

Isaiah – Chapter 9:1-7

Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7 – 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. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them. ... 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. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, 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.

REVIEW

In Chapter 7, we saw Ahaz at the conduit of the upper pool while the two smoldering firebrands from Aram and Israel threatened Jerusalem. We watched YHWH Himself give the house of David the sign of the virgin-born Son called Immanuel. The near horizon promised that the threatening kings would be gone in a very short period. The far horizon pointed to God with us in the flesh. We saw the three threads we're tracing through the whole book tighten again: the Messianic Hope shining even in national panic, the Motif of the City showing Zion under siege yet promised future glory, and the Holy One of Israel whose holiness judges unbelief yet whose faithfulness preserves the Davidic line.

Chapter 8 closed in thick darkness. The people who refused the gentle waters of Shiloah would be swept away by the flood of the Assyrian king. The land would be filled with the wings of the invader. Yet, right at the point of deepest gloom, the prophet turns the page and says, "But there will be no more gloom." That single word "but" is the hinge on which the entire Book of Immanuel swings. We are about to watch light break into the very region that first felt the Assyrian boot.

HISTORICAL BACKDROP

We remain in timeframe of 732-721 BC and the immediate aftermath. Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria has already struck the northern tribes. The districts of Zebulun and Naphtali, the very lands named in verse 1, were the first to be ravaged and partially deported in 732 BC and fully deposed by 721 BC. The prophet looks at the same devastated territory that Ahaz and the people feared and declares that the same God who allowed the contempt will one day turn that contempt into glory. The grammar is deliberate. The Hebrew verbs move from past action (treated with contempt) to future certainty (He shall make it glorious). The historical audience knew the humiliation of those northern tribes; the prophecy tells them the humiliation is not the final word.

EXPOSITION

Verse 1 – The Geography of Hope

“But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish.” The Hebrew word for “gloom” (מַעֲרִיב, ma’ûph) pictures thick, oppressive darkness. The land “in anguish” is literally “the one being distressed.” The prophet names the precise districts: Zebulun and Naphtali, then adds “Galilee of the Gentiles.” These were the first regions to feel the Assyrian rod because they lay on the invasion route from the north. Yet the text says God Himself will reverse the contempt.

Verses 2-3 – Light, Multiplication, and Joy

“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.” The Hebrew verb “will see” (רָאָה, ra’ah) is in the imperfect tense with prophetic force; it is as certain as if it has already happened. The light is not a gradual dawn; it is a sudden, overwhelming burst.

Then verse 3: “Thou shalt multiply the nation, Thou shalt increase their gladness.” The nation is Israel, the very people who have been diminished by invasion. The gladness is compared to harvest joy and the joy of dividing spoil after battle. Both images speak of reversal: what was lost is restored, what was taken is reclaimed.

Theological insight: This multiplication is not merely numerical. It echoes the Abrahamic promise that his seed would be as the stars and the sand. The remnant that survives the Assyrian and later Babylonian blows will one day become the nucleus of a restored people under the Messiah. The joy is not emotional; it is the concrete result of the yoke being broken. This is an often-overlooked prophecy.

Matthew 4:12-16. When Jesus begins His public ministry, He deliberately settles in Capernaum, in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali. Matthew quotes these very verses and says, “to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet.” The Holy Spirit inspired Matthew to see in Jesus’ choice of Galilee the first rays of the light Isaiah promised. The literal geographical fulfillment anchors the prophecy in history while pointing forward to the greater light of the Messiah.

Matthew 4:12 – Before the Father would permit Jesus to be crucified, Jesus needed to fulfill His earthly mission and this strategic retreat to Galilee also fulfilled what was stated by Isaiah.

Matthew 4:13 – To see what happened in Nazareth, we go to Luke 4:16-31. Matthew states that when Jesus came to Capernaum and the setting around the Sea of Galilee, it fulfills an important prophecy.

Matthew 4:13-16 – In Isaiah 1-8, Isaiah is prophesying against Jerusalem; both Judah and Israel (Northern Kingdom) are being warned with Israel coming into judgment during the time of Isaiah. Judah is to watch and see the judgment of the Lord against

Israel and not fall into the same error of Israel. In this midst of judgment and gloom, there is also given prophecy of hope (Isaiah 8:19-9:7).

