

Kyle Sanford  
Dr. Jack Collins  
Prophetical Books  
22 February 2011

## Isaiah 9:1-6

- 1) The people who walked<sup>1</sup> in the darkness<sup>2</sup>,  
have seen<sup>3</sup> a great light;  
the ones who dwelt<sup>4</sup> in the land of the shadow of death<sup>5</sup>,  
a light has shown upon them.
- 2) You have enlarged the nation<sup>6</sup> [for him]<sup>7</sup>,  
you have made great the<sup>8</sup> joy,  
they make joy before you  
as with joy in the harvest,  
as when they rejoice  
in dividing the spoil<sup>9</sup>.
- 3) For the yoke of his<sup>10</sup> burden  
and the rod of his shoulders,  
the staff of the one who beats at him<sup>11</sup>,  
you have shattered as in the day<sup>12</sup> of Midian<sup>13</sup>.

- 1 Esv: “who walked”; Nasb: “who walk”; Niv: “walking”. *Walked* has been chosen to match the past tense of this passage. Walking is an imagery for act of living out one's life.  
J. Alec Motyer, *The prophecy of Isaiah: an introduction & commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 100.
- 2 This “darkness” is not new experience caused by the Assyrian invasion, although it may have intensified it. Darkness has long been apart of Israel's history.  
Edward J. Young, *The book of Isaiah: the English text, with introduction, exposition, and notes. Vol.I, Chapters 1 to 18* (1965. Reprint. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 324-325.
- 3 Esv, Niv: “have seen”; Nasb: “will see”. Isaiah uses the past tense to demonstrate that the people's hope is secure. It is as if these future events have already occurred. (Motyer 98)
- 4 Like “walked”, “dwelt” was chosen to reflect the past tense of this passage.
- 5 Motyer persuasively argues that דָּוָה should be interpreted as “death-darkness” or *shadow of death*. It is a strong metaphorical word to describe the people's trouble (Motyer 100)
- 6 This reflects the promise made to Abraham (Genesis 12:2)
- 7 The MT includes the negative לֹא, yet there is nothing in the context that would suggest the use of the negative. It is more likely to be לוֹ (for him) in reference to “the nation.” Some translations will adjust this to “for them” since it is a collective noun. Here the singular has been maintained. (Motyer 100)
- 8 Esv: “its”; Nasb, Niv: “their”. These translations make “joy” an object possession, this is more natural for the English use of “joy.” Yet the Hebrew הִשְׂמִיחָהּ does not include a personal suffix.
- 9 The people are not to become the spoil of their enemies. Instead, it is the Lord that will be victorious.  
John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 243.
- 10 Esv: “his”; Nasb, Niv: “their”. The Hebrew is singular, referring to “nation”.
- 11 The language of oppression is reminiscent of Israel's slavery to Egypt.  
Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, Trans. James Martin (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 160.
- 12 Esv, Niv: “day”; Nasb: “battle”. The term “day” is often used in regards to a significant event, and can be used to refer to a battle that took more than one day. יוֹם was translated as “day” to maintain the original imagery  
Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the prophecies of Isaiah* (New York: Wiley And Putnam, 1865), 159.
- 13 Like Gideon's victory over Midian, it is only by God's hand that they people are victorious (Young 327).

4) For<sup>14</sup> every boot<sup>15</sup>  
     of the one who is booted in clatter<sup>16</sup>  
 and the mantle  
     of the one who rolled in blood,  
 and she will be for burning,  
     fuel<sup>17</sup> of fire.

5) For a child<sup>18</sup> has been born<sup>19</sup> to us,  
     a son<sup>20</sup> has been<sup>21</sup> given to us,  
 and the government has been placed  
     upon both shoulders of him,  
 and the name of him has been called<sup>22</sup>  
     one who counsels wonder<sup>23</sup>,  
 valiant<sup>24</sup> God<sup>25</sup>,  
     eternal father,  
 chief of peace

---

14 “For” is a clue to let us know why the people are joyful. The series of three describes the conditions of the is Lord's victory.

Jean Calvin, *Isaiah* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 91.

