



THE PROMISE OF LIGHT

Many of the prophecies we're looking at in this series are actually written as songs in Hebrew. And that is certainly true of this one: a pre-Christmas Christmas carol.

Isaiah 9:1-7

If I were to say the word SAD, you'd know what I was talking about, yes? No, not my fashion sense, I'm talking Seasonally-Affected Disorder. Well, the people of Isaiah's time were experiencing their own version, only theirs was a *Spiritually*-Affected Disorder. The Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III had captured part of the Kingdom of Israel; thousands had been taken into exile; and the rest of the nation seemed doomed to follow. But Isaiah says, "Don't give up! A new day is dawning!" And then he launches into this song – a song about a Child, a Child with the longest nickname of anyone in the Bible (vs6):

Pele-yo'etz el-gibbor avi-ad sar-shalom

(Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace)

Why this string of words? It's because they each represent the light that Jesus will bring to this dark world – starting with:

1) Wonderful (*pele*). The word *pele* means awesome, mind-blowing, jaw-dropping, eye-popping – and it's a word that's only ever used of God. Which means this is no ordinary child – this is the One who parted the Reed Sea,

who brought down the walls of Jericho, who would one day become as human as us. I.e. this is a Child for whom "Impossible is nothing" (acknowledgements to *Adidas*) - whatever that 'impossible' might be.

2) Counsellor (*yo'etz* in Hebrew). What does this word mean? In the 21st century we might think therapist, analyst, psychiatrist, shrink. But the people of Isaiah's time would have thought adviser, wise man, guide, friend. This Child will represent a God who loves us and cares for us and is there for us in the midst of life's messiness. And just like a counsellor, if we listen to His words He will lead us into ultimate victory, ultimate success.

3) God (*el*). *El* is the Hebrew for God, but it also means power, and in particular, God's power as Creator (interestingly, the plural form, *elohim*, is used in Genesis 1). So this is a Child who brought everything into being and holds everything together: every galaxy, every atom – every person. And if He's got the power to create everything, then He's got the power to *recreate* it, too: to restore our world to what it was supposed to be.

4) Mighty (*gibbor*). The word *gibbor* kind of infers a courageous strength (it's often used of the heroes of the OT). And when we're talking about Jesus, we're talking about the greatest hero there's ever been. Who else would choose to be born into abject poverty just so He could grow up and die? Move over Spiderman – this is what you call a superhero! And His courageous strength can give *us* the strength to be heroes, too.

5) Father (*avi*). This Son is also a Dad – that's what the Hebrew word *avi* means. In fact, He's the greatest Daddy of 'em all, because this is the Father of Eternity: God Himself. Before Josh and Abi were born, I kind of made a promise to myself that I would be the best Dad I could be. I'm sorry to say: I failed (sorry kids. I did try!). But I also made another promise (and I hope I've kept this one): to make sure they know the Dad who really is.

6) Everlasting (*ad*). The word *ad* refers to a state of existence without beginning and without end. And when you're talking about God, not only does *He* last forever, so does everything about Him – His promises / His laws / His covenants / His kingdom / His love / His mercy / His calling on your life. We might refer to something as being 'set in concrete', but concrete is not indestructible (think TNT). This Child is. And so is His passion for *you*.

7) Prince (*sar*). *Sar* usually refers to the heir to the throne, and in Jesus' case, that's the throne of the world and of our hearts, too. Now most people want to live as though they're in charge, but they're not. Jesus is. And we need Him to be, because when we behave like we're the kings and queens in this story things go wrong. Everything belongs to Him, and it's only as we appreciate *that* truth that we begin to experience this last one:

8) Peace (*shalom*). Most people know this word, as it's a Jewish way of saying 'Hi', but it means a little bit more than that. It means a little bit more than 'the absence of conflict', too. *Shalom* means wholeness, satisfaction, equilibrium – the 'wish-list' of us all. And people go looking for it in all sorts of places: in a good education, the ideal job, the perfect marriage, a nice house, a fat pension, etc. When what we really need is? Jesus.

The Ultimate Light Box

So there you have it: Isaiah's pre-Christmas Christmas carol, dedicated to a light that outshines all others.

And the point of the song is: we all go through dark times. Where can we find our 'light in the darkness', our spiritual light-box, if you like? In this Boy-Child Jesus, born in Bethlehem in Judea, but brought up in Nazareth in Galilee – thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy to the letter.

So what kind of light do you need, at this moment? Or those around you, whether they be a family member, or a friend? Or perhaps that place in the world that's very dear to you, where Jesus' light needs to shine? What do you need? What do they? Is it:

- The Jesus who is Wonderful.
- The Jesus who is Counsellor.
- The Jesus who is God.
- The Jesus who is Mighty.
- The Jesus who is Father.
- The Jesus who is Everlasting.
- The Jesus who is Prince.
- The Jesus who is Peace.

As a response, you see the big candles in the windows around you? We're going to pass those candles around, and as one comes to you, just hold it for a while, and ask God to shine His light into your life, or the life of another, or that situation in another part of the world. If you're stuck for what to say, just try this:

*Jesus, light of the world, shine Your light into my life, their lives, that place.
Amen.*