

ISAIAH 9:1-7
CHRISTMAS ACCORDING TO ISAIAH

“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.

“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.
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.
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.
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.
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.”¹

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

More than ever our world needs the message of Christmas. We are witnessing retrogression in faith and in religious expression as an increasing number of Canadians become so accustomed to spiritual darkness that they eagerly forsake even pretending to prefer the light. Canada, a land once noted as prominent in preaching the Gospel of peace, is advancing backwards into what must be seen as new dark ages. However, we need not despair at this retrograde movement, for even greater opportunity is afforded the children of God who is light. When the hour is darkest, we are granted opportunity to shine with greatest intensity. Let us determine that as Christians we shall shine, flames burning brightly, dispelling the darkness which even now is engulfing our world. It was at just such a time that the birth of Christ was witnessed by a handful of shepherds distinguished by spiritual acumen, a few perspicacious magi and multitudes of angels in chorus above the darkened earth.

From the moment our first parents sinned and fell from their exalted position of communion with Holy God, they condemned the creation to suffer the effects resulting from the ruin of sin. God did ameliorate the pain of judgment by promising a Saviour. Thus, man has had since the Fall a promise on which to hope. Much later we are able to look back through the eyes of the Apostles and discover that the One who has been appointed to set us free from bondage to death was chosen even before the Creation of the world. What is apparent from even a casual acquaintance with the Word of God is that Christmas has always been central to God's plan for mankind. The Incarnation—the revelation of God's Son as one of us—has from eternity past been the focus of God's plan for fallen humanity. Christmas—not the artificial celebration of materialism, but the knowledge of the Incarnation—is essential for the salvation of fallen mankind.

Isaiah lived in the dark days of Israel's decline. Though superficially the nation appeared secure, a dark rot gnawed away at the foundation of Jewish society. Economically, the nation was prospering and people lived in ostentatious splendour. There were, it is true, a significant number of the people who were excluded from enjoying the fruits of national affluence; but the nation generally enjoyed great wealth. Militarily the nation appeared secure; the armies of Israel were strong and well equipped. The borders of the nation were secure and the throne was not threatened. No major wars were then being fought and those few enemies which might otherwise menace national security seemed remote and incapable of mounting a major threat. No significant social unrest stirred the populace during those days. However, the underpinnings of Jewish society were decayed and the seeds of destruction had been sown.

Family life was in disarray. Contempt for authority was the rule of the day. Disrespect of the elderly had become a common feature of Jewish life. Parental authority was constantly challenged. Morality was openly ridiculed and unrighteousness was exalted. Worship of the true and living God was a façade, religion having been reduced to mere rituals thoughtlessly carried out by ageing adherents to the Faith. Society in general was characterised by a muted sense of quiet despair.

Into this environment of national hopelessness, God revealed His grace by sending a message of hope. The message pointed forward to events which were yet some seven hundred fifty years in the future. That which Isaiah prophesied would usher in the Age of Grace. The One to whom Isaiah pointed will complete the prophecy when He concludes His Millennial reign and at last puts down all rebellion. Join me in exploring this study of Christmas according to Isaiah.

REASONS FOR CHRISTMAS — A copulative conjunction, “but” is the first word in our English text. The word is necessary if we will understand Isaiah’s prophecy. We are prone to think that the chapters of the Bible are separate units, each standing alone. Nothing could be further from the truth. The ninth chapter is a continuation of the eighth. The verses immediately preceding our text read as follows. “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? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. 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” [ISAIAH 8:19-22].

Even as he wrote these words, Isaiah’s contemporaries were embracing nature worship, exchanging the glory of the immortal God for images [cf. ROMANS 1: 23]. Even then, mankind had exchanged the truth for God for a lie [cf. ROMANS 1: 25]. The Prophet spoke of the yoke that burdened Israel, the bar across their shoulders and the rod of their oppressor [ISAIAH 9:4]. Isaiah pointed forward to a time of enforced humility for Israel, a time of turmoil, war and conflict [ISAIAH 9:5]. Into a time of darkness and fearful gloom, God would send a Saviour. The Son of God would be born into a world that groped about in deepest darkness. At the time of Christ’s birth, the voice of the prophets had been silent for over four centuries; worship of God had degenerated into mere routine—a burden tolerated as a necessary cultural mandate.

