***Light Out Of Darkness***

**First Sunday in Advent December 1, 2024**

***The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
 on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.*Isaiah 9:2**

**We all know darkness**

1. Beginning in Isaiah:

1. Isaiah knows darkness, geopolitical and spiritual

2) Everyone walking in or living under the “shadow” needs this promise of light

3) Isaiah introduces us to God’s holiness and salvation

2. Visualizing the message of Isaiah:

A close-up of a newspaper

Description automatically generated

**Putting the *analogia scripturae* to work: Isaiah 9:1-7**

*Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan—*

*2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;*

*on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.*

*3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy;*

*they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest,*

*as men rejoice when dividing the plunder.*

*4 For as in the day of Midian’s defeat,*

*you have shattered the yoke that burdens them,*

*the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.*

*5 Every warrior’s boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood*

*will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.*

*6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,*

*and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he 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.*

*He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom,*

*establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever.*

*The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.*

1. Hermeneutic keys for reading the prophets

1. Always begin with a commitment to read all Scripture as God’s inspired word

2) The prophets are preparing God’s people for Messiah in their message of judgement

and restoration

3) Golden Rule: “Read the author as you would have the author read you.”

4) one picture, multiple fulfillments

2. Isaiah has already made clear the prophetic pattern of Judah’s judgement and restoration, which began with the distress of the land of the north, but this prophecy looks forward to a future restoration, one that reverses the Assyrian judgment.

3. God’s 4-part provision for this restored community hints at the unexpected divine/human nature of the one who brings this “great light”

4. Isaiah refers to three of the great Old Testament promises fulfilled in Jesus: the child/offspring of Genesis 3:15; the son promise of Genesis 15:1-6; and the Davidic kingship promise of 2 Samuel 7

5. Isaiah is certain that this “forever” restoration will be a God thing

**How can Doug be so sure? (And what it means for us.)**

*12 When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. 13 Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— 14 to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:*

*15  “Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,   
 the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—   
 16  the people living in darkness have seen a great light;   
 on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”*

*17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”*

Matthew 4 (See also the end of Zechariah’s Song in Luke 2:76-80.)

1. Darkness is the default where God is not at work

*18 The In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

*3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. 4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.*

Genesis 1

2. Darkness is the result of rebelling against God and rejecting his salvation

*5 “They know nothing, they understand nothing.*

*They walk about in darkness;*

*all the foundations of the earth are shaken.*

Psalm 82 (Remember the Isaiah 1:2-2:5 pattern.)

*18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

*21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

Romans 1 (John also uses the darkness theme, see John 1:1-5, 3:19, 8:18; 1 John 1:5-7.)

3. The light Jesus brings becomes a beautiful picture of Jesus’ message of repentance

*5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

1 John 1 (See also 1 John 2:8-9.)

*8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord.*

Ephesians 5 (The first time “light” appears in Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians.)

**Resources for further study**

The Bible Project’s Colossians poster is available at [*https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/*](https://bibleproject.com/downloads/posters/)

I appreciated this “Three Things You Should Know about Isaiah” article at [2022 printing](2022%20printing)

Spurgeon has series of sermons on Isaiah 9 at [*https://www.biblebb.com/brefindex/isa.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/brefindex/isa.htm)

The ESV Study Bible has a wonderful introduction to Isaiah (Crossway, 2008) which are included in these notes.

For a refresher in hermeneutics, I recommend James Packer at [*https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/hermeneutics-and-biblical-authority-2/*](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/hermeneutics-and-biblical-authority-2/)

**Three Things You Should Know about Isaiaih**Derek Thomas

at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/3-things-isaiah>

**1. Isaiah was overwhelmingly influenced by a vision of the holiness of God at the outset of his ministry.**

On the day King Uzziah died (740/739 BC), Isaiah had a vision of God “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,” while seraphim called to one another,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!” ([Isa. 6:1, 3](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%206%3A1%2C%203/))

The threefold repetition of the adjective “holy” is a Hebraic way of expressing unmatched intensity. Only in [Isaiah 6:3](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isaiah%206%3A3/) is this done three times in the Hebrew Bible. Its effect upon Isaiah can be seen in the fact that the word “holy” (Heb. *qadosh*) occurs more frequently in Isaiah than in the rest of the Old Testament combined.

