

# CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

December 18, 2022 | *The Birth of the Messiah*

## SERIES PREVIEW

Last year, Oakwood small groups studied the life of Jesus. One of the things we learned was that Jesus's life was part of a larger story that began long before He was born and will continue until after He comes again. All of human history centers on the man we profess to be the savior of the world. It is not surprising that Christians following Christ's ascension continue to define our lives in terms of Jesus's story. What may be surprising to many is that the generations before Christ's birth looked forward to His coming. This series will examine eight Old Testament passages that anticipate the first coming of Christ. Each lesson will identify the main idea of the passage and give special consideration to how the passage points to the first coming of Christ. May this series prepare your heart to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

## PREPARATION

### GETTING READY

Why do Christians pay so much attention to Jesus's birth? Isn't it His death and resurrection that is important?

Read Isaiah 9:1–7.

Ask God to help you find peace in the Prince of Peace.

## THIS WEEK

### KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

Isaiah foresaw the birth of a messianic king who would end the nation's suffering.

### THEOLOGY APPLIED

Jesus is God's answer for the problems we face.

### MEDITATE

*"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" (Isaiah 9:6).*

## GETTING STARTED

*+This section will consider the New Testament's use of Isaiah 9:1–7 and affirm the main point of this lesson, that Isaiah foresaw the birth of the messianic king.*

- Q: Which of the verses in Isaiah 9:1–7 would you most expect to find quoted in the New Testament?*
- Q: Isaiah 9:1–2 is quoted in Matthew 4:15–16. What is the significance of this time in Jesus's ministry?*

Isaiah 9:1–7 is one of the clearest prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, His ministry, and His divine nature. Given the clarity of this prophecy, especially in verses 6–7, its rare usage in the New Testament is surprising. Matthew 4:15–16 is a quotation of Isaiah 9:1–2. At first, this may seem rather mundane. Matthew 4:12–17 is merely describing the early movements of Jesus's ministry. But Matthew was surely making a significant point. The events of this passage occur immediately after Jesus's baptism (Matthew 3:13–17) and His temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1–11). It is the beginning of His ministry. By tying Jesus's ministry to Isaiah 9:1–7 from the outset, Matthew was identifying it with the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1–7 (Matthew 4:14).

Surprisingly, Isaiah 9:6–7, the heart of this messianic prophecy, is not quoted in the New Testament. The closest allusion to Isaiah 9:6 comes in the angel's announcement to the shepherds in Luke 2:11. This hesitancy to quote Isaiah 9:6–7 may reflect the practice of Jesus's early teaching. Although Jesus's ministry was controversial from the start, during His early ministry He often guarded the nature of His identity as the Messiah. He focused more on building an effective teaching ministry and calling attention to what God was going to do for His people. Rather than shouting from the rooftops that He was the Messiah, Jesus hinted at His identity before finally confirming it to His followers and the world. By quoting Isaiah 9:1–2, Matthew surely intended to hint that the one who fulfilled these verses would also be the fulfillment of the rest of Isaiah 9:1–7.

- Q: Isaiah gave this prophecy to a people in great need. Matthew applied it to Christ in a time of great need. How is Christ the answer to the problems we face today?*
- Q: Does the absence of a quotation of Isaiah 9:6–7 diminish its value as a messianic prophecy in your mind?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –Isaiah gave this messianic prophecy to provide hope for the people during foreign oppression. By applying these verses to Jesus, Matthew pointed to Him as the bringer of that hope. Jesus is also the provider of our hope today. We look back to the hope He provided us on the cross. We look forward to the hope He will bring at His return. We have even more reason to find our hope in Christ.

## ▣ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+Isaiah 9:1–7 can be divided into two parts. The first part describes the momentous change God will bring to His stricken people (Isaiah 9:1–5). The second part identifies how He will bring this change (Isaiah 9:6–7). The key word in the transition between the two passages is the word “for” beginning Isaiah 9:6.

1. THE CHANGE
2. THE CAUSE

### GOING DEEPER

*+The rest of this lesson will briefly describe the change taking place among God’s people before discussing verses 6 and 7 in more detail and offer several personal applications.*

## 1. THE CHANGE

### ▣ ISAIAH 9:1–5

- 🔍: *What metaphor did Isaiah use to describe the current condition of the people and their future hope [verse 2]? Where else does this metaphor appear?*
- 🔍: *What happened on the day of the battle against Midian [Judges 7:19–25]?*

At the outset of this passage, Isaiah envisioned a time of widespread distress and oppression. He certainly had in mind the Assyrian invasion referenced earlier (Isaiah 8:1–10) but also future times of foreign oppression. Isaiah described it as a time of darkness, but the darkness would not last. Light would come and dispel the darkness. This darkness/light metaphor appears throughout Scripture. It is perhaps most well-known from the Gospel of John

(John 1:8), but it is found at other points in the New Testament (Luke 1:79; Ephesians 5:8, 14) and in the Old (Isaiah 42:16; 60:1–3). Isaiah also spoke of the removal of oppression. Just as Gideon defeated Midian (Judges 7:19–25), the oppressors of God’s people would be broken. Their boots and garments would be burned (Isaiah 9:5). The end of oppression would coincide with great joy among the people.