The peoples of the earth staggered in darkest sin; ignorance of God was paraded as wisdom. The mystery religions—Mithraism, the Magna Mater, the Dea Syria, Isis and Osiris, Dionysus and Eleusian mysteries were in ascendancy. These efforts to give meaning to life actually gave mute, though powerful, evidence of mankind’s continual futile search for cosmic significance—a fruitless search that continues to this day. Where the “civilised world” had not yet gained influence, pantheistic religions (such as druidism and Wicca) or polytheistic religions (such as Hinduism and animism) prevailed, as darkened hearts of fearful societies were held in thrall.

Israel had been humbled through extended occupation of the Promised Land. At the time Christ was born, the Romans were occupying the Holy Land, having superseded Greek rule. Constant wars on the fringes of the Empire necessitated a continual flow of recruits to fight Rome’s battles, halting probes by the barbarians—the Celts, the Teutons, the Huns, the Vandals, the Goths and the Visigoths— each testing Roman resolve. Into that darkened and threatening environment the Son of God was born.

Not much has changed! Conditions now are comparable to what then prevailed. I believe we are entering new dark ages. Christians will be tested by powerful, irrational and unreasonable opponents of the Faith. However, the darkest hour permits those few lights which do shine to penetrate farthest and to appear the brightest. When evil seems to abound, those who walk with the Master will be recognised as empowered by Him. The darkness will ensure the greatest distinction between righteousness and wickedness. We are confident that where sin increases, grace abounds all the more [see ROMANS 5:20]. Christians need not fear the darkness since we walk in the light.

During this past week I again invested time reviewing contemporary society. Spiritual wickedness is deeply rooted in western society; it is wildly sprouting bitter fruit. As we enter the Christmas Season, stores are decked out in Holiday colours and houses are gaily festooned. The streets are tinselled and lights are strung between the light standards. The Christmas Tree at the Mile Zero Post is lighted. Yet, too often we are unable to acknowledge openly the reason for this observance in our schools or even in civic activities. “Winter Festival” and other such weird celebratory names are given to the festivities in order to avoid damaging the sensitivities of non-Christians.

Instead of being a Christian observance, the Christmas Season increasingly is secularised to a point that it is sometimes difficult to see the Faith through the layers of materialism and overt paganism. Paganism—ancient druidic rites, worship of Gaea (Mother Earth) and growth of Wicca—has been popularised until practise of the Faith is threatened today. I preached from this passage twenty years ago and at that time I noted that Camosun College planned to offer a non-credit community course on Wicca. Today, major universities offer courses to teach the goddess religions.”²

That which was in the planning stage ten years ago has come to full flower. The Temple of the Lady Society began by providing handfasting services (marital unions) performed in any “Pagan tradition—Gardnerian, Asatru, Dianic, Thelemic, etc.). Those various activities appear to have been assumed by the Lilith Temple Society.³ This society competes for relevance with the Wiccan Church of Canada⁴, the Congregationalist Wiccan Association of British Columbia,⁵ including such religious societies as the Temple of Mirth & Reverence.⁶ Other Wiccan and pagan congregations vying for attention are the Covenant of Gaia,⁷ the Pagan Federation of Canada,⁸ numerous covens⁹ and the Aquarian Tabernacle Church of Canada.¹⁰ These various groups provide prison ministries,¹¹ military¹² and university chaplaincies,¹³ hospital and hospice chaplaincy,¹⁴ death midwifery services,¹⁵ in addition to providing training for priests and priestesses,¹⁶ handfastings (marriages) and apologia with attendant outreach throughout the Province. Reports indicate that there has been a steady influx of recruits to neo-paganism from a number of environmentalist groups including Greenpeace, the Western Canada Wilderness Committee and the Sea Shepherd Society.

