

## “Darkness, Light, & Christmas”

Isaiah 8-9

December 10, 2023

**INTRO** ...Some familiar Christmas words & phrases...

**Isaiah 7:14** “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

**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.”

### Isaiah’s Setting of “Darkness”

**Isaiah 8:16 - 9:6** Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. <sup>17</sup> I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. <sup>18</sup> Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. <sup>19</sup> And 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? <sup>20</sup> To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

*For to Us a Child Is Born*

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

### Isaiah 8:16-19

...A group of “disciples” are being addressed in this hour.

- There is More Than One Voice/Message to be Listening to (for humanity ...for disciples too)
  - ...“the testimony, the teaching” ...what God has spoken & revealed!
  - ...“the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter” ...other ideas; other ‘life-explanations’; other approaches on how to live
- There is a Concern about their “INQUIRING” (Heb. – “to consult, to frequent, to seek”)
  - “Influencers”
  - Is Their Source from “The LIVING or the DEAD”—v. 19

“It’s not political plots and conspiracies that we should fear but the Lord (8:9-18). Because they reject God, the people instead consult mediums and spiritists, but that road leads only to darkness (8:19-22).” **Tim Chester**, “Isaiah for You”

...Isaiah has warned the people about two familiar (to us!) sounding things: Economic Collapse ...and the Natural Minded Man's Conspiracy Theories!

**Is. 8:11-13** *For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: <sup>12</sup> "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. <sup>13</sup> But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.*

...This is an Invitation to God's People to See MORE Than the "NATURAL FORCES" of this life!!

"Two different understandings of history: (1) Give God the central place that only the Holy One must have, or (2) explain historical events as the result of human conspiracy, with the constant dread of the unknown that this view engenders. Yahweh counsels Isaiah that if he is going to dread something, it ought to be the Lord Almighty". (Zondervan NIV Study Bible)

"The promised boy will grow up eating honey and curds (7:15). It's the food of poverty—a sign that Judah's economy will collapse (7:18-25). **Tim Chester**, "Isaiah for Everyone"

**Is. 7:21-23** *In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep, <sup>22</sup> and because of the abundance of milk that they give, he will eat curds, for everyone who is left in the land will eat curds and honey. <sup>23</sup> In that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briers and thorns.*

**...Isaiah is a voice educating earthly people that "you CAN go from great prosperity to great DARKNESS"!!!**

## Days of Darkness... & the Distance from God's Word

**Isaiah 8:20-22** *To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.*

### (1) Distance and Minimizing of God's Word Always Ushers in Darkness

v. 20 *...To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because **they have no dawn**.*

### (2) The 'Vocabulary' of Darkness is 'Felt' and Life-Impacting

[v. 21-22] *...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. <sup>22</sup> And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.*

... "Hunger" (unsatisfied longings, desires, cravings)—lead to "Rage & Contemptuous Speech"!!

"The country is increasingly partisan and politically polarized. ...We don't know anyone who hasn't lost friends over the last few years. To maintain friendship in real life or online, it feels like people must agree with you on whole new lists of things that we didn't have in the past. ...It only makes sense that the fracturing of American culture and society and the erosion of American institutions it has caused would spill over into the pews. ...Couples, families, friends, and congregations once united in their commitment to Christ are now dividing over seemingly irreconcilable views of the world. In fact, they are not merely dividing but becoming incomprehensible to one another." **Jim Davis & Michael Graham**, *The Great Dechurching*, p. 17-18

### (3) Darkness Comes in a Variety of Shades

<sup>2</sup> *The people who walked in **darkness** [ḥôšek] have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of **deep darkness** (šalmâewt), on them has light shone.*

ḥôšek; (literally) darkness; figuratively, misery, destruction, ignorance, sorrow, wickedness (Strong's)  
šalmâewt (tsalmaveth); shade of death, deep darkness, shadow of death (used in Ps 23)

<sup>22</sup> *And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into **thick darkness** [aphelah].*

aphelah; darkness, gloominess, calamity (Strong's) ... darkness, with the associative meaning of mental gloom and despair (Mounce)

**...Ours is a Day of Great Mental Health Crisis! ...Discouragement, Depression, Suicide—are at ALL-TIME-HIGHS! ...This is NOT merely Natural Causes!**

**2 Cor 4:3-4** *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

**Acts 26:17-18** *"...delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."*  
...Darkness is associated with the "power of Satan" ...This is a MASSIVELY Helpful Insight!

**Eph 6:12** *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*

### (4) Our Own "Day of Darkness" Needs the Light of Christmas

...Insights from Ezekiel's Day!

**Ezekiel 34:11-14** *"For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. <sup>13</sup> And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. <sup>14</sup> I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.*

— **This Condition has a particularly concerning impact—it SCATTERS God's SHEEP!**

...The Darkness of Our Days and the "Great Dechurching"

"No group of people is immune from the Great Dechurching. ...Presbyterians lead the dechurching, losing about 45% of their attenders over the last twenty-five years ...Methodists follow at 37 percent, Baptists at 29 percent, and Pentecostals at 26 percent. ...we can't lump all the dechurched into the same category when it comes to the animating concerns behind their decision to stop attending. One large group stopped attending church without initially intending to do so. Some moved to a new city with the intention of finding a church but never took that next step into a faith community. Many young professionals prioritized personal networks around their careers and, as a result, found themselves disconnected from a local church. Some families prioritized children's sports and other activities that increasingly happen on Sundays. Then there are those who stopped attending church during COVID-19. They developed new Sunday rhythms and now prefer those new activities over Sunday morning worship. We call all this group the casually dechurched." **Jim Davis & Michael Graham, *The Great Dechurching*, p. 22, 24**

...Ezekiel would call these "dechurched"—"SCATTERED"