

One of the most fascinating conversations in the Bible in my opinion happens at the end of the gospel of Luke, after Jesus' resurrection. Luke tells of two of the disciples traveling from Jerusalem on a road to a village named Emmaus, and that the resurrected Jesus begins to walk along with them, but Luke says that they were kept from recognizing him. The story goes that Jesus asks them why they are so downcast, and the disciples tell them about Jesus, that they had thought he was the one who was going to redeem Israel, but apparently they were wrong, since he had been crucified. And Jesus, still not recognizable by them, tells them how foolish they are, that the Messiah needed to suffer those things before entering his glory. And then in Luke 24:27 is this great line: *And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

Now, that may not be a fascinating line to you, but what I find incredible about it is that the more you read the Old Testament, the more you see how true that verse is, that **Jesus is all over the Old Testament.** Even though his name is never mentioned, story after story points to him and to the gospel. I don't think there is one book where this is more true than the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah is a collection of prophecies from the 8th-7th century BC. **Isaiah in Hebrew is Yshua Yahu** – God is salvation. Isaiah was a prophet from 740-680 BC under the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. God raised up prophets as His spokespeople when the nation of Israel was violating the covenant that had been set up at Mt. Sinai. At the time of Isaiah, Israel was in moral decay – idolatry, empty worship, and social injustice. Listen to Isaiah 1:10-17:

***Isaiah 1:10-17** - Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ "The multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me?" says the LORD. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. ¹² When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations-- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; ¹⁶ wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, ¹⁷ learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.*

Listen to this prophecy: stop bringing your empty worship into the assembly and instead **worship me by seeking justice, encouraging the oppressed, defending the cause of the fatherless and pleading the case of the widow.** How convicting is that. I don't care about your worship, your offerings, your assemblies – I'm not even listening to your prayers. The worship I want is to live your lives the way I have told you – to bring my justice and care to this world to those who are oppressed.

Isaiah, as a prophet, is calling Israel back to the covenant. No empty worship or idolatry or social injustice. Judgment is coming because of your sin.

But even in the midst of these accusations there are hints of what is to come, the redemption that will follow their discipline:

***Isaiah 1:18-20** - "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; ²⁰ but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.*

Even in the midst of the discipline, God was already hinting at their restoration.

Now, remember that during the time of the judges, Israel wanted a king. They got King Saul, then David, and then Solomon, and then the kingdom split into two kingdoms in 928 BC – Israel was the northern kingdom, and Judah was the southern kingdom (with Jerusalem as the capital). After Solomon came a string of kings in Israel and Judah that were disappointments, including a king by the name of Ahaz. Let's set the scene by looking at 2 Kings 16:1-9:

***2 Kings 16:1-9** - In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, Ahaz son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign. ² Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. ³ He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. ⁴ He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree. ⁵ Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem and besieged Ahaz, but they could not overpower him. ⁶ At that time, Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram*

by driving out the men of Judah. Edomites then moved into Elath and have lived there to this day.

To set the historical scene: Judah was facing pressure from Aram & Ephraim, two tribes in the northern kingdom, who were facing pressure from a foreign power named Assyria. Judah, and King Ahaz, was left with a decision, whether to ally with Assyria or stand against Aram & Ephraim on their own. King Ahaz had to choose between trusting God to protect them or to make an alliance with another nation. Isaiah, the prophet, tells him to trust God and not make an alliance, as we see in Isaiah 7:

***Isaiah 7:1-13** - When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. ² Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. ³ Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. ⁴ Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. **Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood-- because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah.** ⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶ "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it." ⁷ **Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "It will not take place, it will not happen,** ⁸ **for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. ⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."** ¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test." ¹³ Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?"*

Isaiah tells Ahaz to trust God, even to ask for a sign, in Isaiah 7, but he refuses. He instead submits to Assyria on condition that Assyria would deal with the northern threat. Back to 2 Kings 16:

⁷ *Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, "I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." ⁸ And Ahaz took the silver and gold*

found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. ⁹ The king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.

And so Isaiah prophesies that God will use Assyria to discipline the people of Israel. Ahaz will be the last Davidic king – the rest would be puppets of Assyria and then Babylon. In 100 years, by 587, all of Israel and Judah will be in exile. The reason was not just the political decisions and refusal to trust in God, but the moral decay and violations of the covenant.

