The Light of the World

**Isaiah 8:16–22** 16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. 17 And I will wait for the Lord who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will even look eagerly for Him. 18 Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. 19 When they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. 21 They will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. 22 Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be driven away into darkness.

*The Gathering Of The Remnant*

Verse 11 begins to introduce a sharp division between the remnant and the rebellious house of Israel. These two groups will run concurrent throughout this passage and will reemerge later in the prophecy with greater intensification (cf. 51.12-55.13; 56-66). Isaiah means to draw a dividing line between those who will remain faithful to Yahweh and those who will flee to divination and the powers of darkness for their direction in troubled times. Here the call goes out to safeguard the revelation of God, the “testimony” (תְּעוּדָה) and the “law” (תּוֹרָה). Here God’s revelation is described with two comprehensive terms. The “testimony” would be those things which God has spoken about Himself, the future, and the people. The “law” is that which out to govern the people, reminding the nation of that which has been rejected (cf. 5.24).

But for the disciples, this testimony and this law would still be central to their lives. The evidence of this is embodied by the prophet who, “will wait for the Lord” during turbulent times when God is “hiding His face from the house of Jacob” (v.17). Indeed, while destruction was looming over the horizon, God’s people are not merely casting themselves on the providence of God in some fatalistic or indifferent heart attitude; their attitude is everything. They will “even look eagerly for Him,” that is to say, with great expectation and hope. It is evidence therefore that their faith had not failed even in the face of mass apostasy and unbelief.

This is nothing more than the hope of every believer. Whether we find ourselves looking for temporal deliverance from earthly rulers and the rebuilding of a nation such as Judah did, or here at the end of the age looking for our final eschatological hope, our final resting place; the hope is germane. We have the same hope and the same object of hope, “Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion” (v.18).

**Romans 8:23** 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

**Philippians 3:20** 20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

**1 Thessalonians 1:9–10** 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

This is why Isaiah, his disciples and his children (whether they are a different group or not, e.g. whether it refers to Isaiah’s literal children or not cf. 7.3; 8.3) are used in Scripture *typologically*. They are a true reflection of the gospel foreshadowing the solidarity between Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant and His disciples, the Church His covenant community so that just as there was a progressive move from one stage of redemptive history in Judah, so too, there is a messianic move from this age to the next as Jesus and His brethren are brought to glory:

**Hebrews 2:9–13** 9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. 11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, [Ps. 22.22] “I will proclaim Your name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise.” 13 And again, [Is. 8.17] “I will put My trust in Him.” And again, [Is. 8.18] “Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me.”

Notice also, for our instruction and encouragement, the early Church’s hermeneutics. They did not hesitate to engage in intertextual theology where the Psalms and Prophets can be strung together in the formulation of their messianic theology. This of course is what Jesus taught them to do himself (cf. Lk. 24.25-27, 44-47). Isaiah, and his “children” are prophetic, they are “signs and wonders” (לְאֹת֥וֹת וּלְמוֹפְתִ֖ים) of the future remnant that will gather in covenant solidarity around the cross for there our great covenant Head bowed in shame for us. We should also notice that the gathering of the remnant is ultimately owing to God’s power and initiative, “and the children whom the Lord has given me” (v.18). The Hebrew verb “to give” (נתן), is in the *qatal* form (Perfect), and implies a settled action on the part of God to gather Isaiah’s children to him and is no doubt why the NT authors see that this passage is reflecting some greater typological reality, namely, the gathering of the elect to the Son by the Father as the faithful remnant to be delivered. Behind this ecclesiastical phenomenon is the Trinitarian economy of the covenant of redemption (cf. John 6.37-39, 17.6).

*The Delusion Of The Wicked*

The opposite of this hope is that people have no future, “they have no dawn” (v.20). In fact, the future for the majority of the inhabitants of Jerusalem at this point is precluded by their rebellion and unbelief and their desire to find what only God can give in the forces of darkness. What a reminder to us today of what can happen to a people once they have rejected the light of revelation. Although the people rejected God’s light, they did not reject spiritual things. That is because like it or not, man is a spiritually wired; we were created to worship (cf. Rom. 1.21-23). In the pursuit of the occult here is evidence that man craves something beyond the physical realm- even if they do not know what it is (cf. Acts 17.23). People know they need something they cannot give to themselves, something transcendent, spiritual and divine. Sadly, like Jerusalem at this time, man’s susceptibility to such evil is always rooted in man’s rejection of God’s truth and revelation.

This distinction between truth and error, the occult and the true spirituality introduces the divide between true and false prophets, true and false teaching, and true and false signs and wonders. While Isaiah and his children are given as an indication of true revelation; the people who will not trust in the *signs* of Immanuel seek for signs elsewhere. Perhaps some spiritists, or some soothsayers can tell of the events to come.

