

## The Promise of God's Comfort

*We and our World need the Messiah  
Not just anyone, but clearly the One God Himself would send*  
SCRIPTURES: Isaiah 7, 9, 11-12, 61 (others)

If the history of the world proves anything – the course of humanity on this planet – it proves that we need a Savior. Desperately so.

About a dozen years ago, Chris Hedges wrote a piece for the New York Times entitled, "What Every Person should know about War." <sup>i</sup> War being defined as "an active conflict that has claimed more than 1,000 lives." So how has humanity conducted itself?

- Over the past 3,400 years, humans have been at peace for all of 268 years. 92.6% of the time, we've been hell-bent on killing each other somewhere on the planet.
- 108 million people were killed in wars from 1900-1999 alone. That means that the last 100 years in our enlightened, modern world were the most violent on record.
- Throughout all human history, estimates of those killed range from 200 million to 1 billion.
- Since the birth of our country, close to 1 million Americans have died in its various wars
- Since the turn of this century, at least 30 wars have been fought or are being fought.
- Beyond combatant casualties, 75-90% of those who die are civilians.
- Beyond casualties, war displaces and disrupts the lives of the living. World War II displaced 40 million people - people are shot, bombed, raped, starved and driven from their homes.
- There are today over 21 million people in the armed forces of the world's countries. China's armed forces number 2.4 million; the United States 1.4 million. India 1.3 million, North Korea over 1 million, Russia 1 million.
- War costs billions. World War II – \$3 trillion. Korea - \$336 billion. Viet Nam - \$500 billion. Gulf War - \$76 billion. The Iraqi War - \$100 billion+ plus an additional \$400 billion+ for occupation and peace keeping. Somewhere around \$2,250.00 per person in the United States.

Yep...you can get drowned in the numbers, and the numbers tell us that we are drowning. But this picture (one cited by TIME magazine as one of the most influential photos of all time) sums it up. A little boy, fleeing with his family the war in Syria, was tossed overboard and found washed up by an unforgiving sea.

For all our human brilliance and technological advances, the truth remains. Humanity needs a Savior. There is a God who understands us better than we understand ourselves. A God who warned Cain about what his sinful rage could do to his brother, and was ignored. A God who warned Noah's generation that their violence against each other would not be tolerated much longer, and was ignored. A God who warned Israel and Judah that chasing after false gods and tolerating repeated injustices against the poor and powerless would invite incredible judgment, and was ignored.

And yet that same God continues to actively promise that there is a Savior. Not just any

Savior, but a Savior He would send. Today, continuing our celebration of Jesus' birthday through the eyes of Isaiah the prophet, our question is this:

### **What kind of Savior did God promise to send?**

From the revelation that came to him through the Spirit of God, Isaiah knew this SAVIOR would be recognized in the following ways --

1<sup>st</sup> - The Savior God would send would be **remarkably born to signal God's unwavering commitment to save**...even in the face of men's unbelief. Isaiah 7:10-17 (p.571 ESV)

**Isaiah 7:10** Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz: **11** "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." **12** But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." **13** And [the Lord] said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? **14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. **15** He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. **16** For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. **17** The Lord will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!"

This prophecy about the unique conception and birth of God's Messiah is set in the historical context of the rule of King Ahaz, who ruled over Judah in Jerusalem in 735 BC. From the north, the armies of Assyria were flexing their muscle, and about to conquer Israel, the northern kingdom. Syria and Israel wanted Ahaz to join them in battling Assyria. *Perhaps* all three nations – together - could survive Assyria's relentless onslaught. It seemed like a good, man-made, who-needs-God(?) plan.

One day, Isaiah shows up in Ahaz's court with God's offer on his lips. "Ahaz – the Lord God wants Himself to rescue you. Do not join the other 2 nations. Trust Him. He will even give you any sign you ask to assure you He will save."

Ahaz's response reveals his divided heart. With fake humility, he rejects the offer (vs.12), "I won't ask God for a sign; I won't test God that way." But Isaiah, mirroring God's frustration with Ahaz's hypocrisy, will not take NO for an answer. "*The Lord Himself will give you a sign (vs.14). Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel (i.e. God with us).*"

Translation – even in the face of hypocrisy and fake humility and unbelief, God has a plan to save...and He signals that plan through a most remarkable sign. A virgin will miraculously be with child. A virgin will bring forth a son. Her son's name means, GOD IS HERE, WITH US, TO SAVE.

7 centuries later, the Lord's angel extinguished young Joseph's anxiousness with dream.

Matthew 1:20-21 (p.807) "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people **from their sins**."... just like the Lord told Ahaz through Isaiah the prophet.

If the question is, "Why the virgin conception and birth?", the answer is God sent a SAVIOR unmistakably. The sign should not have been missed and should not be missed. God shouting – my commitment to SAVE YOU from our sins is unwavering. D.L. Moody said it, "Looking at the wound of sin (in my life) will never save anyone. What you must do is look at the remedy."

2<sup>nd</sup> - The Savior God would send would **bring prevailing light for people who have lived swallowed by darkness.** Isaiah 9:1-3 p.573 ESV

(cf. Isaiah 2:5, 42:6, 49:6, see also Matthew 4:12-17, Zachariah in Luke 1:76-79, John 1:1-9, 3:19-20, 2 Corinthians 4:6)

**Isaiah 9:1** 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.

**2** The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

**3** 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.

Look carefully at a map of Israel in Old Testament times, and you'll notice that the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were given land in the northern part of the Promised Land. It's wonderful land, but it is also vulnerable land. And when God judged his people's sinfulness by bringing in foreign armies, they would first march into and destroy these two territories. For the Jewish families living up north, there was untold gloom and anguish and darkness—the consequences of their sin and God's disciplining hand.