**Q:** *Do you ever feel as though God does not know or understand the hardships you face or the injustice in the world?*

**Q:** *How is the joy Christ brings evident in your life?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –When we encounter hardships or see injustice prevailing over others, it can often feel as though God does not know or does not care. These feelings can lead to questions about God’s existence or even feelings of animosity toward Him. The Bible, including Isaiah 9:1–5, consistently maintains that God does see our sorrows. He does see injustice in the world. And one day He will act decisively to judge all such deeds and comfort His people (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4).

## 2. THE CAUSE

### ■ ISAIAH 9:6-7

**Q:** *What is a counselor?*

**Q:** *How do you use the word “wonderful”? What limits do you place on using it?*

Isaiah tied the reversal of darkness and oppression to the birth of a messianic figure. He would rule over the people of God with justice and righteousness. Isaiah identified the Messiah by four titles. These titles explain the effectiveness of His rule and also hint His divine nature.

The first title is “Wonderful Counselor.” We use the word “wonderful” to describe things or circumstances we find extremely good or remarkable. The Messiah will certainly be extremely good and remarkable, but our typical usage of the word fails to capture an important dynamic of the underlying Hebrew word, *pele*. This Hebrew word is

usually reserved for contexts describing the actions of God (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 25:1; 29:14). The one place this connection is not immediately obvious, Lamentations 1:9, is likely meant to imply that God had a hand in Israel's downfall. This alone would suggest that the Messiah would give divine counsel for the people, but as these titles progress, there is certainly reason to wonder whether the counselor Himself might be divine. These two words, "Wonderful Counselor" are used to describe God Himself in Isaiah 28:29.

Q: *The figure in Isaiah 9:6-7 is royal in nature. What is the significance of calling him counselor?*

Q: *We often face situations in which we are uncertain what the best path forward is. How can Jesus help us navigate these times of uncertainty?*

**APPLICATION POINT** –For Jesus to be a “counselor” is quite remarkable. Considering His importance within the grand story God is unfolding within history, it would be perfectly understandable if Jesus did not have time for the specific concerns people face. But if we will place Him at the center of our lives, He will guide us to make decisions that honor Him and cause us to flourish.

Q: *Why would some scholars question whether the title “Mighty God” was intended to ascribe deity to the Messiah?*

Q: *How do verses like Deuteronomy 10:17; Isaiah 10:20-21; and Jeremiah 32:18 confirm that Isaiah recognized the divinity of the Messiah?*

If the first title hints at the Messiah's divinity, the second declares it explicitly. Many scholars who find it inconceivable for Isaiah to attribute deity to the Messiah argue for a non-literal meaning for the title “Mighty God.” They want to treat the word “God” as though it were an adjective and suggest that Isaiah meant “god-like” or “remarkable.” There is no warrant for this reading, however, especially when the word “God” is modified by an adjective, as it is in Isaiah 9:6, unless the reader has predetermined this could not be what Isaiah is saying.

God is often described as “mighty” in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalms 24:8; Zephaniah 3:17). The same title as it appears in Isaiah 9:6 is also found in Isaiah 10:20-21 (see also Deuteronomy 10:17 and Jeremiah 32:18), affirming the conclusion that Isaiah believed the Messiah to be divine.

- Q: *Why is it important that the divinity of Christ is confirmed in the Old Testament?*
- Q: *What theological difference would it make if Jesus were merely human and not divine?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – It is helpful for Christians to see the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. There are some matters that are not clearly revealed in the Old Testament. For example, Paul referred to a mystery that was revealed in the coming of Christ (Ephesians 3:1–13). From the Old Testament alone it is difficult if not impossible to distinguish between the first and second coming of Jesus and between the millennial reign of Christ and the final eschatological state. But when we see continuity between the Old and New Testaments, especially on something as essential to our faith as the deity of Christ, we can know that Christianity was not just invented by a fringe group of radical followers of Jesus. Our faith is confirmed by God.

