

## Isaiah 11:1-16 A Vision of the Future

### Introduction

In Isaiah chapter seven to twelve we have the emphasis on God as Immanuel, the One who identifies with, or draws alongside His people. The nation of Judah is in deep trouble and the young, inexperienced King Ahaz was completely out of his depth. The Lord sent Isaiah, a prophet and a distant relative of the King to speak God's message in this critical situation. The gist of the message was that the king ought not to be afraid of neighbouring governments or even the superpower of the day because God was ultimately on the throne. He has made a covenant with His people to care for them and provide for their needs and, therefore, whatever troubles they faced He would go with them through those trials. Ahaz was offered the opportunity to suggest a sign by which God could demonstrate His sovereignty in this situation. Ironically this offer was repeated to and accepted by Hezekiah, Ahaz's son years later when the same kind of pressures were facing the nation (Isaiah 38:4-7). The difference being that Hezekiah was a follower of the God of Israel, unlike his father, and he was, therefore open to heed the message from the Lord; However, God, through Isaiah, declared that a sign would be given whether he wanted it or not, of a virginal conception that would be the evidence of God with His people. Either side of the extraordinary prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-7 the prophet expounded the judgement of God against the nations for their sins, including His own people, and the consequences of that judgement. It appeared a totally bleak scenario, a totally dark landscape but yet a reference to a remnant of God's people coming through their trials (Isaiah 10: 20-22) gives hope for a brighter future. This links in with the call of Isaiah years earlier when this young man was told of his calling to a people who would resist his message and fail to return to the Lord, yet at the very end of that call from God there is a mysterious reference to *the holy seed that will be the stump in the land* (Isaiah 6:13). This was a reminder that the judgement of God was not His final action with respect to His people; there was always a hope and a future for those who put their faith and trust in Him, in spite of the circumstances. Isaiah chapter eleven will explain in more detail what is the hope of Israel and who is the One in whom they could place their hopes. Ironically this pivotal chapter so significant in biblical revelation is rarely preached or reflected on, yet is so important for understanding the mission of the Messiah God was to send.

### 1. The Character of the Messiah (Isaiah 11:1-3a)

<sup>1</sup> *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.* <sup>2</sup> *The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—* <sup>3</sup> *and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.* At a time when the Assyrian Empire is ancient history not a present reality, at a time when the surrounding nations no longer are a threat to Israel this special person will be born. At that time the Jewish people will be like a forest reduced to mere tree stumps after the timber has been harvested. It will be a picture of hopelessness. When Jesus was born Israel was again occupied by a foreign army –this time the Roman Empire held sway. It was a time when messianic hopes were high, but more a dream than a realistic expectation. Interestingly in the passage where Isaiah will prophesy about the nature of Jesus' death it contains these words about His birth: *He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground* (Isaiah 53:2). Here in Isaiah 11:1 this section begins: *A shoot will come up from the stump of*

*Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.* Assyria with all its might when cut down in 605BC by the combined forces of Babylon, Media and Persia would disappear forever from the records of history. Yet out of this weak vassal state of Judah, despised and condemned, would arise the One who would bring hope to the world in the future. The reference to this figure as both the shoot and the root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1, 10) gives a clear pointer to the fact that it was not just another king in David's line, but rather another 'David'. In the books of Kings, successive kings are compared with *their father David* (eg. II Kings 18:3), but no king is called 'David' or 'Son of Jesse'. However, the introduction to this figure indicates that he is at least as great as David by this introduction. Jeremiah 30:9, prior to the exile to Babylon, speaks of the coming ruler in this way: *Instead, they will serve the Lord their God and **David their king**, whom I will raise up for them.* Ezekiel, the main prophet during the Babylonian captivity, likewise refers to this coming figure in similar terms: *I will place over them one shepherd, **My servant David**, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.* <sup>24</sup> *I the Lord will be their God, and **My servant David** will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken* (Ezekiel 34:23-24). Hosea, again before the exile, spoke concerning the future, of a glorious day of restoration for a repentant Jewish nation: *Afterwards the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and **David their king**. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days* (Hosea 3:5). The hymn-writer, James Montgomery captured this in his well-known hymn: Hail to the Lord's Anointed:

Hail to the Lord's Anointed,  
 great David's greater Son!  
 Hail in the time appointed,  
 his reign on earth begun!  
 He comes to break oppression,  
 to set the captive free;  
 to take away transgression,  
 and rule in equity. [C.M.P.204]

This special figure is called *a Branch* (Isaiah 11:1). This imagery is picked up by Jeremiah (and in the post-exilic era by Zechariah in his book in Zech.3:8, 6:12): <sup>5</sup>*The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up to David **a righteous Branch, a King** who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.* <sup>6</sup> *In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness* (Jer.23:5-6). No earthly ruler of his day could have delivered such prosperity, but the future Messiah of the line of David would one day usher in such an era of blessing.

