



GOD WILL RESCUE HIS SUFFERING PEOPLE

The only proper way to understand the birth of Jesus is to see it in its larger context of God's eternal plan and purpose to save His people from sin and death. Before the foundation of the world, God determined that He would save a people for Himself and that He would do it in a most unexpected way. This is what we see in Isaiah 9.

Chapter 8 ends on a very hopeless note—one of darkness, distress, gloom, and anguish. But chapter 9 begins with hope. “But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish.” Isaiah announces hope, and he does so by employing three themes: light, joy, and victory.

Tomorrow we will focus in on the theme of light, but today let's look at joy and victory. Isaiah describes the whole land as being in “deep darkness.” Such imagery suggests that there is no hope of things getting better. Life is hard. Things are bad.

And there is no prospect of change. The hopelessness that Isaiah describes is deep. It is pervasive. The people “walked in darkness” and “dwelt in a land of deep darkness.”

Such moral, spiritual, and emotional darkness had simply become a way of life for the Jews of Isaiah’s day. He poetically describes a mindset that has set in on people who experienced such penetrating, pervasive, and persistent hopelessness that they now expect it to be simply the way that life is and will always be.

Into such hopelessness the prophet announces God’s coming salvation. God promises to rescue His people by exchanging their sorrow for joy. Isaiah communicates this by employing two metaphors, one from agriculture and the other from warfare.

First, God will cause them to rejoice like a farmer rejoices at harvest. The idea of harvest can seem distant to us today, but it would have resonated intensely with Isaiah’s original hearers and with most generations prior to the modern world. It is the inexpressible joy and relief of a farmer who sees his labors rewarded and can rest in the knowledge that, at least for a season, his family has the provisions they need to live.

Not only will God give them the joy of a successful farmer, but verses 4 and 5 also promise that He will cause His people to rejoice like an army that defeats their enemies. Their oppressors will be overthrown through triumph in battle. Every enemy who opposes and attempts to destroy His people will be conquered, and all their enemies will be finally vanquished.

In verse 4, the images of a yoke, staff, and rod describe how difficult life had become for God's people because of their sin and its consequences. Verse 5 describes how all these elements of warfare will be consumed because they will become obsolete. The promise, again spoken as an accomplished fact, is that God has "broken [these implements of oppression] as on the day of Midian."

Just as God used lowly Gideon to save Israel from the Midianites (Judg. 6–7), He promises to save His people in a similar way by sending them a King who doesn't look much like a Savior. When Christ arrived on the scene, there was nothing about Him that caused people to automatically recognize Him as the long-awaited Messiah. And the work that He accomplished through His death on the cross certainly did not look like a victory. In those hours He looked nothing like the Savior of His people. But that is exactly what He was. By His death He was rescuing His suffering people.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the words that Isaiah uses to describe the lost in this passage? How do those words compare to "the hope" that Isaiah proclaims?
2. Why is the eternal plan and purpose of God the "only proper way to understand the birth of Jesus"?
3. In light of the two common metaphors of agriculture and warfare that he uses, what can we learn about God from how He communicates to His people?



*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.*

Isaiah 9:2