

About the Story

Light in the Darkness (Isaiah 9:2-7)

Prophets

A prophet was a person who served as a means of communication between the human and divine worlds. They lived in the millennia before Jesus was born. The prophets were called by God to speak to the people on God's behalf. There were different kinds of prophets, but they all had in common the job of delivering to individuals or groups the divine messages that they received during their prophetic experiences.

The prophets brought messages of judgment for disobeying God's way. The point of these messages was to get the kings and the people to change what they were doing wrong and be in right relationship with God. The prophets also brought messages of hope and confidence in God's care for the people. They encouraged the people to trust God.

Usually prophets communicated through oral speech, not by writing. The prophets were very important to the people of God and played an authoritative role in Israel's religious life. They had disciples who wrote down what they said. Eventually their speeches were collected into the prophetic books of the First (Old) Testament in the Bible. Some of them are long books, like Jeremiah and Isaiah. Others are short, like Amos and Micah.

The prophets were also very important to early Christians. They interpreted some of the prophetic writings as pointing to the coming of the "Messiah" or "Christ" (which means "anointed one"). They believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

The story of "Light in the Darkness" is an example of this. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is called the light that shines in the darkness. (John 1:5) In the Gospel of Luke, an old man named Simeon held baby Jesus and called him "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (Matthew 2:32)

Isaiah

Isaiah was a prophet who lived 700 years before Jesus was born. He lived in the city of Jerusalem (also called "Zion") and prophesied during the reign of four Judean kings. He celebrated God as the great king of heaven and earth, Jerusalem as the city God chose for a royal dwelling place, and the kings who descended from David as God's anointed rulers on earth.

Isaiah assumed that God had founded Jerusalem, lived in it, and would ultimately save it. He believed that since the holy God would not live in a moral slum, a morally defiled Jerusalem must be purified by judgment before the city could be saved. The Word he spoke for God to the kings and the people was intended to motivate them to change.

The book of Isaiah is the first and the longest of the prophetic books in the First Testament. You can find it by opening your Bible to the middle.

Darkness and Light

References to darkness and light would have reminded people hearing this prophecy long ago of the first Creation story: “In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the face of the deep...Then God said, ‘Let there be light; and there was light.’” (Genesis 1:1-3) They would have been reminded that God is the Creator of all that is, worthy to be both praised and feared.

Another association with darkness for the people listening to Isaiah long ago was oppression. Darkness was commonly understood to symbolize oppression, and light symbolized how the kings would provide relief from oppression. At least the people hoped they would.

Coronation of a King

In its original context—the land of Judea, 2700 years ago—those who listened to this prophecy would have known that it celebrated the coronation of a king, probably Hezekiah. While other biblical prophets are suspicious of kings, Isaiah speaks well of them. He sees them as exalted on earth just like God is exalted in heaven.

Seven hundred years later, followers of Jesus listened to this passage and understood it as referring to him. In 1741, George Handel wrote a piece of music called “The Messiah” that used passages from this story in Isaiah including “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” and “For a child has been born for us...and he is named...Prince of Peace.” This music is still performed in many places every Christmas.

Connections

❖ Listening to the story in light of our own life experience we hear the prophet say:

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

And we are invited to consider: **What is a source of light in my life?**

❖ In this story the promised savior is named:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace

What name would you like to give the One who gives you hope?