

Adult Teaching Resources

January 22, 2023



January 1, 2023—Ecclesiastes 3:1-13—“It’s Always Time”

Season of Epiphany: What Does God Expect?

January 8, 2023—Isaiah 42:1-9—“Bringing Justice”

January 15, 2023—Isaiah 49:1-7—“Bearing Light”

January 22, 2023—Isaiah 9:1-7—“Multiplying Joy”

January 29, 2023—Micah 6:1-8—“Defining Expectations”

www.nurturingfaith.net

Subscribe to *Nurturing Faith* to access the core Bible content for this lesson.
Find links and videos related to this lesson.

Multiplying Joy

Isaiah 9:1-7

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. (Isa. 9:2)

Opening

After everyone arrives, have each person find a partner. Once everyone is settled, have them share their stories with each other.

Share a time when you were without electricity, water, or other creature comforts for an extended amount of time.

What was the situation?

How long were you without what you wanted?

How did you cope during the event?

How did it feel to have everything back to normal?

Give each couple time to share with each other, then open the floor for large group sharing before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

What will there be for those in anguish? (no gloom)

What did he bring in the former time? (he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali)

What did he do in the latter time? (he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations)

Who has seen a great light? (the people who walked in darkness)

Who did the light shine on? (those who lived in a land of deep darkness)

How do they rejoice? (as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder)

What has God broken for them? (the yoke of their burden and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor)

Reading the Bible *continued*

What will be burned as fuel for the fire? (all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood)

What has been born and given to us? (a child has been born for us, a son given to us)

What rests upon his shoulders? (authority rests upon his shoulders)

What will he be named? (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace)

What will he establish? (the throne of David and his kingdom)

Who will do this? (the zeal of the Lord of hosts)

Making Connections

Who, in contemporary times, has been so defeated that everywhere they turn, they only see darkness and despair? What has contributed to their situation? Where, if anywhere, do they find hope?

When you experience times of darkness and despair, where do you turn for comfort? Where do you turn for peace? Where do you turn for a glimmer of light and hope?

Other than scripture and hymns, what writings and songs do you turn to for comfort and hope when you are feeling stuck in a dark place? What do those words and songs say to you?

What light and hope do you see in your future? In your church's future? In the world's future?

In referring to God multiplying the nation and increasing its joy, our Lesson Writer explains, "The word translated as "multiplied" doesn't necessarily refer to a growing population; it could also mean "you have made the nation great" or "you have enlarged the nation," which may catch the meaning better." When you think of nation, do you only think of the United States or do you think of something else? Do you think God is at work in your understanding of "nation" and making it better? Why do you say that?

Isaiah uses "yoke," "bar," and "rod" as symbols of oppression for Israel. When you think of those oppressed today, who comes to mind? What symbols would you use to describe their oppression?

What does "Wonderful Counselor" mean to you?

What does "Mighty God" mean to you?

What does "Everlasting Father" mean to you?

What does "Prince of Peace" mean to you?

Who, or what, has helped you in your times of darkness and despair? What did they do to be a light in your darkness? What was "light" for you?

So What?

Ask everyone to partner together with their partner from the beginning of the lesson. Once everyone is settled, share with them this statement from our Lesson Writer. “As children of God and followers of the Prince of Peace, we are called to devote our best efforts toward bringing peace and justice – security and equality – to the world in which we live.”

Give each couple a piece of paper and a pen and then ask each couple to answer this question from our Lesson Writer:

What are specific ways in which we can touch the lives of others with grace, delivering them from oppression?

Have each couple write their answers on the sheet of paper. Then, ask each couple to share their answers with the larger group. Write all the answers on the board as they are shared so that everyone can see.

Once all the answers are recorded, ask your class to choose 2-3 specific ways they can individually, and as a class, commit themselves to touching the lives of others with grace.

The Challenge

This week, when you come across someone or a situation that needs peace and justice, be the servant of God and do what you can to bring grace and love.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for bringing light into the darkness. Thank you for the light that chases the darkness away. Use us as instruments of your light to shed a glimmer of hope to others as they travel through their dark valleys. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Isaiah of Jerusalem—The previous lessons were drawn from the part of the book known as “Second Isaiah” (chapters 40-55), when many natives of Judah were living in exile, somewhere in Babylon. Many were second or third generation exiles who had never seen Jerusalem.

Today’s text is from the first part of the book, commonly attributed to the first prophet to write under the name Isaiah. He lived and preached in Jerusalem in the 8th century BCE, before either the northern kingdom of Israel or the southern kingdom of Judah had yet been fully conquered. He is typically known as “First Isaiah” or “Isaiah of Jerusalem.”

Dark days—The social and political setting of Isaiah 9 reflects a very troubled time in the history of Judah and Israel. Isaiah of Jerusalem prophesied during the last half of the 8th century, BCE, at a time when the united kingdom of David and Solomon had been divided for 200 years. The first half of the 8th century had been a relatively stable and prosperous time for both the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah), but things began to erode with the rise of the Neo-Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727), referred to in the Bible as “Pul.” A powerful ruler, he quickly conquered Babylonia to the South and Urartu to the North. He then moved against Syria, Tyre, Israel, and Judah, no later than 738 BCE.

