

Study Notes: Isaiah 8:19-9:2
December 1, 2024: 1st Sunday in Advent
“Long Lay the World”
Prepared by Reverend Robert W. Rice
Pastor, Muncy Baptist Church

When someone tells you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Consult God’s instruction and the testimony of warning. If anyone does not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God.

- In Isaiah 8, Isaiah paints a striking picture of the sin that the northern nation of Israel had fallen into, as well as the distress that was coming to the nation through an invasion of the Assyrian army. Isaiah had just received a vision from God that the people would be forced to endure desolation and destruction because of their sinfulness.
- The practice of consulting mediums was strictly forbidden in the Law (see Deuteronomy 18:9-11). However, in a desperate attempt to understand the future and what would happen to their nation, the people thought it would be wise to engage in this practice. Isaiah makes it clear that this practice is foolish and only leads to darkness.
- The true source of light is God’s Word, and if anyone ignores it or acts contrary to it, they will have no light, and remain distressed and hungry. In the midst of this, they will begin to curse both the earthly king, and the Lord.
- The NIV Application Commentary explains the contemporary significance of these verses, “If God is left out of life’s equations, then we must resort to other means in order to feel as if we have some control over life’s forces. There is a deep need in us to feel we have some knowledge of, and control over, the future. If the creator God of the Bible is rejected, then we will have to consult other means, and often it is the dead who are considered to have both some interest in their descendants and some access to the world of the spirits. But in fact, the dead know nothing, and the result is a deeper darkness of fear and superstition.”

Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

- Throughout Scripture, the idea of darkness is associated with evil and sin. Isaiah says that everywhere people look, they will find darkness and gloom. This darkness will force the people to places they do not want to go.
- The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary notes that all the verbs in these verses are singular. From this knowledge, it is clear that, “Judgement, like salvation, is individual and personal.”

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.

- Yet God’s judgment for the nation will not last. The gloom and distress that once came to the nation will soon be replaced by honor, which will come through the Messiah.

- It is important to note that God is Sovereign and the first actor in both the judgment and salvation of His people. God brings judgment, but also provides salvation by sending the Messiah, Jesus Christ.
- Zebulun and Naphtali were tribes of Israel, and these lands in the north of Israel were the first to endure attack. This judgment would be replaced by a Messiah who came from Galilee (see Matthew 4:12-16 for this fulfillment).

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

- This verse can also be translated as *the people walking through death's dark shadow*. The judgment and pain of sin, which covered the land, were about to be replaced by the light of the Messiah. While darkness represents evil and sin, light represents the hope and the work of God. In John's Gospel, Jesus is referred to as the Light of the world, the One who comes to bring home to the nation.
- Jesus brings with Him the dawning of a new day for the nation, which the following verses describe in detail.