



## Translation, Interpretation and Exposition of the Messianic Texts in Isaiah 9 and 11

*“The description of his reign makes it absolutely clear that his role is messianic. There is no end to his rule upon the throne of David and he will reign with justice and righteousness forever.”*

(Brevard Childs, Yale University.)

### Messianic Text One: Isaiah 9:1-7

*“For the remnant, beyond the darkness of the hidden face and the distressful pathway, there is the shining light of 9:1–7.”* (Motyer, 98.)

*“Immanuel is a truth as well as a name—the truth of the Lord’s presence with his people and the security which it brings.”* (Motyer, 92.)

Interim Pastor Prof. Glen Taylor

#### THE TEXT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

*God’s bringing light from the darkness of oppression (military and spiritual)*

<sup>1</sup> But there will be no gloom for her whose anguish it was; in the former time, He<sup>1</sup> showed contempt toward the land of Zebulun and toward the land of Naphtali<sup>ii</sup>, whereas in the latter time He made honorable<sup>iii</sup> the way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.<sup>iv</sup>

*Light, Growth, and Joy*

<sup>2</sup>As for the people who are walking in the darkness,\*

**they have seen a great light.**

As for those dwelling in the land of death’s shadow,\*

**a light has shone upon them.**

<sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation;\*<sup>v</sup>

**You have magnified its<sup>vi</sup> joy.**

They rejoice before You as the joy at the harvest,\*

**as when they rejoice in their dividing of booty.**

*The end of tyranny and war*

<sup>4</sup>For the yoke of his burden,

and the staff of his shoulder,

and the rod of his oppressor,\*

**You have broken as on the day of<sup>vii</sup> Midian.<sup>viii</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>For every boot stomped<sup>ix</sup> in tumult,

and garment rolled in blood\*

**will be for burning,**

**devoured by fire.**

*The reign of a new king who brings lasting peace and justice*

<sup>6</sup>For a child is born to<sup>x</sup> us,\*

**a son is given to<sup>xi</sup> us;**

and the government will be upon his shoulder,\*

**and his name<sup>xii</sup> will be called**

A Wonder of a Counsellor,<sup>xiii</sup> Mighty God,<sup>\*xiv</sup>  
**Eternal-Father<sup>xv</sup>, Prince of Peace.<sup>xvi</sup>**

<sup>7</sup>There will be no end of the increase of government or of peace<sup>xvii</sup>  
upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom,\*  
**to establish it and to sustain it in justice and righteousness  
from now and forever.**

*The level of God's commitment to this newness*  
**The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will accomplish this.<sup>xviii</sup>**

### **Messianic Text Two: Isaiah 11:1-9**

*"Isaiah . . . never fails to summon God's people to hope and expectation in the face of discouraging  
circumstance." (Brueggemann, Isaiah 1-39, 98.)*

*"The primal gift given to the new king by the spirit is a capacity for wise discernment, in order to enact the  
very realities betokened by the royal titles of [Isaiah] 9:6." (Ibid., 100.)*

*"The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall  
reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land." (Jeremiah 22:3,  
23:5.)*

*"We have yet to relearn what the Bible knew— that adversarial human transactions foul the nest for all  
creatures." (Brueggemann, 102.)*

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THE TEXT OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

A shoot<sup>xix</sup> shall emerge from the stump of Jesse, <sup>\*xx</sup>  
**A twig shall sprout<sup>xxi</sup> from his<sup>xxii</sup> roots.**

*The Messiah's divine endowment for ruling*

<sup>2</sup>The Spirit of Yahweh<sup>xxiii</sup> shall rest upon him,\*

**A Spirit of wisdom and understanding,**

A Spirit of advice and strength.<sup>xxiv</sup>

**A Spirit of knowledge and fear of Yahweh.<sup>xxv</sup>**

*The absolute justice of the Messiah's rule<sup>xxvi</sup>*

<sup>3</sup>And he will scent out<sup>xxvii</sup> the fear of Yahweh. <sup>\*xxviii</sup>

**He will not judge by what his eyes see,**

**Nor discern by what his ears hear.<sup>xxix</sup>**

<sup>4</sup> Thus he shall judge the poor with equity,\*

**And decide what is right for the lowly<sup>xxx</sup> of the earth.**

And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, <sup>\*xxxi</sup>

**And slay the wicked with the breath of his lips.<sup>xxxii</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>Righteousness<sup>xxxiii</sup> will be a belt<sup>+xxxiv</sup> around his loins,\*

