Assyrians. “Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.” Isaiah sees the tables turned. And Judah will be victorious.

The next three phrases all begin with the word “for”, each providing an explanation about how the great light multiplies the nation and increases gladness. The word “for” can be read here as “because.” Gladness and prosperity will come because...

⁴ [Because] You shall break the yoke of their burden	and the staff on their shoulders,
The rod of their oppressor,	as at the battle of Midian.

The great light brings gladness and prosperity because at the time of its rising God will overcome the oppressor. Motyer points to the three nouns, “yoke,” “shoulders”, and “rod” as evoking

³ Motyer, 99-100.

remembrance of the Egyptian oppression, when the Jews were slaves in that land. He also connects the battle of Midian with Gideon's victory over the Midianites. And when I read Motyer's comments, I thought, how can you know that these words, they all point us back to Gideon and the Exodus? That seems like, to me, you are reaching too hard for a connection. But then when we get to chapter 10:24-26, we are going to see the same three words "yoke," "shoulders," and "rod" in context with the Egyptian oppression (Egypt will be mentioned), and we will see a reference to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb, which is a clear Gideon reference. So, yes, Motyer is right. This is a reference to the Exodus and Gideon. And though it is like an Easter egg in a movie here, if we miss it, it will be made more clear in chapter 10.

What do the references do for us? Judah's current international crisis is not so severe as to be like slavery in Egypt, but it will become much more like that when Judah is exiled. The reference to Gideon's story links in a number of ideas. When we think of Isaiah telling Ahaz to ask for a sign, we cannot help but think of Gideon, who twice laid out a lamb's fleece and received a sign from God. The Midianites were bringing destruction on the land, just like this great flood Isaiah pictures, it's another connection. In the Gideon story, the affliction from Midian affected the northern tribes with Zebulun and Naphtali being mentioned specifically in the Gideon story, just like we have here at the beginning of chapter 9. And the victory included lights shining in the enemy camp. Maybe that connects, too.

Even with all that, the Gideon reference connects to our current situation predominantly through the idea of an oppressor being removed from Israel by the hand of God. God's zeal is going to do this. Midian boasted an army of 120,000. God would destroy that army in a way that communicated clearly who was responsible for the victory. God is responsible. Nobody believed Gideon had a chance. It was like Greece winning the European Cup in 2004, or the Americans beating the Soviet Union at Olympic hockey in 1980. They didn't have a chance. But those underdog stories don't really capture the incredibly, unbelievable upset of Gideon defeating Midian. God knocked Gideon's army down to only 300 men. 300 against 120,000! That's more like Malta winning the World Cup. No. That's like that lone Chinese man who tried to stand down a tank during the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989. Gideon had as much chance of winning as that man did. So, when Gideon won, everyone knew without a doubt that God made it happen.

That's good news for Judah. Anyone in Judah over the next few years would certainly assume the oppressor in this reference, it's not Egypt or Midian, it's Assyria. Assyria will, in fact, reach the walls of Jerusalem during the reign of both Ahaz and his son Hezekiah. And in both cases Judah will be a Gideon-like super-extreme underdog. There is no way the behemoth of Assyria's well trained, massive, iron army fails to take down Jerusalem. And yet, they did fail. Twice. Even so, the oppressor is removed only temporarily. Judah will continue to struggle under the domination of super-power Assyria, then super-power Babylon, then super-power Persia. The yoke does not appear broken. This text seem to promise more, especially as we move on to verse 5.

⁵ [Because] every boot of the booted warrior And cloak rolled in blood,
in the *battle* tumult,
will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

Isaiah is saying that the great light will bring gladness and prosperity because war will end. The breaking of the yoke is so complete, the equipment of war will not be needed anymore. It will be burned up in fire. Is that just a temporary reference? How can war end? That sounds like chapter 2 verse 4.

And they will hammer their swords into plowshares And their spears into pruning hooks.
Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war.

So, we burn the boots and the cloaks in the fire. Not needed. How is it that the great light ends warfare? How can this be true? The "for" of verse 6 tells us that oppression and warfare end because of this.

⁶ 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 <i>His</i>	On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
government or of peace,	
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.

We've just left the realm of humanly possible. Though we have not left the realm of human. We are talking about the Messiah. We are talking about the throne of David. We are talking about a child, a son who will reign. We are talking about a human being. But how can a human being end war? How can a human being establish and uphold a reign of justice and righteousness that will be forever? A human being cannot. Or I should say, a mere human being cannot. A human being who is also God, can.

And that is exactly where the fourfold name of this human being is going to lead us. This is a child who is also God. This statement truly astounds. Other ancient Near Eastern cultures attribute godhead to their rulers. Not Israel. And certainly not Isaiah, who has beheld the glory of God Almighty. More than once, Isaiah is going to assert the central Jewish truth that God is one. 45:5-6 states this truth emphatically.

⁵ "I am the LORD, and there is no other;	Besides Me there is no God.
I will gird you, though you have not known Me;	⁶ That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun
That there is no one besides Me.	I am the LORD, and there is no other,

The prophet cannot be saying this child is God in the sense that the first born of Pharaoh claims to be God. Could these names be symbolic, like the names of Isaiah and his sons, referring to something true about God but not applying to the child? That's a possibility. But that is really not what this sounds like. That's why Jewish theologians are not satisfied with saying these names are only symbolic truths about God. They go to some effort to show a different interpretation, especially for the name phrase, "mighty God."

