

May 7, 2017
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Peace in Chaos
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2017 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from Isaiah 9:1-7.

1. What was life like under the reign of King Ahaz and how did the people respond?
2. Why don't people read or teach the Word of God (8:20) and what happens to such a culture (8:21-22)?
3. When did (or when will) God's promise about the great light shining in spiritual darkness come to pass?
4. Who is the Prince of Peace and what is His connection with the "light"?
5. How can the Prince of Peace be the same as the Everlasting Father?
6. How can people who live in the gloom of spiritual darkness today, have peace with the Prince of Peace?

THE PRINCE OF PEACE OFFERS PEACE
Isaiah 9:1-7

Ahaz shared a co-regency with his father Jotham beginning in the year 735 BC. He ascended to the throne of Judah as king in the year 731 when his father died. That was only about nine years before God would finally fulfill His threatening promise sent often through

the prophets, the promise that a mighty nation would overrun His rebellious people, take them into captivity, or scatter them to the four winds. The prophets, beginning with Elijah and Elisha and including Obadiah and probably Joel and finally Amos the farmer, cried out God's warning for the people to abandon their sins and false gods and return to Him.

They didn't. Now in the day of Ahaz, things were unraveling quickly. The relatives in the north, in Israel, were about to lose their homes, their shrines, their idols, and their nation. All that would be left were so many smoldering piles. And yet Ahaz and his people never learned the lesson God taught. Ahaz reigned for sixteen years over Judah and God assessed his work with this statement: "*Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree*" (2 Kings 16:2-4).

When people who once walked in fellowship with God decide to trade a relationship with God for a relationship with the popular gods, idols, and ideologies of a pagan, sinful world, society unravels. Sadly, when that comes to pass, most people in the society cannot connect the dots. They really act like they don't understand why their world is falling apart.

And so when Ahaz led the people of God into sin, it wasn't long before the king of Syria and his allies were knocking on the gates of Jerusalem. God sent Isaiah with His message pleading for His people of Judah to repent of sin and turn back to God. Instead of listening to God, Ahaz formed an alliance with the ungodly king of Assyria, the king and nation that was about to destroy Israel. Ahaz took the gold and silver treasure from God's temple to pay for the pagan king's services.

We know from the stories of history how common sense ethics, respect, honor, and courtesy disappear when respect for God and His word also disappear. That must describe life in Judah under the

leadership of Ahaz. It must have been much like life in America, the land that we love, that once seemed to enjoy the blessing of God.

Things have changed dramatically. Common courtesy, respect for authority, kindness and helpfulness is painfully absent, especially in the concrete jungles of our cities. Ours is now a society in which it is every man for himself, every woman for herself. Every word spoken by public figures is taken and twisted in an effort to slander and minimize those whose ideology is different. Selfishness, arrogance, boasting is not only common, but exalted. Therefore, if someone differs in preferences and ideologies, they must be eliminated at all costs.

That does not make for a pleasant world in which to live. However, throughout history people groups and nations who have rejected God and His word have repeated the same foolish mistakes. If we reject the authority of God, all God-ordained authority will be rejected, and the only authority left is self. Those nations do not survive for long. And when we connect the dots of historical experience, we cannot help but wonder who our “Assyria or Babylon” will be. Will God ordain for Russia, or China, or Iran, or North Korea to damage us greatly?

Into that kind of a dark and gloomy environment God gave a wonderful promise that one day there will be peace. Did the people of Judah living under the reign of Ahaz understand the promise? Probably very few people got it. But the promise still stands. Do the people today living under the reign of a new president and a fragmented congress get it? Not very many do. But to us who understand the promise it is great indeed, because in this promise we find the reason for peace in our hearts. We understand the reason because we know the Prince of Peace who gives us peace.

A Great Promise.

Dark days need great promises. The people of God during Isaiah’s ministry lived in self-inflicted spiritual darkness. They tried in vain to find the answers of life through palm readers and fortune tellers. If we look back at the last few verses of the previous chapter we read, *And when they say to you, “Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter,” should not a people inquire of*

their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living (8:19)?

Those are very appropriate questions to ask of people to whom God had given His law. Furthermore, God added to the clear teaching of His law His messages that He continually sent to the people through the prophets. But Instead of seeking God’s will through His word and through His messengers, the people turned to messengers of Satan who chirped and muttered (a picture of utter foolishness). How utterly ridiculous to try to find answers for the living from among the dead.

God pointedly stated the consequence of this rebellion and foolishness. *To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (8:20).* God has given His law and His word of testimony. He has every right to expect that people who claim to belong to Him listen to it and know it. Therefore, whoever refuses to teach from the law and testimony of God proves that he is spiritually dark, even spiritually dead.

