



Autumn 2017 – **Contemporary Carols**
(the 10 & the 5: 10 December
Paul Langham)

Reading: **Reading – Isaiah 7:14; 9:2, 5-7**

Isaiah 7

¹⁴ The Lord himself will give you a sign:
The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,
and will call him Emmanuel.

Isaiah 9

¹ 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 honour Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan –

² The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.

² The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
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 warriors 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 Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the greatness 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 for ever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

CONTEXT

Isaiah was a prophet to the Southern Kingdom (Judah) in the time of the Divided Kingdom (from the death of Solomon in 930 BC to the fall of Jerusalem in 587/6 BC). Isaiah was active in the 8th-century before Jesus lived.

The 3 areas in v. 1 allow this text to be dated around 733 BC, when the Assyrians had begun to 'nibble away' at the northern and western fringes of Israel.

INTRODUCTION

These are 'Messianic' texts – this means parts of the OT that the Jewish community has always accepted as describing the Messiah.

So when we use them to speak of Jesus, we are using the texts in precisely the way they were intended (of course, the Jewish faith does not recognise Jesus as the Messiah).

In other words – these verses were written about Jesus before Jesus was born ...

Messianic – accepted as such by the Jews

i.e Christians are not reading back into the text in the light of Jesus

Simply, having recognised Jesus as the Messiah, applying texts to him – just as the Jews expect to do when the one they recognise as Messiah comes ...

There's an incongruity throughout Isaiah 9

- light in the midst of darkness ...
- a son named everlasting Father
- a Prince who, rather than leading armies to war, is a Prince of Peace

So this prophecy is essentially one of hope at a time when, humanly speaking, there seemed precious little reason to hope.

9:2 darkness / light

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;

Doesn't make sense ... by definition, if you're walking in darkness, it's because there is no light, great or otherwise ...

Hebrew for 'darkness' & 'light' are the same as those used in Genesis 1:2, 3

¹ *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**.*

2nd reference in Isaiah 9:2 is even darker ...

*on those living in the land of **deep darkness** a light has dawned.*

Hebrew = a death-like shadow

Word used in Psalm 23:4

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil ...

Doesn't make sense ...!

Again, doesn't make sense in 9:2

In both cases, the pronouncement is past tense –

- the people 'have seen'
- 'a light has dawned'

Power of the prophetic ... God's Word speaks truth to our experience, often speaking what we cannot yet see. Part of the walk of discipleship is accepting this greater reality than what appears to be real. It's not an easy path, but it is one our Lord invites us to walk with him ...

9:3-4 Prophecies of growth, blessing, gladness, prosperity, freedom from oppression ...

Again, makes no sense – these words are written around 733 BC – when the Assyrians are beginning to conquer parts of Israel – especially the Eastern coastal stretches (areas identified in 9:1) which we know historically were the first to fall to Assyria ...

Linguistic references to Egypt

- yoke
- burdens
- shoulders
- oppressor

the promise is: 'no more tyrants ...'

9:5 extends this prophecy of peace and wellbeing to a global sense

every boot (interestingly, this is not a root Hebrew word but a borrowed Assyrian word ...)
So why this confidence?

You've got a situation of deep darkness, gloom, death-like shadow ...

Oppression by a vastly powerful Oppressor
And it's all going to be overturned ...

We're looking for a strongman – a world leader, a global super-power

And what do we get?

9:6 A baby ... who rules the world ...

'government'

Hebrew word meaning rule, dominion

Only occurs in these 2 verses ...

Not 'rest' on his shoulders – simply 'be': implication is that government (world rule / dominion) finds its most appropriate place on these shoulders ...

Burdens are lifted from people's shoulders are released from when He shoulders the burden of government ...

WHAT IS GOOD GOVERNMENT?

- wisdom – Wonderful counsellor
- Increase ... abundance without end
- Peace
- Justice
- Righteousness
- Given – supernatural ... (a counter note to the sense that leadership / government is essentially a human construct in which faith plays no part)

¹⁴ *The Lord himself will **give** you a sign:
The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,
and will call him Emmanuel.*

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

⁷ *The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.*

Key doctrine of revelation – we are given truth, we don't discover it ...

NAMES OF JESUS

Mighty God – divinity (mighty = warrior)
Everlasting Father

Prince of Peace
Emmanuel

VIRGN BIRTH

9:6 tells us two things about this child
He is **born** as from human parentage
But he is **given** as from God

Even here we see that Jesus is both human and divine ...

9:7 The zeal of the Lord ...

Why this verse to 'close' the prophecy?
It underscores the inviolable nature of the purposes of God.

As soon as Jesus was born, all that his later life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension accomplished, was assured – by the zeal (determined, fervent desire and intent) of God himself.

QUESTIONS

1. How readily do you allow God's Word to speak a deeper truth than your present experience or apparent reality suggests?
2. Who is ruling / governing you? If this child, this Jesus, this Saviour and Lord, has shoulders which most appropriately bear the burden of leadership and government, do you allow him to lead, govern, rule you?
3. Given that, according to St Paul, we are 'in Christ' and 'seated with him in heavenly places', how are you playing your part in 'the increase of his government' – in the workplace, family, community, place of leisure, network of friendships etc?
4. Who are you inviting to one of our Christmas services this year? It's not too late to get those invitations out!

Paul Langham, December 2017