There are four names here. Some Bible translations list five names by separating out "wonderful" and "counselor." In the Hebrew, the names consist of eight nouns. There are no adjectives here in the Hebrew. The last six nouns are paired with one another through a genitive construction which translates like an adjectives, "Mighty God," "Eternal Father," "Prince of Peace."⁴ The first two nouns are not related to one another through a genitive construction, but the parallelism of the Hebrew text requires that we recognize those two nouns as belonging together in the pair "Wonderful Counselor."

"Mighty God" is the name that causes the most consternation for non-Christian interpreters. To give you an example from a Jewish scholar, here is the note that Robert Alter attaches to this verse.

The most challenging epithet in this sequence is 'el gibor, which appears to say "warrior-god." The prophet would be violating all biblical usage if he called the Davidic king "God," and that term is best construed here as some sort of intensifier. In fact, the two words could conceivably be a scribal reversal of gibor 'el, in which case the second word would clearly function as a suffix of intensification as it occasionally does elsewhere in the Bible.⁵

So he is saying, You know, "el," if we put it on the other side of "gibor", "el" which normally means "God," maybe it doesn't mean "God" at all in this case. It's just meant to intensify "gibor". So, he's a great warrior, mighty warrior, not God. I find it quite interesting that Alter says, "The prophet would be violating all biblical usage if he called the Davidic king 'God.'" I agree. That's an excellent point. And yet, he does! That's the problem. I can sympathize with the problem created here for Jewish

⁴ Motyer, 102.

⁵ Robert Alter. *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2019) 1743.

scholars. How can Messiah be called, God? One solution is to translate the phrase some other way, as Alter does. But as John Oswalt points out, “Wherever *’ēl gibbôr* occurs elsewhere in the Bible there is no doubt that the term refers to God (10:21; he mentions Deut. 10:17; Jer. 32:18).”⁶

We can imagine how a good Davidic king could be a wonderful counselor on the level of Solomon, receiving wisdom from God. And we could conceive of a king being called “father of the nation,” though we have to note that Judean kings were not called “father.” That was not part of the way they addressed the king. It would be easier to call a Davidic king, “prince of peace,” especially if he provided security to the nation during his generation. But there is just no way to make the name “Mighty God” fit a human king. And in the context of this verse, we do not appear to be talking about a symbolic name. It looks like Isaiah is giving us the name of the child. Like Moses gave us the name of God in Exodus 34:6-7. His name is His nature. This is who this child is to be.

Consider the names, starting with “Mighty God.” Let’s think about it again. Who do you think of when you hear the name, “wonderful counselor?” Does anybody come to mind? Wonderful counselor. When you hear that phrase, what do you think of? Who do you think of when you hear the name, “Prince of Peace?” You know, you’re just reading your Bible and you read, “Prince of Peace,” who comes to mind first? And who comes to mind first when you hear the name, “Eternal Father?” Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

This is the child who will be born. Mighty God who is also Wonderful Counselor, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. He is one, and He is three. This is both Trinity and Incarnation. The Great Light will enter into the world as a baby and somehow that baby, that man-child, is God.

He does not come to be a baby. He comes as a baby. But this baby boy will grow up to be the King of creation. He will bear the government on His shoulders.

The burden of oppression weighed heavy on the shoulders of the people in verse 4. The strength of this child’s shoulders will bear up an everlasting government. There is no hope for humanity in a human king. All human kings fail at some point. The bad ones like Ahaz and the good ones like Hezekiah, all human kings die. Their generation ends. Their peace is forgotten. Who will remove the oppression? Who will end war? The Son of Adam, who is also Son of God. His reign will not be accomplished through human power, or human goodness, or human ingenuity. Isaiah assures us, “The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this.”

Like the rescue of Israel from Egypt and like the defeat of Midian’s army by Gideon’s army of 300, the reign of this child will be established by the passion of God. The word “zeal” is connected to the word “jealous.” God is jealous for the redemption of His people. He is not content for them to be oppressed. He is moved by the love in His own nature. God will set things right. God will create a future that has no war. God will bring about joy and prosperity. This is God’s plan. God makes it happen. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish these things.

Let’s conclude with one thought about application. Having observed this text about the remnant and about the glorious hope of the remnant, who do you personally identify with in the text? That’s often a great question to ask, “Who am I in this passage?” There’s a child, do I identify with the child? There are people raging, and scheming, and making plans against God. Do I identify with those people? There are religious people who are gonna stumble. And there is a remnant.

I hope you feel that you can identify as one of the remnant, as a disciple of Isaiah. The disciples of Isaiah are marked by the presence of God and a faithful response to Him. Do you experience God as your sanctuary? Do you meet with Him personally, knowing His holiness and knowing His grace? Does something in you respond to the cry, “to the law and to the testimony!”? That is, do you turn to God’s Word as your source for understanding Him and how to understand living for Him? Do you have a glorious hope in your relationship with God?

⁶ J. N. Oswalt. *NICOT: The Book of Isaiah, Chs 1-39*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1986) 247.

The disciple of Isaiah is called by faith to three realities as they walk through dark times. They are called to an experience of the presence of God. They are called to trust the Word of God for instruction and guidance. And they are called to hope in a future dawn.

We live in the wonderful reality of being on the other side of both Christmas and Easter, the birth, the death, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These earlier disciples of Isaiah saw a great light in the future but they did not see clear distinction between the first coming of the Messiah and the second coming. We have seen the light rise, and we look ahead to the glorious return.

If you are a disciple of Isaiah, this is your gladness and prosperity, to know the presence of God through Jesus Christ our Immanuel, and to know with sure conviction that the Son of David reigns now in Heaven and will come again one day to reign on Earth.

May you deeply experience the peace and joy of God's presence as you faithfully walk with Him.