King Menaham of Israel (752-742) paid heavy tribute to Assyria as the price of relative independence (2 Kgs. 15:19-20), as did his son Pekahiah (742-740). This was not a popular course, however. With the assistance of fifty men from Gilead (an area east of the Sea of Galilee), a man named Pekah assassinated Pekahiah and seized the throne (740-732). In an effort to stand against the oppressive Assyrians, Pekah made an alliance with Rezin, the king of Syria, along with the Philistines and Egyptians. Biblical historians often refer to this as the “Syro-Ephraimitic Coalition.”

Pekah and Rezin tried to draw Judah into the anti-Assyrian alliance, but King Jotham (750-732) refused to join. Hoping to force Judah to join the coalition, troops from Israel and Syria invaded Judah (2 Kings 15:37). About the same time, Jotham died and his 20-year-old son Ahaz succeeded him on the throne. Pekah and Rezin sought to depose Ahaz, but Isaiah counseled him to trust in God, assuring him that God would deal with the two “smoldering stumps of firebrands” (7:2-9). Ahaz did not listen, however, and appealed to the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser to protect him against his northern neighbors (2 Kgs. 16:7-9).

Isaiah predicted that the coalition would fall, and that Judah would come under increasing Assyrian domination. His predictions were correct: within a few years the northern kingdom of Israel was conquered, and many residents were carried into captivity by Tiglath-Pileser’s successors, Shalmaneser V (727-722) and Sargon II (722-705). Judah retained its national

Digging Deeper *continued*

identity, but effectively became a vassal of Assyria (2 Kgs. 16:10-18), forced to pay tribute to avoid an outright invasion.

Zebulun and Naphtali—Why would Zebulun and Naphtali be the first to fall? The Mesopotamian powers of Assyria and Babylon were located east of Israel, but they could not march through the desert and attack from that direction. Instead, they followed the main roads up and around the “Fertile Crescent,” west and south through Syria and Phoenicia, so that they arrived in Israel from the north. As two of the northernmost tribes, Zebulun and Naphtali would have been the first to be overrun by the Assyrian forces and thus forcefully “brought into contempt.” Dan, the tribe furthest north, may have already lost its territory, since it is not mentioned.

Naphtali’s downfall was recounted in 2 Kings 15:29: “In the days of King Pekah of Israel, King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria.”

The defeat of Naphtali described in 2 Kings 15:29 appears to match a campaign described in Tiglath Pileser III’s own records, which were preserved on clay tablets, many of which have survived. James B. Pritchard’s *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (ANET) includes a translation of an Assyrian military report usually dated to 733 BCE. The report speaks of an expedition that reached the Mediterranean near Byblos, north of Israel, before the army turned south. The commander then lists places he conquered (note that Assyrian and Hebrew spellings are often different). The text is broken, with an ellipsis (. . .) representing missing words or syllables: “. . . nite, Gal’za, Abilakka which are adjacent to Bit Hu-umria (Israel) the land of . . . li, in its entire extent, I united with Assyria. Officers of mine I installed as governors over them” (ANET [Princeton University Press, 1969], 283). “Bit Hu-umria,” or the “House of Omri,” was a typical Assyrian name for Israel, which was ruled for many years by Omri and his descendants. Abilakka is probably Abel-beth-maacah.

Name that genre—Commentators are divided over how to classify Isa. 9:2-7. It is clearly poetry, but used to what end? The text has some similarities to a psalm of thanksgiving, for vv. 3-4 address God as “you,” and vv. 4-6 list reasons to be thankful. But thanksgiving psalms usually contain an invitation or “call to praise” that is lacking here.

Some scholars have compared the text to Egyptian accession hymns that accompanied the coronation of a new king. In such hymns, it was typical for the new king to be assigned special titles, such as those listed in 9:6b. There is a question as to how familiar that practice would have been to Isaiah, though.

Others consider the text to be a royal birth announcement, and see a possible connection with the earlier prediction of a child to be called “Immanuel,” whose birth would usher in a happier age (7:10-17).

Note that the Revised Common Lectionary cites only vv. 1-4 as the text for the day, but there is little point in stopping at v. 4 when the oracle clearly continues through v. 7.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Tense and tension—The verbs in vv. 2-6 are mostly in a form that Hebrew scholars often call “perfect.” Typically, verbs in this form are translated by the English past tense as completed action. The prophets often used the perfect form to describe future events, a manner of writing sometimes called the “prophetic perfect.” Though speaking of things to come, God’s fulfillment of the promises was believed to be so certain that it could be spoken of as having happened already. The verbal forms shift to imperfect in v. 7, which appears to speak to the future. The mixture of past and future tense verbs adds a natural tension to the reading as we try to puzzle out the prophet’s meaning.