²

<http://web4.uwindsor.ca/units/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/cur.nsf/982f0e5f06b5c9a285256d6e006cff78/44839991fbd4e0a885257364004f17f7!OpenDocument>, accessed 25 November 2013

³ <http://www.lilithtemple.ca/index.html>, accessed 25 November 2013

⁴ <http://www.wcc.on.ca/>, accessed 25 November 2013

⁵ <http://www.thewicca.ca/articles/sam-wagar/cwa-bc.php>, accessed 25 November 2013; <http://cwabc.org/>, accessed 25 November 2013

⁶ <http://mirthandreverence.webs.com/>, accessed 25 November 2013

⁷ <http://www.cogcoa.ab.ca/>, accessed 25 November 2013

⁸ <http://www.pf-pc.ca/>, accessed 25 November 2013

⁹ http://www.witchvox.net/wotw/groups_a/british_columbia_ga.html, accessed 25 November 2013

¹⁰ <http://www.aquariantabernaclechurch.org/>, accessed 25 November 2013; <http://www.atccanada.org/>, accessed 25 November 2013

¹¹ <http://www.ppo-canada.ca/prison/justice.htm>, accessed 25 November 2013

¹² <http://www.ppo-canada.ca/military/chaplaincy.htm>, accessed 25 November 2013

¹³ <http://www.ppo-canada.ca/university/chaplains.htm>, accessed 25 November 2013

¹⁴ <http://www.ppo-canada.ca/hospital/visitation.htm>, accessed 25 November 2013

¹⁵ <http://www.ppo-canada.ca/death/midwifery.htm>, accessed 25 November 2013

¹⁶ <http://www.ppo-canada.ca/training/tests.htm>, accessed 25 November 2013

Were such overt paganism insufficient to give Christians pause when considering the effectiveness of our witness today, we need but read the daily news to realise that evil has infected society to a dismaying extent. Gender wars have contaminated the Faith. Feminists demand, and compliant males agree, that the Apostle to the Gentiles was a misogynist who was mistaken about setting apart women to the pastorate. Feminists, funded by our tax dollar doled out by our governments, exclude pro-life, pro-family and Christian representation at United Nations sponsored conferences. Our compassionate neighbours to the south permit the delivery of a baby until only the head remains undelivered, and then murder the infant by inserting scissors into the skull to macerate the brain. Led by a President who is obviously hostile to the unborn, they are equally confused about whether babies born alive should be protected or permitted to die.

Western governments have redefined marriage, defining deviancy down. These actions not only ignore the history of western society but ridicule the very Faith on which the nation was founded. Clubs promoting immorality are established in public schools; and those few, courageous, conscientious parents who dare raise their voices in protest are subject to attempts to silence their voices by such quasi-judicial entities as the various Human Rights (or human wrongs) Commissions or Tribunals. This promotion of visceral hatred of the Faith follows the American model of GLSEN which provides training for elementary school children in the new morality, which is not new at all.

Virtually all prime time programming on television now features open immorality as a programming theme—and this despite the silence of Christians who actually view such vile sitcoms as entertainment. Conscientious individuals who dare speak out against spiritual wickedness beamed into the homes are increasingly seen as hate criminals.

Increasingly the attitude is adopted that it is good to ridicule simple-minded Canadians who accept God as Creator and who dare believe the biblical account of His creative work. The wisdom of this age is witnessed in the rejection of Christian morality even as the views of pagans and Hindus and Muslims and a plethora of eastern cults are embraced as the epitome of spiritual enlightenment.

