

Isaiah Part 9: “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him...”

Isaiah 11 and 12

The righteous reign of the branch (Isaiah 11 v 1 to 16)

The Assyrian cedar would be irrevocably felled (as we saw in Isaiah 10 v 33, 34), but out of the stump of the pollarded Judean tree will come forth a shoot – the Messiah, in whom Isaiah’s hope for the future is centred. His glorious reign (Isaiah 11) is described (i) in relation to human society (v 2 to 5); (ii) with reference to creation (v 6 to 9); and (iii) in relation to world history (v 10 to 16). In Isaiah 12 there follows a ‘psalm’ of thanksgiving to God for his forgiveness, together with a vision of a united Israel enjoying the blessings of salvation, and engaging in ‘missionary’ activity among the nations...

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse” (v 1) – the LORD causes a branch to grow out the family of Jesse, David’s father. The royal authority of the house of David had lain dormant for 600 years when Jesus came as Messiah – it was like a new green branch coming out of a dead stump. God emphasises the humble nature of the Messiah: it is less prestigious to say ‘from Jesse’ than ‘from King David’.

- How would you describe the characteristics of the coming Messiah from verses 1 to 5? Compare this picture of his reign with the picture described in Isaiah 9 v 2 to 7, and note what new truths are brought out in this chapter.

Jesus has (i) the *Spirit of the LORD* – not a false or deceiving spirit, or even the spirit of a man. (ii) He has the *Spirit of wisdom* – Jesus is perfectly wise in all things, and 1 Corinthians 1 v 30 says that Jesus became for us ‘wisdom from God’. (iii) Jesus has the *Spirit of understanding* – he understands all things, and he understands us perfectly, as our sympathetic high priest in heaven (Hebrews 4 v 15, 16). (iv) The *Spirit of counsel* will rest upon Jesus – he has perfect counsel to give us at all times. (v) The *Spirit of might* is upon Jesus – he has the power to help us. (vi) The *Spirit of knowledge* rests upon Jesus – he knows everything, and he knows our hearts. (vii) Jesus has the *Spirit of the fear of the LORD* – he willingly kept himself in a place of submission, respect and honour to God the Father (see John 4 v 34; and John 6 v 38).

These seven aspects of the Spirit of God are not the only characteristics of the Holy Spirit, but they are grouped together in a ‘seven’ to show the fullness and perfection of the Holy Spirit. This passage is behind the term the “seven spirits” of God used in Revelation 1 v 4; 3 v 1; 4 v 5; and 5 v 6. The seven-branched lampstand (‘menorah’) that held the oil lamps for the tabernacle is also an illustration of the seven aspects of the Spirit: the menorah had one stem in the centre, from which protruded three branches to the right and three to the left. Similarly, in this text, three pairs of the names of the Spirit are grouped around the central stem...



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An extra note on Isaiah 11 v 1, and its links to Matthew 2 v 23: “And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.” No specific passage in the Old Testament says “He shall be called a Nazarene”. However, Isaiah 11 v 1 says: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit”, and the Hebrew word for ‘branch’ (נֶצֶר *netser*) sounds like ‘Nazar’. So the epithet ‘Nazarene’ could mean: ‘the man of Nazareth, the town of the little branch’. Nazareth was a little, dirty town. It was treated with contempt by the exalted Pharisees and the common people alike. His enemies associated Jesus with this city as a slur; but he wore the title as a badge of honour...

“He shall not judge by what his eyes see... but with righteousness he shall judge the poor... and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth” (v 3, 4) – Jesus did not rely on outward appearance, or by the words that someone said: he judged with righteousness. The mere words of Jesus have the power to judge the wicked: he only has to announce judgment and it is done.

“The wolf shall dwell with the lamb...” (v 6) – when the Messiah reigns, nature will be transformed. No longer will there be predators among the animals, and it seems all animals will be herbivores (v 7). This could be seen as a lifting of the curse pronounced in Genesis 3, and a return to Paradise (see Isaiah 65 v 25; 66 v 22; and Romans 8 v 18 to 25). “And a little child shall lead them” – not only will the way animals relate to each other be changed, but the way they relate to humans will be also changed. A little child will be safe, and able to lead a wolf or leopard or young lion or bear. Even the dangers of cobras and adders will be gone (v 8). “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (v 9) – the knowledge of God, in a relational sense, not merely an intellectual sense, will cover the entire earth (see Isaiah 6 v 3; and Habakkuk 2 v 14). The Millennial reign of the Messiah will be glorious!

- “In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people...” (v 11) – ‘yet a second time’: so, when was the first time? See Ezra and Nehemiah.

“He will raise a signal for the nations, and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (v 12) – the ‘nations’ are Gentiles, and the assembling of the dispersed Messianic Jews from many nations in Israel (as evidenced by the many small, ‘house’ fellowships of Jewish Christians) is one of the clearest signs that the ‘end times’ (‘in that day’) are upon us. See also Isaiah 14 v 1, 2; 49 v 22, 23; and Zechariah 8 v 23.

The Lord is my strength and my song (Isaiah 12 v 1 to 6)

This chapter is one of a few ‘psalms’ outside the Book of Psalms. It falls into two parts: (i) the worshipper speaks to the LORD (v 1 and 2); (ii) the worshipper declares the greatness of God to everyone (v 3 to 6).

- This ‘psalm’ is the song of those who have discovered that God’s anger has been turned away from them. What results of salvation are described here? Are we experiencing them all?

“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (v 3) – Jesus promised the woman from Samaria: “whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4 v 14). Like the woman, we can come to Jesus and draw water from the ‘wells of salvation’! When we remember the semi-arid climate of Israel, we see what a beautiful picture the ‘wells of salvation’ paint. When water is rare, a well gives life. To have a place where you can continually come and draw ‘water’ to meet your spiritual need is a precious gift indeed.

Prayer – O Lord God, you are my salvation. I will trust, and will not be afraid, for you are my strength and my song, and you have become my salvation. I will give thanks to you, O Lord, and call upon your name; I will make known your deeds among all peoples, and proclaim that your name is exalted. I will sing praises to you, O Lord, for you have done gloriously. Help me to make your salvation known in all the earth. Help us to shout, and sing for joy, for you, O Lord, are great in our midst! Amen.