In light of that warning, listen to the consequences God announced: *They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness (8:21-22).* And so it was in Isaiah’s day. The distress, gloom and darkness were evident all through the nation. The people doubtless experienced all kinds of trouble from family issues, to job issues, to national leadership issues. They read the news every day expecting to learn that Syria or Assyria was ready to pounce on them and destroy them. I wonder how they relaxed or how they were even able to sleep at night?

But God is gracious and long suffering. That is what we read in the words of our text. To people who lived in such distress, gloom, and darkness God offered this great and ageless promise. Things were going to change. Those who knew only gloom and anguish would see God’s glory. So God promised through the prophet: *But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the*

latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations (v.1).

All of these regions were part of Israel, the northern nation as contrasted with Judah in the south. They were people who had forsaken God and rebelled to the point of being destroyed and scattered according to God's justice. But in grace, God promised that one day people who lived again in those regions would not experience gloom and anguish.

Not only they but **all people who walk in darkness** (v.2) would see great change. God promised that great light will burst upon those who live in darkness. *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined* (v.2). The promise is a reminder that only light is able to dispel darkness. And because the spiritual darkness is so deep, only a great light can disperse it. Would the people embrace the light when it shone on them?

If people who live in darkness will embrace the light, they will experience the increased joy God promised to His people. *You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil* (v.3). This promise means that the nation defeated by Assyria and then by Babylon would not be doomed to extinction. God multiplies the nation and they have increased joy like the joy of the harvest. They will be glad to receive God's blessings. This has not happened yet.

Another part of God's promise that was still future for Israel is that God will bring light and joy and remove the gloom when He dispels the oppressor. So God promised: *For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire* (vv.4-5). Will God keep His word? He promised that He will remove all oppressors from His people. And the nation of Israel still waits.

All people who lived in spiritual darkness waited for a coming Prince who would be the cause of change (vv.6-9). God promised that the solution to the spiritual darkness, the chaos of a culture separated from God would be a child who would be born and rise to be king.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder (v.6a). Among the people of Israel a child would be born. Not an outsider. A child from among them. The responsibility of ruling the people shall be placed upon Him.

This promised king would be astonishing in character. *His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace* (v.6b). Let's stop to consider those traits briefly. He will be the Wonderful Counselor which means that the promised child will become a counselor of astonishing ability. He will guide, counsel, give advice, recommend. The essential trait of this counsel is the communication of wisdom. That counsel stands in stark contrast to the repeated examples of human folly recorded throughout Isaiah.

He will be called the Mighty God. Now this term leaves little doubt that whoever or whatever the promised leader is, he is equivalent to God. The Hebrew text states that He is the mighty *el* which is a common name for God. That being true, some scholars argue that this name is so common that it can refer to any kind of god or gods. That is true and, therefore, might mean that the promised child would be gifted beyond his peers. That is until we compare the use of "el" with the rest of the titles used in this text.

He will be called the Everlasting Father. Okay, now there is no doubt whatsoever about the meaning of *el*. The Heavenly Father who lives forever is clearly contrasted with the little gods, the gods of man's imagination. He is the gracious Father to whom all honor and respect is due. He is enduring to an extreme degree. This trait is true only of the one true God Yahweh. The promised child is equivalent to the one true God.

Therefore, we would naturally expect this everlasting God to be the author of peace. Indeed, He will be called the Prince of Peace. That means that He is the captain of the completeness of welfare. He is the One who is in command of making everything as it should be. Peace is experienced when everything is in conformity to our Creator God. Only He Himself can provide that.

Now, like the Puritan preachers of old, let's go back through those characteristics and consider the nature of this person God promised. He is a child born. Okay, many children are born, but no other children like this child has been born. He is a son given. Who

gives the son? He is the leader of the government. He is the consummate teacher of wisdom. He is God who rules forever, who gives peace.

We have no choice but to conclude that the work of this given Son, yea, the miracle of sending this Son is beyond human comprehension. *Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this (v.7).* His government never ceases to be successful, which trait has never been seen on earth. He will sit on David's throne. This is the fulfillment of God's promise that David would have a relative on the throne of Israel forever (2 Samuel 7). Many of David's relatives ruled on Judah's throne. But this relative of David must be king over all the Jews. He must maintain justice forever. He must rule in righteousness forever. Only God is forever. Therefore, Yahweh, creator and ruler of the hosts of heaven, must do this miracle of the Son ruling on David's throne forever.

The fulfillment of this promise is a miracle. When will it happen? What will it be like? Will we see it or experience it? As in many of God's promises, this one has been partially fulfilled already.

The Great Fulfillment.

We know from the New Testament record that this was none other than God the Father promising God the Son—Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit revealed this truth through Zechariah the priest. He was the father of John the baptizer. As soon as Zechariah's speech returned at the birth of John, he prophesied: *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our*

days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:68-79).