In the past decade, we even witnessed introduction of a bill to “take Christ out of Christmas.”¹⁷ A former Federal Minister of Multiculturalism, assigned to promote Canadian tolerance, felt free to ridicule evangelical Christians.¹⁸ She was willingly ignorant of the fact that that she was also responsible to protect the majority faith of Canadians. Even Supreme Court judges feel free to assert that Christian values are to be seen as a disguise for intolerance.¹⁹ Where do we find these people? In the face of such assault on righteousness should we be surprised to learn that a grandmother attempted to sell her own five-year-old grandchild so that his organs could be harvested.²⁰

It is as though we are watching the unfolding of the events which prompted the writing of **ROMANS 1:21-32**. “Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

¹⁷ Cf. <http://www.canoe.ca/EdmontonNews/es.es-09-27-0006.html>

¹⁸ Cf. <http://www.vancouversun.com/newsite/opinion/4929654.html>

¹⁹ Cf. <http://www.nationalpost.com/scripts/printer/printer.asp?f=/stories/20001110/364301.html>

²⁰ Cf. <http://www.cnn.com/2000/WORLD/europe/11/28/russia.children/index.html>

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

“For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

FOCUS OF CHRISTMAS — For Christians, there can be no question but that the focus of Christmas must be Christ. Too often forgotten in this contemporary “me-first” society is the wonderful truth that God did not create us and then forget us or leave us to our own devices. Though we are fallen creatures, and though there is no good thing within us to make us attractive to God, He nevertheless loves us and has provided the way for us both to know Him and to enjoy Him forever. The way He has accomplished the unimaginable is through provision of a perfect sacrifice for our sin. I have often noted the precision with which Isaiah writes as he is guided by the Spirit of God to pen this promise of Christmas. Note the wording of the **SIXTH VERSE**.

To us a child is **born**,
to us a son is **given**.

God’s Son was sent to die in the place of wicked mankind. In the **protoevangelium**, those words of promise which were spoken by the Lord God when our first parents fell allow us to discover the truth that the Promised Deliverer would experience pain and the sorrow resulting from the serpent striking His heel. Listen again as the LORD God speaks in **GENESIS 3:15**.

“I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

This provision of One to taste death in man’s place was no after-thought. God was not responding to an unexpected rebellion by the man and woman He had created. Even as He breathed into man’s nostrils the breath of life, God knew His creature would rebel; before He created the man He made provision for redemption. God provided, if you will, for His Son to be born to redeem fallen man from before man was created.

Peter has written of this divine provision in these words, “If you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” [1 PETER 1:17-21].

The Aramaic Targum Jonathan, written in the first century B.C., paraphrased the words found in our central text. Listen to this ancient Jewish understanding of Isaiah’s message, written before Messiah was born.

“And there was called His name from of old,
Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, He who
Lives forever, the Messiah in whose days
Peace shall increase.”

Reacting to unanticipated growth of those worshipping Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah, the renowned Jewish commentator Kimchi attempted to avoid ascribing these names to Jesus. Accordingly, he drastically distorted the passage.

The God who is Wonderful, Counsellor,
The mighty God, the eternal Father, calls
His name the Prince of Peace.

Modern Jewish translators avoid translating at all, choosing instead to transliterate into English, thereby giving mute testimony to their acute embarrassment, as is evident from the passage as recorded in the Complete Jewish Bible.²¹

“For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us;
dominion will rest on his shoulders,
and he will be given the name
Pele-Yo‘etz El Gibbor
Avi-‘Ad Sar-Shalom,”

This is the identical tactic adopted by translators of the Jewish Publication Society Bible translation, **THE HOLY SCRIPTURES ACCORDING TO THE MASORETIC TEXT**. The verse reads, “For a child is born unto us, a son is given unto us; and the government is upon his shoulder; and his name is called Pele-joez-el-gibbor-Abi-ad-sar-shalom.” In a footnote, these translators, apparently fearful of prophetic accuracy in this instance, rob readers, (predominantly Jewish, one would suspect), of a glorious and comforting messianic promise through translating the verse with neither reference to nor even possible fulfilment of any messianic prophecy.

