

## Christmas 3 The Gospel of Christmas in the Old Testament

Based on - **The Gospel Which Isaiah Preached** **Isaiah 9:1-7** *By Richard D. Balge*

### Introduction

The Scriptures bear witness to Christ. No single Old Testament author had more to say, with greater detail and clarity, than did Isaiah.

For example 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 Immanuel.**

There is the suffering servant in Isaiah 53; and 61 begins **1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.**

Approximately 750 years before the birth of Christ, the Prophet Isaiah preaches the Christmas Gospel: UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN.

Believing Jews of the first century regarded the child to be born, the son to be given, as the Messiah. The Talmudists and later Jewish commentators preferred to identify him as Hezekiah, and this view has been endorsed by many modern scholars.

Some of Hezekiah's contemporaries may have understood the passage as a reference to him and his reign, but events proved them mistaken. The prophecy stood nevertheless and was regarded as Messianic.

**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. (9:2).**

Like the Hebrews in Isaiah's day we were walking in darkness and death until we experienced the light of God's presence.

**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. 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. **Isaiah 9:6-7****

### 1. He Is Born To Rule (v 6a)

He would come to govern a people who did not want to be ruled by the Lord any longer, as Isaiah observed:-

**1:2b-3 I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.**

**2:6-8 the house of Jacob. They are full of superstitions from the East; they practise divination like the Philistines and clasp hands with pagans. ... Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made.**

**5:7 The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.**

The Law could not change or improve them and most of their kings only contributed to their apostasy and immorality. Isaiah prophesied that this rebellion would bring God's judgment on them: humiliation, oppression, war, captivity.

But here the promise (9:1–5) of honour, light, joy, deliverance, peace.

“**For to us a child is born,...**” The sign that He has the authority and responsibility to rule and to establish a peaceful reign is there for all to see: “**The government will be on his shoulders**” which probably refers to a symbol of authority rather than to the burdens of office. The point is simply that the promised son will have the authority to rule.

Not only in Israel and in Judah, but everywhere in God's good world there are rebels. All of us were born enemies of God and at war with each other.

This child was born to remedy that. But it never looked as though the government were on his shoulders. Instead scourge marks, and the splinters of the cross he carried to Calvary. On his shoulders were not the robes of high office but my sins and yours. He came to die.

But by his death and resurrection, he destroyed the arch-rebel, the serpent, Satan. As the seed of Eve and Abraham He now rules over all Eve's children as he sits at the right hand of the father. This is indeed a blessing for all nations.

## **2. He Is Equipped To Rule (v. 6b)**

His names tell how and why he can rule. Oriental peoples may have given their kings names like these, but that didn't make it so. He is called these things because they are so.

The names by which the child will be called state what he is and what he does, not what his parents will name him on the day of circumcision.

The versions vary in the translation, “a wonderful one,” or “a wonder.” It is even legitimate to render the phrase as “a wonder of a counsellor.” Thus, “Wonderful Counsellor” (NIV) is as legitimate as “Wonderful, Counsellor” (KJV).

The Promised One will be the ultimate fulfilment of the Lord's promise to David, 2 Sam 7:12ff. No other descendant of David ever accomplished what this one will achieve.

He is a Wonder of a Counsellor. He has a marvellous plan to rescue mankind. No one else could have devised such a plan or carried it out. He is wonderful in doing what he came to do: save sinners.

He is the Mighty God, not as an honorary title, but because he is. Redemption is divine work, impossible for a mere human being to carry out. He did it, demonstrating throughout his ministry and especially by his victory over death that he is the Mighty God.

He is the Everlasting Father. This means that he is our loving, benevolent Guardian, acting as a compassionate Father to us, Psalm 103:13. He is everlasting: never gets tired, never grows old, never stops doing what he was born to do.

He is the Prince of Peace. Every year at this time we are reminded that the world's kind of peace has not yet arrived. But we also hear and believe that God has declared **peace to men on whom his favour rests**, Lk 2:13-4; that Christ is our Peace because **the punishment that brought us peace was upon him**, Is. 53:5; that by faith in Him we have peace with God, as Paul puts it in Ro. 5:1-2 **we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.**

With God's peace in our hearts we can live at peace with one another and share his peace with others. We recognize him as the Ruler of our lives and act accordingly. We know that even our daily struggles, and Christian warfare, are a sign of his peace. This tension confirms we are as God's children because we have not yet arrived in heaven.

### 3. He Will Be Successful In His Rule (v 7)

His realm keeps on increasing as he reaches out beyond Israel, beyond his own time, to us and to others through us. His reign as a Prince of Peace is stable because he is always in charge, always acting in the interests of his own.

He established his reign with justice and righteousness. He satisfied God's justice in his life and by his death. He has fulfilled all righteousness for us and his righteousness is credited to us just as our sins were charged to him.

The means by which he establishes and upholds his kingdom are especially important. He will do this **with justice and righteousness**. In the broad context of Scripture it is possible to understand "justice and righteousness" as Law and Gospel.

Luther pointed out that a truly eternal kingdom requires that the Ruler's subjects be raised from the dead if he is to rule over them eternally.

His rule is eternal, not like that of David and his successors, not like the kingdoms of this world. The King of kings reigns forever and his rule culminates in raising us from the dead to eternal life. The prophet saw all this as an accomplished fact because "**the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.**" Literally a bright glowing fire. He will not give up what is his, forfeit what he has paid for, or abdicate his rule.

This is the Christmas Gospel which Isaiah preached. God has given us what we really need, himself and his salvation. It is a gift outright, which will never wear out.

### Conclusion

Although we remember Jesus was born as a baby, He is given several important names that show that He is God, and tell of His greatness.

They tell us He Is Born To Rule (v 6a), He Is Equipped To Rule (v. 6b), and He Will Be Successful In His Rule (v 7). As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, let us remember that He will come again as King over all. What a privilege to crown Him King in our lives right now!

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