Messianic Jews understood that when Messiah comes, He must go to Galilee to proclaim to the Jews who are in Gentile-controlled areas. The northern lands will be blessed when Messiah comes because He will not remain in Judah exclusively but will shine a light to the areas of Israel that are characterized by rebellion, idolatry, and darkness.

This prophetic fulfillment is lost if we do not understand both the significance of the rebellion in Zebulun and Naphtali and the greatness of this prophecy. For 700 years they sat in darkness,

Verse 4 – The Yoke Broken

“For Thou shalt break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.” The Hebrew word for “yoke” (יֹכֵל, ‘ol) is the same word used for the heavy wooden beam that bound oxen or slaves. The “staff” and “rod” picture the Assyrian horde; they were brutal. The reference to Midian takes us to Judges 7:1-2, 16-25 – the Lord used Gideon and three hundred men to rout a vastly superior force without conventional weapons. God demonstrates that, regardless of the enemy, He is able to win against any adversary regardless of the size of army Israel has.

Isaiah 10:26-27 will use the same Midian imagery again when the prophet describes the final breaking of the Assyrian yoke. The principle is consistent: when the Holy One of Israel decides the time has come, no human power can stand.

Verse 5 – Total Destruction of the Instruments of War

“For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, and cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.” The Hebrew is vivid and physical; every single boot that tramped in the mud of battle, every blood-soaked cloak, is gathered up and thrown on the fire. War itself is ended. The instruments of oppression become fuel rather than weapons.

This is not a call for pacifism. It is a description of the conditions that will exist when the government described in the next verses is fully established. The text presents one continuous picture: light dawns, joy returns, the yoke is shattered, and the very tools of war are consumed.

Verses 6-7 – The Child Who Is the King

Now the text gives us the reason all of this is possible. “For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us.” The Hebrew is deliberate: a Child is born (humanity), a Son is given (divine gift). The government will rest on His shoulders. The shoulders that once carried the cross will one day carry the rule of the world.

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9:6 (WLC 9:5) בְּיַלְד יְלִדֵינוּ בֵּן נִתְּנָלְנוּ וְתִהְיֶה הַמְּשָׁרָה עֲלֵי־שִׁבְמוֹ וְיִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ פֶּלְאָ יוֹעֵץ אֵל גְּבוֹר אָבִי עַד שְׁרֵי־שְׁלוֹם:

		Septuagint	Forward	Reverse	Fwd Inline	Rev Inline				
His shoulders; שִׁבְמוֹ / י šikmô h7926	on עַל al h4921	the government הַ / מְשָׁרָה hammîsâ h4951	And will rest וְ / תִהְיֶה vathî h1961	to us; לְ / נוּ lanû	will be given נִתָּן nitân h5414	a son בֵּן bên h1121	to us, לְ / נוּ lanû	will be born יִלְד yullad h3205	a child יֶלֶד yeled h3206	For כִּי kî h3588
H Ncmsc / Sp3ms	H R	H Td / Ncfsa	H C / Vqw3fs	H R / Sp1cp	H VNP3ms	H Ncmসা	H R / Sp1cp	H VPP3ms	H Ncmসা	H C
of Peace. שְׁלוֹם šâlôm h7965	Prince שָׂר sar h8269	Eternal עֵד 'ad h5703	Father, אָבִי 'abî h1	Mighty גְּבוֹר gibôr h1368	God, אֵל 'el h410	Counselor, יוֹעֵץ yô 'ets h3289	Wonderful פֶּלְאָ pele' h6382	His name שְׁמוֹ / י š'mô h8034	And will be called וְ / יִקְרָא vayyiqrâ' h7121	
H Ncmসা	H Ncmsc	H Ncmসা	H Ncmsc	H Aamsa	H Ncmসা	H Vqrmsa	H Ncmsc	H Ncmsc / Sp3ms	H C / Vqw3ms	

His name will be called:

- Wonderful Counselor (יֹעֵץ, פֶּלְאָ, pele' yo'ets) – the Hebrew word for “wonderful” is the same one used for the miraculous signs God performed in Egypt. This Counselor does not merely advise; He performs the wonders He plans.
- Mighty God (גְּבוֹר, 'el gibbor) – the exact title used in Isaiah 10:21 for the Lord of hosts Himself. The Child is identified with the Holy One of Israel.
- Eternal Father (אָבִי־עֵד, 'avi-'ad) – “Father of eternity.” Not that He is the Father in the Trinitarian sense, but that He is the source and sustainer of everlasting life and rule.
- Prince of Peace (שָׂר־שְׁלוֹם, sar-shalom) – the ruler whose very presence establishes shalom, the wholeness and well-being that only the Holy One can give.