The word “holy” is related to the idea of being separate or distinct. Isaiah’s God is not an extension of the created order, someone who can be manipulated. The people of Isaiah’s day, governed by Uzziah, Azariah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, were deaf to the prophet’s warnings. In the eighth century BC, as in our day, man’s mind was forever creating idols shaped after human desires and predilections.

**2. Isaiah’s ministry was seemingly ineffective by God’s design.**

To show Judah’s faithlessness, God sent the prophet on a fool’s errand. At the close of the temple vision of God’s holiness, where God’s glory was put on display, God gave Isaiah a somewhat strange commission. For more than fifty years, Isaiah was required to proclaim a message simple enough for a child to understand ([Isa. 28:9–10](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2028%3A9%E2%80%9310/)) but impossible for hardened political leaders to comprehend ([Isa. 6:9–10](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%206%3A9%E2%80%9310/)). In this way, Isaiah’s ministry set a precedent. When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables, Jesus answered them by citing from Isaiah’s commission ([Matt. 13:14–15](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2013%3A14%E2%80%9315/); [Mark 4:10–12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Mark%204%3A10%E2%80%9312/)). God’s true disciples will make sense of it, but the merely religious will not. In the same way, Isaiah’s message was scoffed at and rejected.

And what was his message? It was a message of political crisis. In 745 BC, Tiglath-Pileser III came to power in Nineveh, the capital city of the empire of Assyria. And the Assyrian king had only one thing on his mind: world domination. Immediately following the vision of God’s holiness, we are told of Assyria’s successful conquest of the Northern Kingdoms of Aram and Israel, and despite a treaty between the two kingdoms to thwart Assyria’s advances, it proved too little, too late ([Isa. 7:1–2](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%207%3A1%E2%80%932/); see also 17:3). Then Judah became a target, and Assyria’s aim was clear: “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” ([Isa. 7:6](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%207%3A6/)). Assyria was attempting to end the entire redemptive purpose of God and bring an end to the line of David. Ahaz, Judah’s king, thought that a way to survive this threat was to make an alliance with Assyria, but Isaiah made it clear: Ahaz was playing with fire ([Isa. 7:17](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%207%3A17/)). Judah’s kings were no longer sovereign; they were puppets to the Assyrian hegemony. Even the otherwise godly Hezekiah, four decades after Ahaz, played the same deadly game, making a treaty with Pharaoh and thinking an alliance with Egypt would prevent Assyrian aggression. But Isaiah’s response was blunt: Hezekiah had made “a covenant with death, and with Sheol” ([Isa. 28:15](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2028%3A15/)). Instead of trusting in the promises of God, exercising *faith*, the kings of Judah showed their soft underbelly, an inclination to trust their own ways rather than the word of the living and true God.

**3. Isaiah is known as the *evangelical* prophet.**

Amidst the decaying glory of the Davidic kingship, Isaiah prophesies, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” ([Isa. 7:14](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%207%3A14/)), and two chapters later:

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of his government and of peace  
there will be no end,  
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,  
to establish it and to uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time forth and forevermore.  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. ([Isa. 9:6–7](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%209%3A6%E2%80%937/))

Seven hundred years before it happened, in the midst of Judah’s winter, Isaiah promises Christmas—the virgin birth of Immanuel, the Savior of sinners!

But that is not all. In addition to a promise of a coming king and ruler (see [Isa. 11; 60](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2011%3B%2060/)), Isaiah is most known for his four Servant Songs ([Isa. 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2042%3A1%E2%80%939%3B%2049%3A1%E2%80%9313%3B%2050%3A4%E2%80%9311%3B%2052%3A13%E2%80%9353%3A12/)). The prophet foresees God’s coming and growing up as a man ([Isa. 53:2–3](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2053%3A2%E2%80%933/)) and becoming the Suffering Servant upon whose shoulders the sins of His people are placed. By way of substitution and satisfaction, the guiltless Servant will die and come to life again and divide the spoils of His victory ([Isa. 53:7–12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2053%3A7%E2%80%9312/)). In the closing verse of [Isaiah 53](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isaiah%2053/), mention is made that the Servant “bore the sin of *many*” ([Isa. 53:12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2053%3A12/), emphasis added). In a discussion with His disciples about who should be first in the kingdom of God, Jesus seemed to provide a summary of His mission: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for *many*” ([Mark 10:45](https://www.esv.org/verses/Mark%2010%3A45/), emphasis added; see also [Matt. 20:28](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2020%3A28/); [John 13:1–17](https://www.esv.org/verses/John%2013%3A1%E2%80%9317/)). Evidently, Jesus had reflected on these words about the Servant and understood them as speaking about Himself.