- Q: *How could a newborn son also be called a father?*
- Q: *How does “everlasting” also support the divine nature of this messianic figure?*

The title “Everlasting Father” immediately dispels any lingering concern that the “Mighty God” would be aloof from His people. Kings in the ancient Near East were frequently depicted as “fathers” of their people. Thus, this newborn king can also be described as a “father.” The Messiah’s fatherhood is qualified by the word “eternal,” meaning His fatherhood would continue forever. Isaiah also applied “eternal” to God (Isaiah 57:15).

- Q: *In our system of government, officials are elected to office. How is this different than being under the rule of a father-type figure? Which is better?*
- Q: *Why is the perpetuity of the Messiah’s fatherhood important for us?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – The fatherhood of the Messiah gains significance when it is recognized that we will share in His inheritance. When we decide to follow Christ, we become sons and daughters of the great king and share in His wonderful, perpetual inheritance. Our earthly fathers will one day pass away, as will their

inheritance, but when Christ becomes our everlasting Father, we receive a Father who will never pass away and whose inheritance will never be exhausted.

Q: *Why is peace important within the context of Isaiah 9:1-7?*

Q: *Given the need for deliverance from foreign oppressors (Isaiah 9:1-5), why is the emphasis on peace instead of victory over enemies?*

The title “Mighty God” generates the most discussion of the Messiah’s titles, but it is likely that Isaiah believed “Prince of Peace” to be the climatic title in the series. Isaiah emphasized peace throughout his prophecies (Isaiah 53:5; 57:19; 66:12). He yearned for a world at peace under the rule of God, and he recognized that the Messiah would be the one to bring that peace. This would have been immensely comforting for his audience, who faced the threat of Assyrian invasion.

Q: *Why has peace been so elusive throughout world history?*

Q: *What plans for peace do modern leaders create?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – A longing for peace unites modern readers with Isaiah’s first hearers, but peace continues to elude us as it eluded them. We have underestimated the problem and overestimated our own capacity to achieve peace. Lasting peace eludes the world today because sin has corrupted our hearts and removed God from the center of our lives. As we attempt to fill that center, our personal ideas and ambitions clash with others and conflict ensues. We fail to find peace because we fail to look to the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the only way for sins to be forgiven and the only solution to the conflicts that elude peace.

Q: *Some scholars propose that Isaiah 9:6-7 speaks of Ahaz, Hezekiah, or Josiah. How does Isaiah 9:7 make this idea unlikely?*

Q: *Why is the mention of David’s throne and kingdom significant?*

After identifying the king by his four titles (Isaiah 9:6), Isaiah describes his rule (Isaiah 9:7). He would rule on David's throne and over his kingdom. His reign would be eternal. These details allude to the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7:8–17). God promised David that his kingdom would endure. Although the Davidic dynasty appeared to be floundering under Ahaz's leadership, Isaiah's prophecy revealed God's commitment to remain faithful to His promises to David. The Davidic covenant would be upheld by the arrival and reign of the Messiah.

Isaiah ended the prophecy by attributing its fulfillment to the Lord's zeal. The coming and success of the Messiah would not depend upon Ahaz or the people. God would bring the Messiah and His reign. God was the reason for the peace the people longed for. God was the reason for the people's hope.

Q: *Does God continue to be the source of your hope?*

Q: *Why is it comforting to know our fate is in God's hand?*

**APPLICATION POINT** – Isaiah 9:7 claims that the birth of Christ was accomplished through God's zeal. Our fate does not rest in our own hands but in His. He is the one who sent the Son to die in our place. He is the one who will send the Son to judge the world. Although we may like the thought of being in control of our lives and our futures, we are in a much better place when we recognize our dependance on God.

## NEXT STEPS

Isaiah 9:1–7 encouraged the people to place their hope in the coming Messiah. This is also where our hope must reside, but we inevitably place our hope in other things. Take time this week to consider where you are seeking hope. Some people put their hope in a new job or a new relationship. Others place hope in a vacation or the latest gadget. Some people place hope in the Christmas season. These may bring temporary joy and relief, but only Christ can bring the eternal hope our souls desire. Furthermore, when we try to replace Christ with our hope in other things, we will eventually crush those things because they cannot bear the weight we have placed on them. As this year draws to a close, identify your false hopes and replace them with Christ. There is no greater gift you could give yourself or others.





## PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, you are not blind to the suffering and injustices I see. You answer every need in your Son, Christ Jesus. Keep my hope transfixed on Him.

Lord Jesus, your birth was foretold centuries beforehand. In the same way, your return was foretold centuries beforehand. Keep my hope focused upon you.

Father, help me this Christmas season to reflect on the meaning of the birth of your Son. Help me to think of what it means for God to take on human flesh.

God, as I look forward to a new year, help me to rewrite my goals and aspirations in light of your glory.

