

Predictions of the Messiah and the Northern Kingdom's Fall Isaiah 9

Isaiah 9:1-7 - *“Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. ³ You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. ⁴ For You have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. ⁵ For every warrior’s sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood will be used for burning and fuel of fire. ⁶ For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”*

Background Notes

In this well-known portion of Isaiah 9, the prophet Isaiah looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. The terms “the land of Zebulun” and “the land of Naphtali” (v1) refer to the land in northern Israel. The northern portion was considered a province of the Assyrian Empire, and thus that area became known as “Galilee of the Gentiles.”

The Assyrians, of course, had come from the east, from beyond the Jordan, and had invaded the north by following the ancient “Way of the Sea” (v1). Thus the people in the north of Israel were in anguish and gloom and distress (v1). From the context, we see that God Himself had allowed this. Why? God allowed this because the people of Israel had forsaken Him and disobeyed the Word of the Lord.

But better days were ahead. The Messiah would come from this area, and His great Galilean ministry would take place there. In fact, Matthew quoted the first two verses of Isaiah 9 when the Lord began His ministry in the Galilee area (Matthew 4:12-17).

Isaiah looked on to the distant future in the first half of Isaiah 9 – to the time when the Messiah would come and subdue Israel’s enemies.

Doctrinal Points

1. Isaiah predicted the rise of the Messianic kingdom in the distant future.

When the Old Testament prophets looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, they did not distinguish between the first coming of the Messiah and the second coming of the Messiah. Thus many Old Testament Messianic prophecies include **both** the first and second comings of Christ - and sometimes the predictions of the two advents were actually blended together in the same passages (as here in Isaiah 9).

Verses 1-2, quoted in Matthew 4, were fulfilled at the **first coming** of Christ. But what about verses 3-5? These verses predicted national happiness (v3), no more oppression (v4), and defeat of every enemy, as Gideon defeated the Midianites (v4-5). Those things certainly did **not** happen at the first coming of Christ. In fact, oppression under Rome increased at the time of Christ! In 70 AD Jerusalem was burned, the Temple was destroyed, the Jews were scattered to other lands, and Christians were persecuted.

What about verse 7? *“Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom.”* What about the earthly kingdom of Christ, the re-establishment of the throne of David, and universal peace with justice and righteousness forever? These things have still not come about. But they **will** come about when the Lord returns to earth!

It's important to remember that this time of worldwide blessing is not a prediction of the Church during the present, as is sometimes taught. No. It is speaking of the **future Messianic kingdom** that will be established at the second coming of Christ. The “throne of David” has not yet been re-established on this earth – but it will be in the future.

Verse 6 is a doctrine-packed verse that predicted the coming Messiah. For sake of time, I'm going to read some excerpts from an article I wrote some time ago on this passage, entitled “What's In a Name?”

*“Preceding the names of the coming Messiah (v6) are two statements about His Person. He was to be God and Man - at the same time. “A child is born” – a statement affirming His humanity. “A Son is given” – a statement affirming His deity. Thus the child to be born would be given titles that are only appropriate for the **Son of God**.*

“The first of Messiah's names revealed here is “Wonderful Counselor.” Wonderful Counselor stresses the fact that the Messiah will be endowed with extraordinary wisdom and understanding. His abilities to counsel and guide will far surpass those of ordinary human counselors, who are limited in knowledge and compassion. This Counselor will never have to change His mind or His techniques in order to help His clients, for “in Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

‘The Messiah’s wonderful plan for His people cannot be undermined or thwarted, because He is also the “Mighty God.” He is God and His power is unlimited. Whatever He plans comes to pass. Even “the gates of hell” (Matthew 16:8) cannot frustrate the designs of Almighty God. His overwhelming power will accomplish His every purpose - just as planned, with no problem, and right on schedule.

“Everlasting Father” is another of Messiah’s titles. The main idea in this name is that Messiah will care as a Father to His people forever. As a good father nourishes and protects and cares for his family, and always plans the best for them, so the Messiah will care for His own. He will eternally care for His people.