**Faithfulness<sup>xxxv</sup> the belt around his waist.**

*The quality of safety that characterizes the Messiah's rule<sup>xxxvi</sup>*

<sup>6</sup>The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,\*

**The leopard shall lie down with the kid.**

<sup>6</sup>The calf and the young lion shall feed<sup>xxxvii</sup> together,\*

**A little boy shall herd them.**

<sup>7</sup>A cow and a bear shall graze,\*

**Their young shall lie down together.**

**The lion, like the ox, shall eat straw.**

<sup>8</sup>A nursing child shall play near the hole of the cobra,\*

**A weaned child shall extend his hand over the viper's den.**<sup>xxxviii</sup>

<sup>9</sup>They shall do no harm, nor shall they destroy  
throughout my holy mountain.\*<sup>xxxix</sup>

**For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh,  
As the waters cover the earth.**

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<sup>i</sup> i.e., God. Oswalt: "[Israel] had thought the land was hers. Now she was beginning to see that she was only a tenant by the permission of the true landlord." (pp. 239-40.)

<sup>ii</sup> "The land of Naphtali" lay on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee and extended northwards. The land of Zebulun was both west and southwest of Naphtali and lay halfway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean. Both were the first in Israel and Judah to fall to the Assyrians.

<sup>iii</sup> "The two verbs... are best rendered as contrasts in time. First he brought into contempt . . . and later he made glorious (. . . cf. Jer. 30:19). . . . More than a chronological sequence is being depicted. Rather two qualities of time, judgmental and redemptive, are being contrasted which continue a major theme from chapter 7 onward. Verse 23 serves as a type of superscription to the Oracle that follows and anticipates both the humiliation and exaltation of the land . . ." (Childs.)

<sup>iv</sup> "It was in this region . . . that Israel commonly encountered the rest of the world . . . The area between the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) and the Mediterranean north of Jezreel had always been something of a melting pot, with Hebrews, Canaanites, Arameans, Hittites, and Mesopotamians all contributing to the mix" . . . . And after 735 B.C. the diversity was to increase because the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser deported local inhabitants to Mesopotamia and brought others from there to this area.

<sup>v</sup> The word "gôy" refers to a pagan (Gentile) nation.

<sup>vi</sup> "Its" is a reconfiguration of "not" which likely reflects an early scribal error. (The reconfiguration comes by way of an alternative suggestion made by the ancient Jewish caretakers of the Hebrew text, namely to read "not" as "to it" (lô) or to join the two consonants in the latter with another word to form the word "joy." (Childs, 78.)

<sup>vii</sup> "On the day of" frequently means defeat; see, for examples, Ps 137:7; Ezek 30:9 (so Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 240 n. 3.)

<sup>viii</sup> The imagery in this verse recalls that earlier in 10: 26-27. The appropriateness of the reference to Midian here (and in 10:26) can be clearly seen by recalling the historical situation: a vast multitude swarming all over the land (Judg 6:1-6; cf., Isa 8:7-8), the giving of a sign (Judg 6:17-22; cf. Isa 7:11-14); the emphasis on faith in God and not dependence on man (Judg 7; cf. Isa 7:9; 8:12), and, perhaps, the defeat of great forces through apparently insignificant means (three hundred men in the case of Gideon, and the child of promise here.) Most of all, of course, the passage promises total redemption by the Lord. Israel was to be utterly delivered from the oppressor (cf. 10:5; 14:25; and esp[ecially]10:24-27)." (Grogan, EBC, p. 74.)

<sup>ix</sup> Literally, "booted." The sense could also be "put on."

<sup>x</sup> Or "to."

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<sup>xi</sup> Or “for.”

<sup>xii</sup> “Unlike Immanuel, these titles were not normal OT personal names.” (NIVSB.)

<sup>xiii</sup> “Counselor points to the Messiah as a king (see Mic 4:9) who determines upon and carries out a program of action. As Wonderful Counselor, the coming Son of David will carry out a royal program that will cause all the world to marvel. What that program will be is spelled out in ch. 11, and more fully in cha. 24-27 (see 25:1—‘marvelous things, things planned [counseled] long ago.’) (NIVSB.) See further my notes.