In this Holy Spirit inspired outburst, Zechariah spoke about Isaiah's promised child, son, ruler, and such. The "Lord" for whom John would prepare the way will deliver from the enemy (v.71). Because He is the Deliverer, we can serve without fear in holiness, righteousness before God (vv.74-75). John would be the prophet who prepared the way for this promised Child (v.76). And most remarkably, Zechariah promised that the child will forgive God's people of their sins (v.77). Only God can forgive sins! In fact, the ministry of this Child will be to show the need for forgiveness as He *gives light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace (v.79).* Now that promise about light to those who sit in darkness should arrest the attention of everyone who has heard about Isaiah's promise.

In light of Zechariah's promise about Jesus Christ the Lord, we are not surprised to learn that in His ministry He revealed that He is the promised Prince of Peace. He is the child born through the virgin by the Holy Spirit. He is the Son given. Jesus Himself taught that the Heavenly Father gave Him to us. He told Nicodemus the teacher, *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).*

He is the One who came to shine the light of truth and peace on those who sit in darkness. Early Jesus *leaving Nazareth . . . went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:13-16).*

That means that Jesus of Nazareth is the same as Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Indeed, as the angel promised Joseph, He was Immanuel

which means “God with us.” And how did God’s people respond? They rejected Him as king and savior. Their spiritual darkness overwhelmed them. Instead of worshiping Him, they chose to kill Him. They thought they were ridding their culture of a blasphemer. But in bringing about His death, they brought to pass God’s miracle of offering the final sacrifice for sins.

In perfect accord with God’s eternal plan, through Christ’s blood shed for us, we have peace with the Prince of Peace. In order to know peace, we must acknowledge that Christ is who He claimed to be, and that He did what He claimed to do. He said that He and God are one. While He preached to the skeptics at the Feast of Dedication, Jesus declared, *“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30)*. They were aghast that He would make such a claim. He taught that He was the light of the world that lives in the utter darkness of sin. At the Feast of Booths He taught, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12)*.

Most astonishing to the people who lived in spiritual darkness, Jesus taught that everyone who trusts His finished work for salvation will have sins forgiven. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24)*. Do you believe this? The people who heard it originally didn’t. They rejected this promised Prince of Peace. They didn’t have peace.

But we who firmly trust all that Jesus taught about Himself know for certain that when God declares us justified through faith, we finally have peace with God. The Holy Spirit led Paul to write, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)*.

This is why the world is not able to offer genuine peace. The world offers ways to escape reality, but we always have to return. People take exciting vacations but always have to come back to the reality of stress and conflict. People intentionally get drunk or get high, but they always sober up. Grown adults act like children and abandon their responsibilities only to discover that nothing has really changed. Many years ago, I knew a man who left his wife and four children. He lived the high life for awhile and then met and married the woman of his dreams. He confessed to me about a year later,

“Nothing is really any different than my first marriage because I am still me.”

The world offers many avenues to peace, but we always come out at the same dead end of continuing or even different chaos. Yoga and eastern meditation really doesn’t make anyone right with their Creator. Joining the Peace Corps doesn’t take away your sins. We must acknowledge that the root of conflict is with our Creator before we can ever know peace. In fact, most of the teaching and activity in the world seems to indicate that there is no point in pursuing peace because it is too elusive.

But God has sent to us the Son who, though born as a child, is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Through Him alone we are able to attain peace with God our Creator. What must we do to gain that peace? We attain peace with God when we acknowledge that our war is with God who must rule our lives. We confess our sins against Him. We trust the blood of Jesus Christ shed to cover our sins. We embrace the promises of God and enjoy forgiveness.

That is where and how we find peace with our Creator God. It is real peace. It is unusual and difficult to explain peace. But we enjoy it. For how long? We do run into a bit of a problem because we still live in a world of chaos. That being true, it is necessary for us to diligently maintain this peaceful fellowship with our Lord. In order to continue to know peace, we must trust that Christ is the Prince of Peace for us every day, not just at the point of salvation.

Even as born again people, the people of God, we will too often sin again against our Creator God. When we do, we must confess those sins so that He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We must keep a clear conscience with Him who longs for us to have peace and teaches us to enjoy peace. We must trust His promises for peace so much that we actually learn what they say and learn how they work. We will learn that peace is found in truly, sincerely leaning on Him and His word.

The culture Ahaz created was full of spiritual darkness, confusion, stress, and discouragement. It was a lot like our own culture. To those people who lived in darkness, God gave the amazing promise regarding the Prince of Peace. No doubt the people found the promise hard to understand and hard to believe. In the same

way, when the Prince of Peace actually showed up, the people were so blinded by spiritual darkness that they killed Him. God's plan was that the blood Jesus shed in that murder was the one and only means for our sins to be forgiven. Therefore, through Jesus Christ we can know peace with God. Jesus is indeed the Prince, the ruler, who provides peace. Do you trust Him to forgive your sins? Do you trust Him to truly keep you in the peace that He alone gives?