

An Ensign For The Nations

We shall not go wrong in reminding ourselves that the Holy Spirit by the prophet Isaiah is comforting the Lord's elect amongst the Old Testament Jews by revealing many new and specific details concerning the future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The long expected Messiah would certainly come, fulfilling God's promises and proving God's faithfulness. Great glory lay ahead for the Lord's elect despite the judgments that would soon befall Judah and Israel. Here the Holy Spirit shows us how faith and trust have always distinguished the Lord's spiritual people.

A Rod and a Branch

With this in mind each new revelation, each detail, contributes more to the picture being painted for these ancient believers. Messiah would come as a rod from the stem, or stump, of Jesse, David's father, when the greatness of David's kingdom had long since gone. This proves Christ's royal lineage, but speaks too of humbleness, poverty and obscurity in His own time. It is from Jesse that Christ is a rod, a root from a dry ground. Messiah's other name, the Branch, comes from the word Netzer, and is the name of the city of Nazareth. Our Lord's dwelling in Nazareth fulfilled a prophecy that he should be called a Nazarene, or an inhabitant of Netzer.

The Spirit of the Lord

Yet it is spiritual qualities that most characterise the Messiah or Jesus Christ, and a spiritual kingdom which Isaiah anticipates. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him and did indeed descend evidently and wonderfully when Christ was baptised by John in the Jordan. The Holy Spirit, given profusely and without measure, fitted the Lord for His ministry. The seven spiritual endowments of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, the fear of the Lord, and discernment of men's spirits were gifts exercised during the Saviour's ministry in dealing suitably with proud legalists and humble sinners.

Peace dwells where Christ reigns

The prophet continues to extol Christ's blessed attributes of righteousness, faithfulness, truthfulness and justice. These qualities are the foundation upon which Christ's kingdom is established. His gospel rule in the hearts of men and women is likened to peace in the animal kingdom and the absence of danger for the weak and vulnerable. In Christ's spiritual kingdom peace reigns in the hearts of cleansed sinners and loving brethren. This is not an idyllic pipe-dream or a future heavenly ambition but the effect of Christ dwelling in the hearts of converted sinners.

A message to the isles

Now Isaiah broadens the view of these saints wider still. Not only will Messiah's gospel kingdom bring peace, being blessed with all spiritual graces, it will also be enlarged far beyond the borders of Israel and Judah, 'for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea'. In the gospel age Christ's saving work has been extended to all nations and God's elect gathered from far away isles, and from every tribe and people.

An ensign raised, an army with banners

Christ is the Ensign of His people. He is raised like a flag by the preaching of the gospel of free and sovereign grace. Christ lifted up will draw men and women, boys and girls from every direction, the four corners of the earth, into the kingdom of God. Then Isaiah assures his hearers that the spiritual rest brought in by Christ shall be glorious, by which he shows the blessedness of sins forgiven, the wonder of justification without works, and the promise of everlasting life. Again, we marvel that so much gospel insight was supplied to God's saints so long before Jesus was born.

The power in the gospel

The end of our chapter speaks of the victories of grace in the souls of God's people and judgment for sin. The enemies of God and His people shall be cut off. No barrier will hinder, no river will separate the Lord's remnant from their Saviour. These verses describe gospel preaching. It shall not return void. It shall accomplish its purpose. It shall prosper. This promise was a great encouragement for the apostles and ought to inspire us, too. The task of preaching, lifting up Christ and raising Him as an ensign, displaying His work as a banner, is the means by which Christ calls His people to salvation. We labour in a cause that must ultimately succeed and we serve a King whose glory is assured.

Our Highway to heaven

Isaiah tells the believers of His day, 'there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people'. What a wonderful gospel message this is! Our Lord Jesus Christ is the way of spiritual and eternal life. He is the highway of holiness, the path made straight in the desert, a highway for our God by which all who seek forgiveness from sin and peace with God are brought to know His salvation.

Amen

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