15 The word for “boot” is likely a borrowed word from a foreign language. This would emphasize the idea of ending foreign powers. (Motyer 101)

16 Esv: “For every boot of the trampling warrior in battle tumult”; Nasb: “For every boot of the booted warrior in battle tumult”; Niv: “Every warrior's boot used in battle”. The repetition of the root “boot” is reflective of the Hebrew.

17 Esv: “as fuel”; Nasb: “fuel”; Niv: “will be fuel”. The Nasb is a more direct translation of the Hebrew.

18 The Hebrew places the emphasis in “child” and not “us.” (Motyer 101) For this reason “child” remains first in this translation (despite the popularity of Handel's Messiah)

19 Although this child is described a divine, we see here that he is still of natural birth. The humbled imagery of a child is mixed with the triumphant imagery of a warrior. This king will bring a unique victory for his people (Oswalt 245).

20 “Son” is parallel to “child.” While the term “child” tells us of his ancestry, “son” reveals that he is worthy to take the throne (Motyer 102).

21 Esv, Niv: “is given”; Nasb: “will be given”. נָתַן has a perfect tense. Even though the events had not taken place, Isaiah is narrating his vision in which these events had already taken place. This is the “prophetic perfect” and is appropriately translated as past tense

C. John Collins, *Verb Tenses in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Psalms, Wisdom Books, Prophets* (St. Louis, MO: Covenant, 2005), 4.

22 Jewish tradition has attempted to remove the messianic element of this passage by translating it as “the God, who is called and is Wonder, Counselor, the mighty God, the eternal Father, calls his name the Prince of Peace.” Yet this detracts from the verse focus on identifying the child (Delitzsch 161).

23 This is commonly translated as “wonderful counselor”. However, פֶּלֶא is noun, not an adjective. It is literally “wonder-counselor” (Motyer 102).

24 “attribute of God especially as fighting for his people... strong, valiant.” גִּבּוֹר has a military tone, keeping in theme with the rest of the passage. “Valiant” has been chosen to emphasize this aspect.

Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The new Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English lexicon: with an appendix containing the biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1979), §1620.

25 There have been attempts to limit the deity of this title by interpreting it as “a god-like warrior.” However, every other usage of אֱלֹהֵי גִבּוֹר refers to God himself. There is no reason this passage should be translated any differently (Oswalt 247).

6) [to the increase<sup>26</sup>] of the<sup>27</sup> government  
 and to peace of no end,  
 upon the throne of David  
 and upon the kingdom  
 to prepare her  
 and to support<sup>28</sup> her  
 in judgment and in righteousness  
 from now and until forever,  
 the zeal of the LORD of armies<sup>29</sup>  
 will make her.

**1) What are the historical circumstances of this prophet and his work? What are the specific circumstances of *this* passage (if we can tell)?**

Isaiah lived in Jerusalem<sup>30</sup> and had a very long career. Originally he was called to be a prophet the year King Uzziah died<sup>31</sup> and he served at least until Sennacherib's campaign (making his service somewhere around 740-701 BC).<sup>32</sup> Isaiah, and his contemporary Micah, spoke primarily to Judah and Jerusalem.<sup>33</sup>

The more immediate concern of this passage is the Syro-Ephraimite war. Isaiah 7 introduces the conflict, which continues through Isaiah 9:1-6. While Ahaz was the king of Judah, Assyria began to reclaim its power under Tiglath-pileser III.<sup>34</sup> Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, were worried about Assyria's oppression and formed a coalition against Assyria. They attempted to recruit Judah, but Ahaz refused. In response, Rezin and Pekah

---

26 There has been a lot of discussion of the final for of *mem* in this word. However, it most likely an error since the previous word ends with the same letter (Oswalt 241).

27 Esv, Nasb, Niv: "his". The English translations show the implied possession of the "government", but this is not in the Hebrew text itself.

28 Esv, Nasb: "to establish/to uphold"; Niv: "establishing/upholding". This translation was chosen to help reflect the infinitive of these two verbs

Paul Joüon, and T. Muraoka, *A grammar of biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Pontificio Istituto biblico, 2006), §124l.

29 Esv, Nasb: "the LORD of hosts"; NIV: "the LORD Almighty". BDB: "1. army, host... 2. war, warfare, service" (§7983). "armies" has been chosen to reflect the military language of the passage

30 Isaiah 7:1-3.

31 Isaiah 6:1.

32 I. Howard Marshall, *New Bible dictionary*, 3rd ed. (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 512.

33 Isaiah 1:1.

34 Marshall 512.

conspired together: “Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it” (Isaiah 7:6).