*“Prince of Peace” is a fitting climax to this series of titles. In the Messiah’s program for the world and for His people, the bottom line is **peace**. All His plans and programs will be directed toward the goal of peace and prosperity for His subjects, and His almighty power will accomplish it. According to verse 7, His kingdom of peace will never decline - and it will never come to an end!”*

The above quotation is an excerpt from ***Devotions for Growing Christians***, entitled “What’s In A Name?” The entire essay can be found on our website at www.growingchristians.org.

Isaiah predicted the rise of the Messianic kingdom in the distant future.

2. Isaiah predicted the fall of the northern kingdom in the immediate future.

Isaiah 9:8-21 – *“The Lord sent a word against Jacob, and it has fallen on Israel. ⁹ All the people will know— Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria— who say in pride and arrogance of heart: ¹⁰ “The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones; the sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars.” ¹¹ Therefore the Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and spur his enemies on, ¹² the Syrians before and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with an open mouth. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.*

¹³ For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, nor do they seek the Lord of hosts. ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord will cut off head and tail from Israel, palm branch and bulrush in one day. ¹⁵ The elder and honorable, he is the head; the prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail. ¹⁶ For the leaders of this people cause them to err, and those who are led by them are destroyed. ¹⁷ Therefore the Lord will have no joy in their young men, nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows; for everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. ¹⁸ For wickedness burns as the fir. It shall devour the briars and thorns, and kindle in the thickets of the forest. They shall mount up like rising smoke. ¹⁹ Through the wrath of the Lord of hosts the land is burned up, and the people shall be as fuel for the fire. No man shall spare his brother. ²⁰ And he shall snatch on the right hand and be hungry; he shall devour on the left hand and not be satisfied. Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm.

²¹ Manasseh shall devour Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh; together they shall be against Judah. For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.”

Remember - when Isaiah wrote this prophecy, the United Kingdom of Israel (that existed under David and Solomon) no longer existed. There were now two kingdoms: the northern kingdom of Israel, and the southern kingdom of Judah. In the second half of the chapter, Isaiah's message was primarily addressed to the northern kingdom of Israel, because "Ephraim" and "Samaria" (alternate names for the northern kingdom) are mentioned (v8-9). However, it was certainly a warning to the kingdom of Judah, where Isaiah lived and ministered. Both kingdoms had departed from the Lord. The Assyrians had already attacked the northern kingdom: *"the bricks have already fallen down"* (v10).

Like most rebels, in their sinful pride the people of the northern kingdom said they would rebuild without returning to the Lord. But the Lord said, "No, you will not rebuild! I will bring other enemies upon you – the Syrians ("Arameans") and the Philistines – and they will devour Israel" (v11-12).

Israel still would not turn back to the Lord, so the Lord declared that He would cut off the false prophets and the elders who were leading the people astray (v14-16), and He would leave them to the consequences of their sinful ways. The orphans and widows would suffer, and the nation would destroy itself with the fires of anarchy, famine, looting, and civil war (v17-21).

All of this prophecy came true. The northern kingdom of Israel did not return to the Lord, and it came to an abrupt end with the fall of Samaria to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Isaiah predicted the fall of the northern kingdom in the immediate future.

Practical Application

Don't test the Lord's patience!

Testing the Lord's patience - that's what Israel was doing. The message to Israel in the second half of Isaiah 9 and the beginning of chapter 10 is in four "stanzas," each ending with the phrase *"For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."* You will see that recurring phrase in Isaiah 9:12, 17, 21, and 10:4.

We know the Lord is longsuffering, and patient, and merciful - so why did the Lord's anger not turn away? Why was His hand of discipline still stretched out? The key is in verse 13: *"For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, nor do they seek the Lord of hosts."* Israel continued to test and try the Lord's patience.

Let me ask you: Are you experiencing the Lord's discipline right now - because of some sin in your life? If so, turn back to the Lord right away! Don't test the Lord's patience!