And yet Isaiah had another word for Zebulun and Naphtali. The darkness of their lives, their walk, would one day, be eclipsed by a great LIGHT. Even if they lived in a land of deep darkness (vs.2), on them this light (by God's promise) would shine.

Forward 700 years. From the obscure village of Nazareth, in Galilee (the land of Zebulun and Naphtali), "Jesus...came forth." The Apostle John himself experienced that "In Him was life; this life was the LIGHT of men. It would shine in the darkness, and overcome it" (John 1:4-5)

John the Baptizer's father, Zachariah, understood that his son would point people to the One who would "give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79)

Jean-Jean and Kristie Mompremier (near Leger, Haiti): "I was born just across the road. When I came back 11 years ago, 14 witchdoctors dominated the hills and valleys here, and the lives of

thousands living in darkness. Today, they are all gone. 27 witchdoctors have been converted. All because of the gospel. All because of Jesus. There is no other reason."

3<sup>rd</sup> - The Savior God would send will – out of the limitless resources of His own personal greatness – **administrate a world-wide reign of extraordinary peace and righteousness from the throne of David.** Isaiah 9:6-7 p.573 ESV

**Isaiah 9:6** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called  
**Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**  
**7** 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.**

You understand, of course, that Scripture undeniably points us *to a future age* on this earth when the Savior God sends, God's Messiah, will climax God's saving plan by reigning and ruling over the world when he comes again, the 2<sup>nd</sup> time. Here Isaiah says that He will do so out of his personal greatness. In my view, no one understood this better than a theologian who lived in the last century. Alva J. McClain, in THE GREATNESS OF THE KINGDOM, explains:

*In their description of the coming Kingdom, the prophets give first place to its Ruler Himself. We often like to think that there is no "indispensable man." It is not so in that future government portrayed by the prophets. There the Ruler Himself is the indispensable figure. In God's mediatorial government there must be a personal ruler – not merely an organization to stand between God and men*

*What the world needs, as the prophets clearly saw, is not primarily a better philosophy of government or a more perfect system of legislation, but a **Person** who has the character, wisdom, and power needed to rule for God among men. This is the central theme of prophecy from first to last.<sup>ii</sup>*

4<sup>th</sup> - The Savior God would send **will, during His reign, thoroughly change the world.** Isaiah 11-12

**11:1** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.  
**2** And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.  
**3** And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear,  
**4** but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.  
**5** Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.  
**6** The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them.  
**7** The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together;  
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.  
**8** The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.

9 They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain;  
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.  
10 In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples  
—of Him shall the nations inquire, and His resting place shall be glorious.

You ask, "Hey Pastor David...are you sure this isn't just figurative language, not something that will literally happen in our world?" Here's the problem with that approach to Scripture. NONE of Isaiah's other prophecies are or were to be figuratively understood. The virgin conception was not a figurative, it was literal. The darkness and oppression that people lived in was not figurative. It was very literal. The prediction of the Messiah's death (Isaiah 53) and his resurrection were not "figurative," they all came to be VERY literally.

- The Savior God has sent us, and will send us, was remarkably, literally born to signal God's commitment to save us.
- This Savior brings light for people who are swallowed up in darkness.
- This Savior will bring his personal greatness to a world-wide reign of peace and righteousness on David's throne.
- This Savior's reign will literally change the world, reversing the curse of sin and disease and the enmities between living creatures.

5<sup>th</sup> - The Savior God would send will **bring salvation's full blessings to the world through the restoration of Zion and the exaltation of His people.** Isaiah 61 p.620 ESV

**Isaiah 61:1** The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor;  
he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
**2** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor,

You say, "Hey David...didn't...didn't Jesus read this passage out loud in his home synagogue when He was here the first time? Yes He did –

**Luke 4:16 (p.859 ESV)** And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. **17** And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

**18** "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
**19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Now...hold your finger there and look back at Isaiah 61. You'll notice that Jesus stopped reading in the middle of Isaiah 61:2. Why did he stop? Why didn't he quote what Isaiah said next? Because. When he came the first time, it was to "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." But when he comes a

2<sup>nd</sup> time, he will come to proclaim (Isaiah 61:2b)

and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;  
3 to grant to those who mourn in Zion—  
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,  
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;  
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,  
the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.[c]  
4 They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations;  
they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations.

There is coming a SALVATION that begins with a day of vengeance, and then the wonderful comfort and restoration, a culmination in a day of salvation through Zion.

### CONCLUSION

What am I saying this morning in this good, 'ole-fashioned Bible study? I'm saying the world needs this SAVIOR it has rejected. It needs the Savior God sent – the Messiah whose birth we celebrate every December and whose salvation we desperately need – isn't finished yet. There is prophecy yet to be fulfilled in the coming history of our world. This Messiah is coming again!! And when He does....WOW!

TODAY, we are in the "year of the Lord's favor" (Is 61:2a). Do we understand the opportunity of these days?

#1 The opportunity to come into the light of Jesus out of your darkness

#2 The opportunity to become a serious disciple of Jesus in the life of others – praying for them, loving them, understanding their darkness with a readiness to introduce them to the light of the world. The most important day of every one of our lives is a day that is still ahead. It is the day when the **Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Father of the Everlasting Ages, Prince of Peace** arrives to fulfill ALL the prophetic word of God. Believing serious disciples get themselves ready...and seek others.

Yes...let's celebrate His birth yet again this year. But the very best way to celebrate is to understand who this Savior is whom God has sent, and be thoroughly ready for his arrival. In Him, SALVATION has not only happened, it is to happen for those who are prepared.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from WHAT EVERY PERSON SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WAR by CHRIS HEDGES Copyright © 2003 by Chris Hedges

<sup>2</sup> Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959 1968, 1974), 161.