²¹ David H. Stern, **Complete Jewish Bible: An English Version of the Tanakh (Old Testament) and B’rit Hadasha (New Testament)**, 1st ed. (Jewish New Testament Publication, Clarksville, MD 1998)

“Wonderful in counsel is God the Mighty, the everlasting Father, the Ruler of peace.”²²

While there is discrepancy between ancient and contemporary Jewish translators, the first readers understood these words to be a clear claim to deity for the One who was to be born and who was to be given.

By virtue of His Person, Messiah is able to accomplish all that is prophesied about Him. How richly suggestive the titles are ascribed to this One who was to be born and who was to be given! He is designated “Wonderful Counsellor,” a name that speaks of His divine nature. The noun *Pele*, usually translated **wonder**, **wonderful** or **miracle**, occurs some thirteen times in the Old Testament. In virtually every instance it is unequivocally applied to God or to His powerful works. In all cases, it could be applied to God without stretching the import of the word. Think of what this would have implied to those who first read Isaiah’s prophecy. They would have immediately understood that the Coming One is divine. In fact, that is exactly what we discover when we appeal to Jewish commentators writing before the Christological controversy became heated because people testified to the presence of the Messiah and received Him as such.

Though wicked men inveigh vociferously against our Master’s identification as the “Wonderful Counsellor,” nevertheless, we may be certain that the One of whom Isaiah wrote is none other than Jesus, “God’s mystery ... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” [COLOSSIANS 2:2b, 3]. We can be confident that each one who believes Jesus is the “Wonderful Counsellor” of whom Isaiah spoke, will likewise discover that He is the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

Was that wonderful and comforting Name insufficient to convince readers of His divine origin, the promised Messiah is also identified as “Mighty God.” As an exciting aside, Isaiah will later write a wondrous thing when of Israel he writes: “A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God” [ISAIAH 10:21]. At His ascension, our Lord Jesus reminded those who gathered on that Galilean mountaintop that “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me” [MATTHEW 28:18]. Jesus is unquestionably Mighty God.

Though the words seem mysterious, the coming One is identified as “Everlasting Father,” or more literally **Father of Eternity**. The emphasis is upon His eternal nature and the dependence of all time upon Him and upon His Word. Time, and all creation itself, depend upon Christ and His powerful word, as we discover in the words of Paul. “He [Christ] is before all things, and in him all things hold together” [COLOSSIANS 1:17].

Finally, Isaiah tells us that this coming Ruler shall be “Prince of Peace.” That Hebrew word *Shalom*, means more than our term **peace**. This word signifies not only the absence of war and strife, but it sums up the thought of **prosperity, wellbeing, harmony within and without, internal serenity, peace with God**. The word signifies the perfect state of man which God intended when man was first created. Reading that title which Isaiah presented, our minds turn almost automatically to the words of the Master as He taught His disciples to prepare them for the change which would come when His sacrifice was at last complete. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you” [JOHN 14:27a].

²² Jewish Publication Society of America, **Torah Nevi'im u-Khetuvim, The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text** (Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, PA 1917)

Taken together the four titles of the coming Messiah are but an extension of the Name given earlier—"Immanuel," **God with us**. This Name was given in another messianic prophecy [**ISAIAH 7:14**]. You will no doubt remember this prophecy since it is so well known, being recited in the Christmas story as found in **MATTHEW 1:22, 23**.

These are not merely names or titles in the modern sense, but they are rather attributes of the One to whom they are given. The Messiah is Divine in wisdom for a world enshrouded in darkness. He is Mighty God for a world enslaved by the power of wickedness. He is the Everlasting Father presented to a world entrapped in relentless time. He is Prince of Peace for the restless multitudes. He is the Christ of Christmas.