*This article is part of the* [*Every Book of the Bible: 3 Things to Know*](https://www.ligonier.org/learn/collections/3-things) *collection.*

**ESV Study Bible, Isaiah**

*Theme*

The central theme of the book is God himself, who does all things for his own sake (48:11). Isaiah defines everything else by its relation to God, whether it is rightly adjusted to him as the gloriously central figure in all of reality (45:22–25). God is the Holy One of Israel (1:4), the One who is high and lifted up but who also dwells down among the “contrite and lowly” (57:15), the Sovereign over the whole world (13:1–27:13) whose wrath is fierce (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4) but whose cleansing touch atones for sin (6:7), whose salvation flows in endless supply (12:3), whose gospel is “good news of happiness” (52:7), who is moving history toward the blessing of his people (43:3–7) and the exclusive worship due him (2:2–4). He is the only Savior (43:10–13), and the whole world will know it (49:26). To rest in the promises of this God is his people’s only strength (30:15); to delight themselves in his word is their refreshing feast (55:1–2); to serve his cause is their worthy devotion (ch. 62); but to rebel against him is endless death (66:24).

A microcosm of the book’s message appears in 1:2–2:5. The Lord announces his basic charge against the people: they have received so much privilege from God and ought to be grateful children, but “they have despised the Holy One of Israel” (1:2–4). He describes the purpose of the various judgments they face, namely, to bring them to repentance, or at least to preserve a remnant who *will* repent (1:5–9). Judah is very diligent to observe the divinely appointed sacrifices, but the people’s hearts are far from God, as their unwillingness to protect their own weakest members exhibits (1:10–20). The Lord called his people to be the embodiment of faithfulness in this world, and yet they are now filled with rampant unfaithfulness at every level (personal, religious, and social); but God intends to purge Zion of its sinful members and set her up as a beacon of light for the whole world. In view of this glorious future, Isaiah’s contemporaries should commit themselves afresh to walking “in the light of the Lord” (1:21–2:5).

*Purpose, Occasion, and Background*

Isaiah announces God’s surprising plan of grace and glory for his rebellious people and, indeed, for the world. God had promised Abraham that through his descendants the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3). God had promised David that his throne would lead the world into salvation (2 Sam. 7:12–16; Ps. 89:19–37). But by Isaiah’s time, the descendants of Abraham and many members of the dynasty of David no longer trusted the promises of God, aligning themselves instead with the promises—and the fears—of this false world. Judah’s unbelief in God during the pivotal events of Isaiah’s lifetime redirected their future away from blessing and toward judgment. At this historic turning point, Judah moved from independence under God’s power to subservience under pagan powers.

What, then, of God’s ancient promises? Is the gracious purpose of God defeated by Judah’s sin? Isaiah answers that question. After the prefatory chapters 1–5, his answer unfolds in chapters 6–27, and the rest of the book develops the serious but hopeful message of these chapters. Isaiah’s answer is that, although God must purify his people through judgment, he has an overruling purpose of grace, beginning with Isaiah himself (ch. 6), spreading to Judah (7:1–9:7) and Israel (9:8–11:16), and resulting in endless joy (12:1–6). Even the nations of the world are taken into account (13:1–27:13). The purpose of Isaiah, then, is to declare the good news that God will glorify himself through the renewed and increased glory of his people, which will attract the nations. The book of Isaiah is a vision of hope for sinners through the coming Messiah, promising for the “ransomed” people of God a new world where sin and sorrow will be forever forgotten (35:10; 51:11).

Isaiah’s book envisions three historical settings (see chart): (1) chapters 1–39 are set against the background of Isaiah’s own times in the late eighth century b.c.; (2) chapters 40–55 assume the Jewish exiles in Babylon in the sixth century as their audience; and (3) chapters 56–66 take the returned exiles and subsequent generations of God’s people as their backdrop. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the chapters have relevance only to their assumed audiences: the long-range prophecies of chapters 40–66, as already indicated, challenge all the people of Judah in Isaiah’s time to accept their role in a story that is headed to a glorious future and to live faithfully in that light (cf. 2:5, on the heels of 2:1–4). Further, the entire book, as canonical Scripture, addresses all the people of God until Christ returns.