<sup>xiv</sup> This title consists of the short form of the word “God” (*’ēl*) plus a word that denotes strength in the sense of “hero,” “warrior.” Thus, NIVSB, “His divine power as a warrior is stressed.” The words that constitute this title reappear in 10:21: “A remnant will return [i.e. shear-jashub, the name of Isaiah’s son), the remnant of Jacob, to Mighty God.”

<sup>xv</sup> “The phrase likely relates to the generative, guaranteeing powers of the king, a massive antidote to anxiety when things seem to be out of control. Nothing will be out of control in the new administration.” (Brueggemann, 83.)

<sup>xvi</sup> “The *Prince of Peace* is himself the whole man, the perfectly integrated, rounded personality, at one with God and humankind, but also as a Prince, these are the benefits he administers to his people.” (Motyer, *Isaiah*, 103.) (See further, my notes.)

<sup>xvii</sup> Many translate “authority” for “government” here; the word is the same as that for government at the beginning of verse 5.

<sup>xviii</sup> “The term rendered ‘zeal’ appeals to Yahweh’s passionate emotionally driven commitment that is twofold. On the one hand, Yahweh is jealous for Judah and Jerusalem and will see that the city prospers. On the other hand, Yahweh has zeal to maintain Yahweh’s own reputation and credibility. . . . That is, the new social possibility for Judah is rooted in Yahweh’s most elemental intensity [in behalf of Judah and in behalf of self-regard].” (Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 84.)

<sup>xix</sup> Or rod; here the word denotes, yes, a shoot of a plant, but it also implies a royal sceptre. Both words are quite rare and neither especially messianic, emphasizing rather “a child descendant” (Oswalt, 276, n. 1).

<sup>xx</sup> Many have followed Calvin in seeing a reference here to Jesse and not David to emphasize the humble beginnings of the Davidic dynasty. This is fitting in a context where the future ideal ruler is more servant like than were the Davidic rulers in Isaiah’s time.

<sup>xxi</sup> Whereas the Hebrew text has “bear fruit” (*yiprâ*) all the early translations have “go up” (*yiprah*). The latter assumes that something larger will emerge.

<sup>xxii</sup> Or “its” (as in the “twig,” “root,” or “stump”—all of which, being masculine singular nouns, qualify. Even if the roots refer to the stump, Jesse is meant.

<sup>xxiii</sup> “We are here . . . to think . . . with appeal back to the coming of Yahweh’s generative, irresistible, authorizing ‘wind’ on David as it was given and then withdrawn from Saul. The spirit of Yahweh is a force that enlivens, gives power, energy, and courage so that its bearer is recognized as one designated, who has the capacity to do what the world believes is impossible. . . . There is no doubt that the Davidic house claimed to be the habitat of the Yahweh’s transcendent power.” (Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 99.)

<sup>xxiv</sup> Synonyms for these words, respectively, are “counsel and bravery” (so JPSV).

<sup>xxv</sup> Oswalt, “[T]o say that God’s spirit was upon someone became almost a code phrase for saying that the person acted out of a capacity which was more than merely human. . . . [Thus] [t]he promised shoot . . . will be characterized by the very breath of God about him. Everything about his leadership will testify to a supernatural endowment of his calling. It is this which is critical. . . . [Otherwise] the results of his rule will be no different from those of an Ahaz.” (279.)

<sup>xxvi</sup> “The poetry here taps into a deep and primal conviction known throughout the Ancient Near East generally, and in Israel, that the royal government is The Equalizer, to intervene in behalf of the poor and

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the vulnerable (widows and orphans) who are unable to supply their own social leverage.” (Brueggemann, 100.)

“Isaiah can look forward to such a Messiah who will be able to perceive things correctly and who will be able to carry out correct decisions because of correct motivation. The basis for this king's activity will be that kind of experiential acquaintance with God which will issue in the recognition that the supreme reality of life is our accountability to a just, faithful, holy God. . . . Pious feelings and ecstatic experiences are as nothing unless they are underlain by that pervading consciousness of God's reality and our accountability to him. Because the Messiah will be characterized by this fear of the Lord, he can be depended upon to perceive correctly (John 2:24, 25; Mark 2:8) and to act with integrity (Luke 4:1-13). . . . The Messiah . . . will not govern on the basis of appearances, but rather will operate out of a fundamental righteousness and faithfulness that will give his pronouncements an unshakable moral force. . . . A human judge can do no more than to make the best use of his or her natural faculties in attempting to reach a fair ruling. Somehow this king will go deeper than that and will pierce beneath appearances to the underlying reality. . . . In this light, . . . the king for whom Isaiah looks is more than a new edition of the present monarchy. Rather he looks for a radically different kind of kingship” (Oswalt, 279-281).