**Isaiah 8:19** 19 When they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?

But in pursuing such occultic sources of secret knowledge, they were aligning themselves with the antithesis of the holy One of Israel. They were aligning themselves with the antilord, the prince of darkness who is the true source of these sinister “mediums” (אוֹב). The LXX actually renders the Hebrew derivative with the term “ventriloquist” (ἐγγαστρίμυθος). The medium is a puppet. That is why the word is also rendered, ‘familiar spirit’ because of the presence of demons in such activity; all of which was condemned under the law (Lv. 19.31; 20.6, 27; Dt. 18.11). God was exposing their depravity as another means of ‘rendering the hearts of this people insensitive’ (6.10). The mediums and spiritists engage in necromancy in the attempt to gain knowledge from those whom they believed to be in a superior position having gone on into the nether world. But this was a mistake. Isaiah will go on to expose the folly of this when describing the fall of the king of Babylon who will join the dead who have entered in a place of shame:

**Isaiah 14:9–10** 9 “Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; It arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; It raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones. 10 “They will all respond and say to you, ‘Even you have been made weak as we, You have become like us.

The use of such occult practices gave the illusion of control and insight into divine mystery but at last, like Saul and the witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28), the people were only staring into the depths of their own depravity and spiritual darkness. Ironically, in the pursuit of such wicked sources of knowledge, the result was the refusal of light for darkness, a lie for the truth, and evil for the holy. The truth remains today. People will opt for the wildest false teaching, the most fraudulent false prophets, oppressive cults, abusive spiritual leaders, swindlers, hucksters, crooks, and thieves so long as they tell them what they want to hear because in reality it is what their heart consist of in the first place— darkness:

**John 3:19** 19 “This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

**2 Thessalonians 2:11–12** 11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

**Ephesians 5:6–13** 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them; 8 for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light 9 (for the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth), 10 trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; 12 for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. 13 But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light.

In all of this, Isaiah sees only one anecdote, “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” (v.20). This dramatic verse is designed to awaken the sleeper (26.19 cf. Eph. 5.14). It is as if God is saying, ‘danger ahead!’ The gapping darkness that looms on the horizon threating now to lead His people to an irreparable end. Later God will give a similar thunderous call to the people much further along in their judgment:

**Isaiah 51:17** 17 Rouse yourself! Rouse yourself! Arise, O Jerusalem, You who have drunk from the Lord’s hand the cup of His anger; The chalice of reeling you have drained to the dregs.

*The Consequences Of The Occult*

This subject regarding the occult illustrates our need as a covenant people to be ever so circumspect knowing that we too have an adversary the devil who seeks to devour us by taking down the path of apostasy. If ever we think this does not apply to us for whatever reason; whether we think demon possession or demonic power is not real or practical in modern world or perhaps we function practically as if naturalism and materialism is all we need to worry about when the bible teaches the complete opposite (cf. Eph. 6.10ff.). Whatever our reasons, we in the West face all sorts of challenges on this but the connection is made clear by Paul as we think about ancient times, OT times and the new covenant Church:

**1 Corinthians 10:6** 6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.

The thing to see in the last two verses of this passage (vv.21, 22) is the consequence, the moral catastrophe that resulted from the Israel’s departure from revealed truth and that is something that can happen to any church, any ministry, any movement if the right safeguards are not put into place. As is often the case with Israel’s sin, the downward spiral into the occult will result in an upside-down world where privilege will turn into curse, promise will turn into threat, and hope will turn into gloom (cf. Dt. 28.15ff.). The nation created and gathered for His praise will wander off into exile as they raise their fist to God in blasphemy. They who were the chosen nation now will join with the nations to curse God and His Anointed “King” (Ps. 2). In doing this, they were expressing their rejection of David and the covenant made with him and that included all their messianic aspirations. It is not surprising therefore that the next Chapter is a messianic eruption in the text.

There is a remarkable lesson here about the nature of sin and unbelief and apostasy. When reaping the whirlwind of sin, notice that Judah will not turn in repentance to hate their sin and to confess their wrong; rather, they turn in rebellion to hate and curse their God, “They will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward” (v.21). This too is the insanity of sin. Sin and the mischief of sin is such that it convinces the sinner that sin is immune to fault and thus, to repentance and mortification of sin. Sin convinces us that sooner we should curse God and die (cf. Job 2.9) than to curse our hell-deserving sin. Sin, like Satan, is mad with misery! As we reflect on this past episode in redemptive history, we should note that Judah’s condition here is ultimately prophetic of the eschaton when humanity will once again, in the final moment, turn to curse God so that they may seal their doom forever:

**Revelation 16:9–11** 9 Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory. 10 Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain, 11 and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

In the face of all this darkness, we are reminded that Immanuel is the true light that enlightens every man and calls us to walk in His light (John 1.4-9; 8.12; 12.35-36). Thus, this chapter break is not a good break for the context is essential because here comes Christmas. Here comes the way out of all gloom and doom. Here comes mercy for misery, the Savior for the sinner. While v.22 leaves the reader immersed in the darkness of gloom, Chapter 9 launches us out into the realm of glory, into the beams of redemptive light:

**Isaiah 9:1** 1 But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

Just like us, Isaiah situates ultimate hope as a future reality and just as in his day, we may be often tempted to see this hope as impractical, unsatisfactory, non-tangible, and mere religious zeal. Yet, Jesus assures us that the hope that he brings is a present, inaugurated, and Spirit-wrought reality for us today. This is why He is the Light of the world that dispels the darkness and illuminates the Church to abide in Him, in His truth, in His love, and in His word (John 15.7-11). If we do that, no matter what befalls us, Jesus promises, your joy will be full!