**Simplified Overview of Isaiah**

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|  | **Isaiah 1–39** | **Isaiah 40–55** | **Isaiah 56–66** |
| **Date and Setting** | The eighth century b.c. (700s); the Assyrian threat | Prophecies about the sixth century b.c. (500s); the Babylonian exile | Prophecies about all times and occasions until the end |
| **Audience** | God’s rebellious people craving worldly security | God’s defeated people under worldly domination | All who hold fast to God’s covenant |
| **Actions** | God purifies a remnant of his apostate people through judgment | God consoles his discouraged people in exile | God prepares all of his true people for his promised salvation |
| **Message** | “In returning and rest you shall be saved; … But you were unwilling” (30:15) | “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed” (40:5) | “Keep justice, and do righteousness” (56:1) |

First, in his own times, Isaiah prophesied “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (1:1). Called by God “in the year that King Uzziah died” (6:1), his long ministry began in 740 b.c. The external threat of Isaiah’s day was the militant Assyrian Empire rising to power in the east. The question forced upon Judah by this threat was one of trust: in what will God’s people trust for salvation—in human strategies of self-rescue, or in prophetic promises of divine grace?

This question of what and whom to trust intensified on two occasions. The first occurred c. 735 b.c., during the reign of King Ahaz. Under pressure from Assyria, the northern kingdom of Israel formed a pact of mutual defense with Syria, and together these two kingdoms aimed to force Judah into alignment with them (ch. 7). But God could be trusted to stand by his commitment to defend the Davidic throne. Accordingly, Isaiah assured Ahaz of God’s saving purpose. But Ahaz refused God, preferring the power of Assyria, and negotiated for pagan protection (2 Kings 16:5–9). Thus Ahaz surrendered the sovereignty of the Davidic throne to a nation hostile to the kingdom of God, and achieved nothing in return. The coalition arrayed against Judah failed—Syria fell in 732 b.c. and Israel in 722, as God had said they would (Isa. 7:16; 8:4).

The second crisis occurred in 701 b.c., during the reign of Hezekiah. This time Assyria was the threat. As before, the temptation was to negotiate an alliance of defense with human powers, in this case with Egypt (30:1–7; 31:1–3; 36:6). Judah chose the false refuge of human promises rather than to rest on the Lord’s “sure foundation” (28:14–22). Assyria then set out to punish Judah for its pact with Egypt. Hezekiah tried to buy peace from the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:13–16), but they turned on him (Isa. 33:1). Under extreme pressure, Hezekiah finally put his trust in the Lord and found him to be powerfully faithful (chs. 36–37).

The eventual downfall of Judah was foreseen in Hezekiah’s unguarded openness to Babylonian influence (ch. 39). Isaiah discerned in Hezekiah’s enthusiasm for Babylon a future of captivity there for God’s people.

Second, Isaiah was enabled by God to address the Jewish captives far away in Babylon in the sixth century b.c. He announces a promise that God is coming with a world-changing display of his glory (40:5). To prepare for his coming, the exiles must return to the Promised Land (48:20). They must not be demoralized by the impressive but empty culture of idolatry in which they live (41:21–24), nor should they resent God’s use of a pagan conqueror, Cyrus the Great, as their liberator from Babylon (44:24–28). They must look by faith for a greater liberator still to come, the messianic “servant of the Lord” (see note on 42:1–9). He will bring justice to the nations (42:1–4) and save his people from their ultimate captivity, the guilt of sin (52:13–53:12). Since the faith of God’s people had already proven weak, God pledges that he alone will accomplish this, for his own glory (48:9–11).

Third, Isaiah addressed the returned exiles and subsequent generations of God’s people with messages of challenge and hope, to keep their faith and obedience steady until God fulfills all his promises. Isaiah makes clear the spiritual and universal nature of God’s true people (56:3–8; 66:18–23). He sees the final triumph of One who is “mighty to save” (63:1). His prophetic eye looks beyond the fraudulence of this world, all the way forward to the eternal finality of God’s renewed people in a renewed cosmos (65:17; 66:22). “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).[[1]](#footnote-1)

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1. Crossway Bibles. (2008). [*The ESV Study Bible*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esvsb?ref=BibleESV.Is&off=16433) (pp. 1234–1236). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)