The Lord called Isaiah to speak Ahaz concerning the Syro-Ephraimite treaty. The Lord said, “It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass” (7:7). Both Syria and Ephraim would be taken by Assyria. Greater yet, the Lord promised a sign of a son who will come, and he shall be called “Immanuel”. It is within this context that Isaiah shares his vision in 9:1-6.

The destruction of Syria and Ephraim is only part of the Lord's promise. The survival of Assyrian invasion is not the end of God's plan. The Lord is establishing an eternal dynasty, and he is giving a son who will be a victorious king. This son/king, Immanuel, will bring about something new. He will conquer warfare itself and bring shalom to his people.

*2) What is the assumed form in which covenant institutions (e.g. kingship; worship; etc.) are administered, and how is this drawn upon and enriched?*

Isaiah 9:1-6 is about the kingship of the covenant. The Messiah will be a child/king who will bring about the end of war and give prosperity to his people.

**3) What is the literary relation of this text to its larger context, and what is the literary structure of the passage itself?**

Isaiah 7-8 builds its way to the vision told in 9:1-6. In the words spoken to Ahaz, the Lord promises to work on his people's behalf. He will not allow his covenant people to be wiped off from the face of the earth. The coming son/king, Immanuel, is the reason why the Lord's promises are made secure. Immanuel will come with a power more fearful than their current enemies,<sup>35</sup> and he will bring an end to their warfare.<sup>36</sup> God will bring an abundance to his

---

<sup>35</sup> Isaiah 8:13

<sup>36</sup> Isaiah 8:9

people.<sup>37</sup>

Many of elements in chapter 7-8 are also found in 9:1-6. **V 1**, there is a great threat to the people of God (the death-like shadow); yet the Lord gives hope (the light in the darkness). **V 2**, there will be multiplication and joy for the people. **V 3**, the oppressors are conquered. **V 4**, the tools of war are destroyed. **V 5**, a son is given who will be king. **V 6**, the greatness of David's kingdom will be restored.

<b>7:1-8</b>	→	<b>9:1</b>
<b>7:21-22</b>	→	<b>9:2</b>
<b>7:23-25</b>	→	<b>9:3</b>
<b>8:9-10</b>	→	<b>9:4</b>
<b>7:14</b>	→	<b>9:5</b>
<b>7:17</b>	→	<b>9:6</b>

The language of 9:1-6 contains linguistic parallelism that is common of Hebrew poetry. Also, there is a repetition of נֶאֱמַר in verses 3-5 which depict purpose. Verses 1-2 declare hope within darkness and abundant joy for God's people. Verses 3-6 are the reason for the people's hope and joy. Their hope is not founded on mere survival; they will have joy when a son is sent who will make the everlasting promises of God become real.

#### *4) What imagery does the prophet use?*

Isaiah uses the imagery of darkness and light. He makes allusions to Israel's captivity in Egypt and Gideon's victory over Midian. There is strong imagery of military power and the dominion of the Messiah.

#### **5) What would constitute fulfillment of predictive events?**

The fulfillment of these predictive events is dependent how we interpret this

---

<sup>37</sup> Isaiah 7:21-22

passage. Who is this child which will be born? There has been an effort within Jewish tradition and modern Christian scholasticism to interpret the child in verses 5-6 as only a man. They look to Hezekiah to be the fulfillment of this prophecy. They come to this conclusion by a couple of ways. Their either they attribute the divine names to God alone,<sup>38</sup> or they remove the divine aspect of these names.<sup>39</sup>

However, even if the language of 9:1-6 is highly figurative, it could not be attributed to Hezekiah. The image is of a powerful king who goes out conquering the armies of the oppressors, not simply withstanding a siege. Assyria destroyed the power of Syria and Ephraim; Babylon was the one who overcame Assyria. While Hezekiah was a great king of Judah, he did not bring about the end of war as it is described in this passage. Also, the child of this passage is supposed to make real an everlasting kingdom. Even if this was watered down to mean a very long-lasting kingdom of prosperity, it would be improper to apply this to the kingdom left behind by Hezekiah.