“Not,” or “his”?—In v. 3, the preserved Hebrew text literally reads “You enlarge the nation, you do not increase the joy,” but such a reading is an internal contradiction. There is obviously a problem with the text here, and fortunately, it is easy to solve. The word translated as “not” (*lō*) is pronounced exactly as the word meaning “its” (*lō*). At some point, a scribe must have misspelled the word when copying the text. The Masoretes responsible for preserving the text recognized the problem long ago. Rather than changing the text, however, they inserted the correct spelling in brackets beside the incorrect version, indicating that readers should choose the alternate version.

Royal report cards—In the books of 1-2 Kings, the author/editor closed the account of each king of Israel or Judah with a summary judgment regarding the monarch’s faithfulness or failure in living up to Israel’s covenant with God. Of all the kings listed, only Josiah and Hezekiah were given unqualified praise (see Hezekiah’s evaluation in 2 Kgs. 18:5-7).

How many titles?—The various names given to the coming king have occasioned much discussion. Does the collection of impressive words indicate four titles? Five? More?

The words typically translated as “wonderful,” “counselor,” “mighty,” and “God” are written separately, while the two words translated as “everlasting father” are written together in Hebrew, and the two words for “Prince of Peace” are connected in the text with a hyphen.

One might suggest, then, that there are six titles: “Wonderful,” “Counselor,” “Mighty One,” “God,” “Everlasting Father,” and “Prince of Peace.”

It seems best, however, to follow the lead of the last two titles and interpret the list as four epithets made of paired words, whether they are written together or not. Thus, “Wonderful Counselor,” “Mighty God,” “Everlasting Father,” and “Prince of Peace” would be honorifics used to describe the coming king.

A forever father?—How do we understand the title “Everlasting Father”? Contemporary Christians often refer to God as “Father,” perhaps following the pattern set by Jesus, but it was unusual for God to be called “Father” in the Old Testament. There are a few instances in which God is described as a father (Deut. 32:6; 2 Sam. 7:14; Jer. 3:4, 19; Isa. 63:16; Mal. 2:10), but combination terms like “Everlasting Father” are otherwise unknown.

Kings were even less likely to be called “father” among the Hebrews (1 Sam. 24:11 is a rare exception), but the term was not inappropriate for a good and compassionate leader.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Likewise, individuals are not thought of as being “everlasting” in Hebrew thought, but God’s promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 was said to ensure a kingdom that would last forever (2 Sam. 7:13, 16). Perhaps, then, we are to think of the coming king as one who would perpetuate the everlasting dynasty promised to David.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Did Isaiah predict the coming of Christ?

When Isaiah spoke the hopeful words of Isa. 9:2-7, did he have in mind an earthly king who would bring a quick end to the Assyrian threat, or did his vision intentionally look beyond to a messianic ruler who would usher in the eschatological end of the age?

The truth is, no one can look into the prophet's mind and know for sure what he intended. However, we are confident that the Hebrew prophets generally addressed their message to people in their own time and context, so it is most likely that Isaiah was expressing high hopes that Hezekiah and his rule would become the embodied fulfillment of God's promise to David.

Some believe that Isaiah was looking further into the future, thinking of a future Messiah with divine attributes. The recorded preaching of Isaiah of Jerusalem, however, never uses the term "messiah," a Hebrew word that literally means "anointed." Second Isaiah, the prophet of the exile, spoke of "God's anointed" deliverer (45:1)—but only with specific reference to Cyrus, the Persian ruler who conquered Babylon and granted Hebrew exiles the right to return home. Third Isaiah, who spoke both comforting and challenging words during the postexilic period, used the term in 61:1, declaring that "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me ...," a text that Jesus later cited as a sort of mission statement.

Looking back from our perspective, we know that neither Hezekiah nor any other Hebrew ruler ever achieved anything approaching the illustrious predictions of Isa. 9:2-7. As time went on, the Jewish people recognized that the promise to David seemed unfulfilled, so their hopes began to focus on a future day when a divinely anointed Messiah would arise to introduce a new age of salvation and hope for Israel. This messianic hope developed mainly in the late postexilic period, however, long after Isaiah of Jerusalem's time.

Today we are likely to view Isaiah's oracle through the lens of the New Testament, seeing Jesus as the only one worthy of being called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. We see Christ as the one who inaugurated the eternal Kingdom of God into human history and the one who will bring about its ultimate, eternal fulfillment. What Isaiah saw taking place through military victory and strong rule on earth, we tend to see in spiritual terms that equate salvation with eternal life in a heavenly kingdom.

So, it is likely that Isaiah truly hoped that Hezekiah would prove to be the Davidic ruler of his dreams, but when that did not happen, later generations sought the fulfillment of his promise through a delivering "Messiah" who was yet to come. Many Jewish people still await the Messiah's arrival, but those who follow Jesus called him "Christ"—the Greek term for "anointed"—believing him to be the promised prince of Isaiah's announcement.