Verse 7 seals it: “There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, 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.”

The throne is David’s. The kingdom is David’s. The justice and righteousness are the very things the failed kings of Judah never produced. Yet the zeal of the LORD of hosts, not human effort, guarantees the outcome. The same Holy One whose holiness demanded judgment now guarantees the kingdom through the zeal of His own covenant love.

PUTTING THIS ALL TOGETHER

There are indeed twelve concrete promises.

1. No more gloom for her who was in anguish – “But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish” (v. 1). The oppressive darkness that had settled over the distressed land will be permanently lifted.
2. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be made glorious – “In earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious” (v. 1). God Himself will reverse the contempt and bring honor and glory to the very territory that first suffered invasion.

3. The people walking in darkness will see a great light – “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light” (v. 2). Those living in the dark land will personally behold this light; it is not merely announced but seen.
4. The light will shine on those who live in a dark land – “Those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them” (v. 2). The light is not distant; it actively shines upon the inhabitants of the region.
5. The nation will be multiplied – “Thou shalt multiply the nation” (v. 3). God will cause the population of Israel to increase again after the losses of invasion and exile.
6. Their gladness will be increased – “Thou shalt increase their gladness” (v. 3). God will enlarge their joy; it is not natural cheerfulness but divinely multiplied joy.
7. They will rejoice in God’s presence with harvest gladness – “They will be glad in Thy presence as with the gladness of harvest” (v. 3). The joy will be experienced consciously in the presence of the Lord and will be as full and satisfying as the joy of a successful harvest.
8. They will rejoice as men rejoice when dividing spoil – “As men rejoice when they divide the spoil” (v. 3). Their joy will also have the triumphant quality of victors sharing the fruits of conquest.
9. The yoke of their burden will be broken – “For Thou shalt break the yoke of their burden” (v. 4). God will shatter the heavy yoke that has weighed them down.
10. The staff on their shoulders and the rod of their oppressor will be broken – “And the staff on their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor” (v. 4). Every instrument of oppression (staff and rod) will be destroyed in the same decisive way God broke the power of Midian.
11. The government will rest on the shoulders of the Child/Son, with no end to its increase or to peace – “And the government will rest on His shoulders... There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace” (vv. 6-7). The rule of the Messiah will be stable, ever-expanding, and characterized by unending peace.
12. His kingdom on the throne of David will be established and upheld forever with justice and righteousness – “On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore” (v. 7). The Davidic throne and kingdom will be permanently set right, maintained by perfect justice and righteousness, with no possibility of failure or end.

The guarantees that make these 12 promises certain: “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (v. 7). This is not a thirteenth promise but the divine assurance that stands behind every one of the twelve. Because it is the zeal (passionate commitment) of the LORD of hosts Himself that will perform these things, none of them can fail.

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These twelve promises move in a clear progression:

- Removal of darkness and contempt (1–4)
- Restoration of the people with multiplied joy (5–8)
- Destruction of every tool of oppression (9–10)
- Establishment of the Messiah’s endless, righteous, Davidic kingdom (11–12)

TYING THE THREADS TOGETHER

Look once more at the three strands that run through the entire book.

The Messianic Hope is no longer a distant promise. The Child who is born is the same Immanuel of chapter 7 and the Branch of chapter 11. He is the holy seed in the stump. The titles declare that the One who will sit on David’s throne is nothing less than Mighty God.

The Motif of the City finds its answer here as well. The darkness that covered Galilee of the Gentiles will one day give way to the light that streams from Zion. The government that rests on the Child’s shoulders will make Jerusalem the center from which peace flows to the nations. The city that trembled under Ahaz will one day rejoice under her true King.

The Holy One of Israel stands at the center. His holiness demanded the judgment that fell on the northern tribes and would later fall on Judah. Yet the same holiness guarantees that the zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish the kingdom. The titles in verse 6 are not honorary; they are identification. The Child is the Holy One in human form.

The Unfinished Mosaic: Visions of Isaiah (Chapters 1–9)

Dark Tiles: The Indictment of Rebellion

Bright Tiles: The Promise of Immanuel