Yet how could this figure achieve such goals? Isaiah 9:2-3a provides the answer: *The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—<sup>3</sup> and he will delight in the fear of the Lord...* the answer is clearly the power of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament era the holy Spirit was given as a temporary endowment of power to accomplish a task—for example Bezalel (Exodus 31:3) was inspired to design and produce all kinds of products out of gold, silver, bronze, wood and cut stones. Samson, by contrast as a judge in Israel, was empowered by the Spirit to demonstrate extraordinary physical strength in a series of engagements with the Philistines (Judges 14:6); David was filled with the Holy Spirit from the time he was anointed as the future king of Israel. Yet he was acutely aware of the potential loss of the Spirit's empowerment after his sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 51, the Psalm of penitence, included these words from David: *Do not cast me from Your presence or take Your Holy Spirit from me* (Psalm 51:10). Isaiah longed for the day (Isaiah 32:15-20) when God's Spirit would be poured out on all God's people. The blessings this would provide for the nation would transform them. Little did he know that a further eight hundred years would pass until the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) when all people, Gentiles as well as Jews, would be eligible through Jesus to be baptised and then repeatedly filled with the Holy Spirit. However, Isaiah

in chapter eleven verse two of his book declared that one special person would be particularly endowed with the Holy Spirit, namely the Messiah. *The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.* You will notice that there are three pairs of attributes possessed by him to ensure his rule will be qualitatively different to that of inadequate Ahaz. (i) *The Spirit of wisdom and of understanding* (Isa.11:2a) these are judicial and governmental characteristics. The picture painted here is of a person who can clearly grasp the bigger picture, but also have the skill to discern the key issues at the heart of a matter. These mental faculties contrast with the idle boasts of the King of Assyria in Isaiah 10:10-11. (ii) *The Spirit of counsel and of power* (Isa.11:2b) This pair of attributes is also found in Isaiah 36:5 and rendered as *strategy and military strength*. This practical gift is to discern a right course of action, together with the strength of character to see it through. (iii) *the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord* (Isa.11:2c) This knowledge is a complete grasping of the truth and appropriate application of it to real-life situations. The word translated ‘knowledge’ is a relational one – used in the Old Testament of the intimate knowledge shared by a married couple. Or of the exclusive relationship between God and His people: *you only have I chosen* (NKJV *known*) *of all the families of the earth* (Amos 3:2). This person’s actions are totally taken up with God-centred holy living. In relation to the Lord this *fear* is a moral boundary marker (Genesis 20:11) restricting choices of action to appropriate limits. It motivates our obedience to God’s revealed will (Exodus 20:20, words spoken at the time of the giving of the Ten Commandments: *Moses said to the people, Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.*). It moulds our conduct (Nehemiah 5:9, 15). It is the spirit of true loyalty and worship (Psalm 2:11; Psalm 5:7). This was the secret of David’s ministry, for example (2 Samuel 23:2). This person will understand and know God in a full and thorough way; he will be completely taken up with pleasing God and being God-centred in everything he says and does. In summary Isaiah 11:3a declares: *and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.* What else does Isaiah say about this Spirit-empowered individual? This person will be able to say in the words of Isaiah 61:1-3: ***The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, <sup>2</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,<sup>3</sup> and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendour.*** Luke 4:16-21 records Jesus reading these words at the start of His earthly ministry and adding at the end of the reading: *Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.* He was either telling the truth and He is the Messiah not only of Israel but the Saviour of the World. The empowerment of the Spirit on Jesus will be transformative for the Jews who grasp His message. Isaiah 59:20-21 states: <sup>20</sup>***The Redeemer*** *will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins, declares the Lord.* <sup>21</sup>***As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says the Lord. My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and for ever, says the Lord.*** However, this blessing is not just for Jews. Three verses later in Isaiah 60:3 it states: *Nations will come to Your light, and kings to the brightness of Your dawn.* What a vision of the future! What an extraordinary message to deliver in the midst of a despairing nation of Judah. God’s plans and future were more exciting for His people than they could ever have imagined or grasped at that time –this is our God also. Likewise to God’s people in this generation, remember this: the best is yet to come-hallelujah!