<sup>xxvii</sup> Many translations interpret what is literally here, “to smell”—a causal a causal form of a root that looks and sounds similar to the word for wind/spirit and which comes from a root meaning “wide”—as “his delight” (e.g., NEB.) My literal rendition, echoed in the JPSV note, “literally, ‘his sensing,’” makes sense of the following verses, which are otherwise good and typical, at least for a good, normal king. The idea is of a pleasing smell, metaphorical for senses; cf. Amos 5:21 for the same expression. (I admit that the less literal interpretation “delight in” gains some support from Isaiah 33:6 which speaks of the “fear of the Lord” being a “treasure.”)

<sup>xxix</sup> There is nothing wrong with these methods, in principle; the problem is likely that people in high places can influence what is seen and heard; besides, as the previous line likely indicates, the Messiah is endowed with special insight, a ‘sixth sense’ that allows Him to make perfect judgments.

<sup>xxx</sup> Synonyms for this word are meek, oppressed, humble, afflicted; in Isaiah 66:1, it is to such that the good news is proclaimed.

<sup>xxxi</sup> The NASB notes invite comparison with Psalm 2:9; Isaiah 49:2, and Mal. 4:6. “*He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth* expresses the moral force possessed by a leader who owes allegiance to no earthly pressure groups. He can say what needs to be said in a given circumstance and the force of the truth is undeniable (Mark 12:34). The word itself becomes his weapon (Hebrews 4:12; 2 Thess 2:8b; Rev 1:16b; 19:15).” (Oswalt, 281.)

<sup>xxxii</sup> “The positive power to create social good requires the capacity for curbing ‘the wicked.’ Thus the king has the capacity to ‘smite’ and to ‘slay’ the wicked, who are here seem to be those who prey upon, exploit, and abuse the meek, vulnerable, and poor.” (Brueggemann, 101.) [I]n the first stich [line], it is said that the Messiah will carry out God's function of judging the earth while the second stich emphasizes that it is the wicked who will have cause to fear that judgment (2:4; 51:56; Psalm 82:8; Rev 6:15-17; 20:11, 12).” (Oswalt, 281.)

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Righteousness and faithfulness “are intimately connected, so much so that they are at times synonymous (1:26; 48:1). Although their meanings overlap, each contributes a distinctive element. *Righteousness* is that capacity for doing the right thing in all circumstances and frequently involves keeping one's promises, so that there are times when it may be translated by ‘deliverance’ (51:8) or ‘vindication’ (54:17). *Faithfulness* comes from the root which means to be dependable or true. So, fundamental to both words is the idea of an integrity or consistency which results from incomplete dependability.” (Oswalt, 282.)

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<sup>xxxiv</sup> The “belt” could be either that “used to gather up the outer robe and into which the bottom hem of the garment could be tucked in preparation for strenuous activity” or “that worn under the other garments.” If the former, “these are the characteristics which bring all the Messiah’s other attributes together, giving them dignity and force.” If the latter, “then righteousness and faithfulness are those qualities most basic and fundamental to all the others.” “In either case, the essential nature of these attributes is underlined.” (Oswalt, 282-83).

<sup>xxxv</sup> On the meaning of “faithfulness” in this context, see two notes before this one.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> For a similar idyllic situation, see already Isa 2:2-4; cf. later Isa 35:9; 65:20-25. “The rightly governed world will indeed be detoxified, no more a threat to the poor the meek, the children, the lamb, the kid. The new world will indeed be safe for the vulnerable . . . We have yet to relearn what the Bible knew—that adversarial human transactions foul the nest for all creatures.” (Brueggemann, 103, 102.)

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Or, more accurately but less sensibly, in place of “shall feed” read “the fatling.”

<sup>xxxviii</sup> “The contradiction of a child playing above the den of poisonous snakes can almost be felt physically. One wants to snatch the child away from the presence of sudden, arbitrary death. . . One thinks of the NT’s appropriation of Hosea 13:14 in 1 Cor 15:55, ‘Death, where is thy sting?’” (Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 84.)

<sup>xxxix</sup> A holy mountain (to which, according to many texts, peoples of the nations are drawn) is a common theme in Isaiah. See 2:2-4 (almost identical to Mic 4:1-3); 27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 65:25; 66:20; cf. 60:3-5, and Zech 14:16.