PROMISE OF CHRISTMAS — There is a desperate need for Christmas—the Incarnation of the Son of God—to be realised in our world. There is need to recognise Christ as the focus of Christmas. In our pride and conceit He has been forgotten, but He is nonetheless the One whose birth divides time, ensuring that history is His Story. There is a rich promise to all peoples in Christmas, whether those people accept the promise or reject it.

The angel choir, whose beautiful words are recorded in Luke's Gospel, extends a glorious promise to all mankind.

"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

[**LUKE 2:14**]

Old Simeon, speaking as a prophet of God, spoke of the promise of Christmas when he said:

"My eyes have seen your salvation
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel."

[**LUKE 2:30-32**]

Though the promise is not now realised by all, it is nevertheless true. God has made provision for all to be saved, if we are but willing to be saved. Whether men and women should believe the Good News or not, Messiah shall nevertheless reign on David's throne and over His kingdom. How terrible it shall be for those who oppose Him. Those refusing His rule and opposing His reign, are described by David in the **SECOND PSALM**.

"He who sits in the heavens laughs;
the Lord holds them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath,
and terrify them in his fury, saying,
'As for me, I have set my King
on Zion, my holy hill.'"

[**PSALM 2:4-6**]

Reading through the Book of Isaiah, we soon come to a detailed prophecy of Messiah's reign [see **ISAIAH 11:1-9**]. Of that reign we read that the Spirit of God will rest on Messiah, reminiscent of that astonishing scene played out on the banks of Jordan as Jesus was immersed when He identified with sinful man in His death and resurrection [see **LUKE 3:21, 22**]. That identification presages His eternal wisdom which will be displayed in judgement of the whole earth—first as the nations are judged before His Millennial reign, and then throughout the whole of that glorious reign and at last when the Millennium is brought to a conclusion. Then the redeemed will be ushered into eternity and the wicked shall be consigned to their eternal destinies. The reign of Messiah will be characterised by justice, by righteousness and by faithfulness. Because the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD, peace shall encircle the globe.

What marvellous descriptions are provided of that day—blessed day, may it soon arrive—descriptions so marvellous they appear as dreams. What a contrast to the distressing, darkened, gloomy conditions that describe the world of this day!

Now—the spirit of wickedness reigns;

Then—the Spirit of God shall prevail.

Now—a spirit of foolishness and incomprehension, a spirit of folly and weakness, a spirit of ignorance and rebellion characterises the earth;

Then—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD will be regnant.

Now—we see scant evidence of justice;

Then—righteousness and faithfulness will ensure that justice is served.

Now—spiritual darkness is the norm;

Then—the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as waters cover the sea. The promise of what shall be is the promise of Christmas.

Christmas 2013 is a time of dark foreboding. Uncertainties surround every aspect of contemporary life, ensuring an aura of fear for many. We need not surrender to gloom and uncertainty, however; for in these dark days we are reminded again of God's victory over evil, a victory that is certain. With every Christmas light we are reminded that He who has perfectly fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy is the same One of whom John said, "In him was life, and the life was the light of men" [**JOHN 1:4**]. With every Christmas carol we sing we remember that joy is promised to those who know Him, to those who await His sure return. Every Christmas star decorating multiplied trees throughout our land will remind us that war shall be eliminated, but not by the brilliance of earthly leaders, when the Prince of Peace shall reign.

This is Christmas according to Isaiah, a promise of anticipation residing in every believer's heart. No one should imagine that His coming will be long delayed. Though we ourselves cry with the suffering saints of the Great Tribulation, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth" [**REVELATION 6:10**], yet He shall shortly come to reign. Together with multiplied saints of millennia past and in response to our Saviour's repeated promise that He is coming soon [see **REVELATION 22:7, 12, 20**] our constant prayer is, "Come, Lord Jesus" [**REVELATION 22:20b**]. This promise, and this anticipation of the saints, provides the impetus for us to speak to you of the offer of salvation which today is extended once more to all who now hear my voice. This promise of life everlasting, of God's peace and of God's presence is offered to all who will receive the Master as Ruler of life. Amen.