If these prophecy were not fulfilled by a mere man, then we must take this passage at face value. The Lord's plans go beyond the survival of their contemporary warfare. God is going to bring about the covenant promises made with David by establishing an everlasting kingdom. A child will come who is both born as a man, yet still divine. He will wield great power, but his unique victory will bring an end to warfare itself. This prediction can only be fulfilled by Christ Jesus. He born a child and king in the line of David. He is a light in the darkness. He alone has power to conquer war itself and bring about everlasting peace and prosperity.

## **6) What elements are conditional and unconditional?**

Of Fairbairn's three categories of prophecy, this passage is primarily the first: "those

---

38 See note 22

39 See note 25

whose direct aim is to disclose God's purpose of grace for his people – e.g. Messiah.”<sup>40</sup> There is some aspect of foreign powers being overthrown, but I would hesitate to classify this vision as Fairbairn's second category. The focus of the prophecy is the coming king and prosperity, not end of foreign powers. The third category of prophecy is unlikely. This passage does not have a distinct ethical aim of the people; the work is accomplished by God alone.

Isaiah 9:1-6 is about the Messiah. He is the light in darkness. He will bring about prosperity. He will bring an end to war. He is the king that will bring about an everlasting kingdom. This prophecy is unconditional because it is founded upon the power and faithfulness of God. Although, his victory is not what many people would have expected. The passage even hints at this: he is both a child and king; he is a mighty warrior, yet warfare will cease when he comes into power.

*7) How did the people respond to the message (if we can tell)?*

Ahaz did not listen to the words of Isaiah. He looked to his own strength and not the strength of the coming Messiah. However, a remnant has always been faithful to the covenant promises of God.

**8) How does this passage speak about the people of God – their current condition, their role in the story, and God's future for the people?**

The current condition of the people in this passage are as ones “walking in darkness.” Their dynasty is under threat. Already the kingdom has been divided, and Ahaz has become “wearisome” to the Lord.<sup>41</sup> The threat has become exaggerated by the growing power of Assyria and the Syro-Ephraimite coalition.

---

40 C. John Collins, *A Study Guide for the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (St. Louis, MO: Covenant, 2008), 21.

41 Isaiah 7:13

The promises made by God are accomplished by his work alone. The role of God's people is to be recipients of hope and joy. Yet this is not an idle role for God's people. They must hold fast to their covenant commitments, and maintain their identity as God's people. Ahaz failed in his role when he did not listen to the words of Isaiah. Instead of remaining faithful to God, he sought his own wisdom by paying tribute to Assyria. We also know that the people's covenantal unfaithfulness leads to their exile. However, a remnant remained faithful to the Lord, and the nation would later return home.

When the Messiah came, the role of people continued. They are recipients of his hope and joy, as long as they remain in him. The final work of this prophesy has yet to be completed. Shalom will be fully established when Christ returns again. Warfare will come to an end, and all of those who remained within his covenant will be filled with joy.



## **Bibliography**

- Alexander, Joseph Addison. *Commentary on the prophecies of Isaiah*. New York: Wiley And Putnam, 1865.
- Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *The new Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English lexicon: with an appendix containing the biblical Aramaic*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1979.
- Calvin, Jean. *Isaiah*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000.
- Collins, C. John. *A Study Guide for the Old Testament Prophetical Books*. St. Louis, MO: Covenant, 2008.
- Collins, C. John. *Verb Tenses in Biblical Hebrew Poetry: Psalms, Wisdom Books, Prophets*. St. Louis, MO: Covenant, 2005.
- Delitzsch, Franz. *Isaiah*. Trans. James Martin. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996.
- Joüon, Paul, and T. Muraoka. *A grammar of biblical Hebrew*. Roma: Pontificio Istituto biblico, 2006.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *New Bible dictionary*. 3rd ed. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
- Motyer, J. Alec. *The prophecy of Isaiah: an introduction & commentary*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Oswalt, John. *The Book of Isaiah, chapters 1-39*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986.
- Young, Edward J.. *The book of Isaiah: the English text, with introduction, exposition, and notes. Vol.I, Chapters 1 to 18*. 1965. Reprint. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1992.