## 2. The Conduct of the Messiah (Isaiah 11:3b-5)

(a) **The Manner of the Messiah's Rule** (Isaiah 11:3b-4a) *He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.* This is an overview statement describing the perfect fulfilment of His duties. The people on whom He will focus most attention are on the margins of society, those who too often are overlooked in favour of the rich and powerful. The Messiah who will take an interest in those who miss out under normal circumstances, will in effect rule with justice and fairness for everyone. His judgements will not be based like ordinary human rulers on partial knowledge and insight. He will have a comprehensive oversight of the issues and thus be in a position to make the correct choices. This standard for government is beyond anything an earthly ruler, whether dictator or democrat can deliver. In Psalm 72 similar sentiments are expressed regarding the hopes for the earthly kingdom of Solomon, but he did not deliver on them. Listen to what that Psalm proclaimed: *He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.<sup>3</sup> The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness.<sup>4</sup> He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor.<sup>12</sup> For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no-one to help.<sup>13</sup> He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.<sup>14</sup> He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight (Psalm 72:2-4, 12-14).* No-one in their right mind could disagree with such noble sentiments, but Solomon did not deliver on these words, like many a politician who takes office after uttering some splendid words about the great things they will do for the good of the people. Isaiah is saying that the One of whom I am talking will not disappoint and let you down. He can and will deliver on His promises. The rule of God's messiah, though, is a radically different kind of authority and kingship. Jesus attempted to explain to Pilate during His trial just how different His rule was compared with the secular kingdom of Rome. *Jesus said, My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest by the Jews. But now My kingdom is from another place.<sup>37</sup> You are a king, then! said Pilate. Jesus answered, You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.<sup>38</sup> What is truth? Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, I find no basis for a charge against Him (John 18:36-38).* May this king come soon to reign!

(b) **The Justice of the Messiah's Rule** (Isaiah 11:4b-5)

*He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips He will slay the wicked.<sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be His belt and faithfulness the sash round His waist.* Principled decision-making will mean genuine justice for all not positive discrimination at the expense of other people. Favouring the poor and marginalised will not be at the expense of the legitimate needs and rights of other people in the community. During Messiah's rule punishment will fit the crime. The guilty will not get away with wrongdoing and the innocent will not suffer for the mistakes of other people. In such a context of Jesus' reign over the whole world, things will make sense. What is going on in the world, will for the first time be understood in a coherent and consistent manner. *Righteousness* here is a stress on always doing the right thing in all circumstances and consistently keeping our promises. *Faithfulness* highlights personal integrity and consistency so that the complete dependability of the Messiah will be acknowledged by the citizens of Messiah's Kingdom. This form of rule expressed with human characteristics, nevertheless, could only be delivered by One who was truly divine as well as human. This fact will be highlighted in the boldest of colours in the next section of this extraordinary prophecy.

3. **The Context of the Messiah's Reign** (Isaiah 11:6-9)

<sup>6</sup>*The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.<sup>7</sup> The cow will feed with the bear, their young will*

lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.<sup>8</sup> The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.<sup>9</sup> They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. This idealistic picture of how life should have been in the original Eden prior to the entrance of sin will one day be realised in Christ's reign in God's new heavens and earth at the end of this age. At that time all the fears associated with insecurity, danger and evil will be banished for ever. Notice the pairs of creatures living in harmony, one wild the other domesticated, climaxed by the words: *and a little child shall lead them* (v6). It is not just humans who long for a new world order; the rest of creation also feels the pain of the loss of how this world ought to have been (Romans 8:18-23). This Immanuel section of the book of Isaiah has emphasised the references to a baby or a child at the centre of God's purposes for His World. Messiah's conception and birth would be anything but ordinary. Attempts to create a just world order based on mutual self-interest (the capitalist system) will ultimately fail. Only a world of people united in fellowship with the Holy One of Israel, who is completely righteous and faithful, can produce an environment where such blessings may be experienced. Isaiah will return to this theme later in his book with the acknowledgement that no earthly ruler could even begin to attain such lofty goals. Isaiah 65:17-25 is the key passage here. *Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.<sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice for ever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.<sup>19</sup> I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in My people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more...The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, says the Lord* (Isaiah 65:17-19, 25). These words must not be taken to mean that only Jerusalem will experience this peace –Isaiah 11:10 dispels this notion for starters. On the contrary, Isaiah is suggesting that if Jerusalem finally experiences true peace, then the whole world will get it as well. Other prophets in the Old Testament also in the midst of the trials of their own day look forward to this coming glorious kingdom, not just for the Jews but also for us all. For example Habakkuk 2:14 states: *For **the earth** will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* What a great future we have to look forward to!

#### 4. The Impact of Messiah's Reign (Isaiah 11:10-16)

<sup>10</sup>*In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.<sup>11</sup> In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the sea.<sup>12</sup>He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; He will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.<sup>13</sup> Ephraim's jealousy will vanish, and Judah's enemies will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile towards Ephraim.<sup>14</sup> They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west; together they will plunder the people to the east. They will lay hands on Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be subject to them.<sup>15</sup> The Lord will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind He will sweep His hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that men can cross over in sandals.<sup>16</sup> There will be a highway for the remnant of His people that is left from Assyria, as there was for Israel when they came up from Egypt.* The folly of Ahaz led to the defeat of Judah and her later exile (Isaiah 8:6-8). Yet the coming of the Messiah will result in the restoration of God's people. (i) This will include

the restoration of the historic nation of Israel to its land in the last days. The Jewish exiles in Jeremiah and Ezekiel's day had not spread to *the four quarters of the earth* (v11), nor had the Messiah been revealed in their generation –it was still hundreds of years too early. Isaiah's list included the known countries where exiles had gone and then more general terms to cover the rest of the globe. Was this ever fulfilled prior to the re-formation of the State of Israel in 1948? I don't think so. Since that date have Jews been returning to their homeland from all over the world? Yes they have! (Ezekiel also prophesied this return in Ezek: 20:34) Jesus also spoke to His disciples about an ingathering of believing Jews from across the globe (Matthew 24:31). (ii) Rebirth of the Nation in a day Isaiah also declared in Isaiah 66:8: *Who has ever heard of such a thing? Who has ever seen such things? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labour than she gives birth to her children.* Israel, a nation that had not really existed as a separate nation for nearly 2,500 years, was declared a new sovereign state by an act of the United Nations on May 14, 1948. The nation was born in a day. (iii) What about the order of return? Isaiah 43:5-6 states: *Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. <sup>6</sup> I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth.* The first Jews returning to the Holy land came in significant numbers from Arab countries in the east. Then there was a major influx from western European countries such as Germany. In the 1980s larger numbers of Russian Jews from the north of Europe arrived, followed by Jews returning from Ethiopia in the south. This order followed the one prophesied in Isaiah. (iv) The transformation of the desert once again into fertile ground Isaiah 35:1-2: *The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus,<sup>2</sup> it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God.* The dramatic reclaiming of the desert by pioneering agricultural methods and the replanting of trees has turned areas of country from a wasteland and useless desert sands into flourishing forests and fertile land that supports a flourishing agricultural industry, whose produce is exported around the world. (v) What was the purpose of this divine activity? Isaiah 43:21 reminds us that the restoration took place with a view to the salvation of His chosen people: *the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim My praise.* Isaiah is pointing forward to the future ingathering of Jewish people who will acknowledge Jesus as their Messiah, described by Paul in Romans 11. *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.<sup>26</sup> And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: The deliverer will come from Zion; He will turn godlessness away from Jacob.<sup>27</sup> And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins* (Romans 11:25-27). Israel's sin is not the final word, but repentance and acknowledgement of their Messiah. Aspects of the prophecy have come to pass with many Jews now back in their homeland. More Jews have accepted Jesus as Messiah in the last hundred years than in the previous 1,500 years; the return of Jesus is close –Isaiah's vision of the future may even become a present reality in some of our lives –praise His name, Amen.