By the end of Isaiah 8, it's clear that in their fear the people of Israel are looking everywhere for answers as to how to survive the impending attack. Read vs. 19-22:

***Isaiah 8:19-22** - When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. ²¹ Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. ²² Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.*

Not only are they trusting in other nations instead of God, but they are consulting mediums and spiritists instead of the law and the testimony, as verse 20 says. As a result, they are in utter darkness. There is no presence of God, no light, no wisdom, no hope. As you can see, things are a mess. Four things are happening in particular under King Ahaz:

There is a lack of wisdom – what should we do with the threats of invasion? Who should we consult? Nobody has any answers as to how to escape the oppression. Be careful in your search for wisdom, that you do not trust in the wisdom of the world.

The king is not godly – your king is showing absolutely no spiritual leadership, but is making treaties with the invading country

God is removing His presence – oh that he would be with us and lead us and protect us, but our sins are causing him to leave us!

The desire for a peaceful kingdom – we are always in fear from neighboring countries. Even the northern kingdom is attacking us!

We can relate, even in the 21st century: we long for godly leadership, for the wisdom to make good decisions about our future, for God's presence to guide and protect us, and for peace in our lives and relationships.

And in this darkness comes the oracle of 9:1-7

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.

Look at the promises to this nation in turmoil – he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles. There will be a great light in the darkness. Darkness throughout the Bible is the absence of God, absence of goodness and wisdom and joy. But there will be a great light, a light greater than the light of the sun. This light is the presence of God, that brings eternal life.

They will experience numerical growth and increased joy. They will be delivered from their enemies. **They will experience peace, the presence of God, safety, and joy. How will this happen?**

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Remember the context – a king, full of fear and following earthly wisdom, is making an alliance with Assyria in the hopes that they will not destroy Judah. Even though God has promised that if they trust in him, he will protect them, they've decided to trust in the wisdom of the world. So, in Isaiah 9:2-7, in place of the unfaithful monarch whose shortsighted defensive policies will plunge the nation into more desperate straits, **there is lifted up the ideal king who**, though a child, will bring an end to all wars and establish an eternal kingdom based upon justice and righteousness.

Look at the names of this child:

Wonderful counselor – Think of the context. Their king is making terrible decisions. They are looking everywhere for wisdom. But this child who will be born will be the wise king. He will reign with perfect wisdom.

Mighty God – A child will be God? God as a baby? This child will have God's power.

Everlasting Father – many kings claimed to be father to their people, but this child's fatherhood is forever – he will be the protector, the provider, eternally for his people.

Prince of peace – a peaceful king, coming in peace, establishing peace. He comes in peace to establish peace, not by vanquishing the nations with a sword but in a completely different way. Consider *Isaiah 53:5 - But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.* Through his punishment, through being pierced and crushed, he will bring peace.

Read it one more time:

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

This child will be the final, eternal king, the king to end all kings, the ideal Davidic monarch who will rule endlessly with justice, righteousness, and peace. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this – God will not rest until he has brought it to pass.

Isaiah's word for Israel is that even though they are headed for destruction, this is not the end. A Messiah will come, a perfect king, a child who is both human and divine, and will end all oppression and create an eternal kingdom of justice and righteousness. I can't imagine being an Israelite at this time and trying to figure out who this person would be – every time a king is born, they must have hoped that this would be the perfect King of Isaiah 9. But now we know who Isaiah was talking about. Read Matthew 4:13-17:

Matthew 4:13-17 - *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."*

The child is Jesus. This child is not just any child, but is God in human form. The consistent witness throughout the Bible is that Jesus is God in human form.

Hebrews 1:1-3 - *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

Colossians 1:19 - *For God was pleased to have all his **fullness** dwell in him,*

And remember Jesus. He claimed to be without sin. He claimed the name "I Am." He claimed to be able to forgive sins. He taught that His eternal destiny depends upon your response to him. He said that he came down from heaven. He said that he was eternal and the creator of the world. He received worship from people. He

had the power to raise the dead. He made himself equal to God. Certainly He knew who He was.

What are the implications?

1) Christmas is about God the Son coming to earth to save us from our sins

What Israel failed to do, God did for them by sending His Son. What we have failed to do, God has done for us by sending His Son. He has come to save us from the mess we are in.

John 3:16-18 - *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

God loves to bring salvation out of darkness, to bring hope and light out of the bleakest, darkest situations.

Above all else, Christmas means that God has come to earth. If He is God, you can't just like Him. Either you believe what He says and worship Him, or you reject Him. But you can't just like Him.

2) Jesus is the perfect King the world is looking for

Do not trust in any earthly leader. Where all others fall short, He is the father, the wonderful counselor, the prince of peace. Seek Him for wisdom.

James 1:5 *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.*

3) Stand firm in your faith and love your neighbor

Stay devoted to him and seek justice and righteousness in this world.