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He Will Honor Galilee of the Gentiles

9: 1-3

He will honor Galilee of the Gentiles DIG: From 8:19-22, what do you think Isaiah meant by the darkness in which people walk? What suffering had Zebulun and Naphtali (in the northern kingdom of Isra'el) experienced? How does the New Covenant interpret what this prophecy means (Mt 4:12-17; Jn 8:12)?

REFLECT: Jesus said that in this world you will have trouble (John 16:33). So even with this trouble in your life, can you find hope in the midst of gloom and distress? What is the joy of the LORD like for you? How does the presence of God give meaning to your life? What do you have to be thankful for today?

Suddenly, in the midst of this **darkness**, comes deliverance and **joy**, the future glory of **Galilee**. The extreme devastation of the Assyrian invasion, especially in the northern kingdom of Isra'el, will give way to bright glory. When every human attempt to bring light had failed, then **God** brought **His** light, not because **He** had to, not because humanity figured out a way to force **Him**, but merely out of **His** own grace. Here **Isaiah** reaches the climax of the section begun in **7:1**.

Nevertheless, a time will come when **there will be no more darkness, and gloom** will be a thing of **the past (9:1a)**. The **gloom and distress** of the northern kingdom of Isra'el came because of divine discipline. The word **distress** (*musaq*) reflects the word translated *fearful* (*suqa*). **Isaiah** saw his prediction of **darkness** begin to unfold. The **darkness and distress** were real, but, as always, we have a choice of how we react to it. We can either sink into despair or rise with **hope**. **Isaiah** insists that **hope** can be found in the midst of **gloom**. How? Even though our present circumstance is all **darkness**, we can say **no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope - the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:12-13)**.

The area between the Sea of Chinnereth and the Mediterranean north, or the Jezreel Valley, had always been something of a melting pot, with Hebrews, Canaanites, Arameans, Hittites and Mesopotamians all living there. This was where Israel met the Gentile world, and why it

was called **Galilee of the Gentiles**. **Isaiah** noted that **in the past God** had **humbled** Israel when **He** allowed the Assyrian **king Tiglath-Pileser III** to conquer the northern kingdom (**9:1b**), or **the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali** in 732 BC (**Second Kings 15:29** and **17:24**). Then the Assyrians **brought** conquered **people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath and Sepharvaim** to replace the Israelites. They took over **Samaria** and lived in its towns (**Second Kings 2:24**).

But Isaiah said that **in the future, God will honor Galilee of the Gentiles (9:1c)**. There were more than two tribes that settled in **Galilee**, but he chose to name **Zebulun** and **Naphtali**. In the outworking of Immanuel in history, why are these two tribal territories picked out? Why not Asher or Issachar; they were also in **Galilee**? The reason is this, *Capernaum*, which was in **Naphtali**, and *Nazareth*, which was in **Zebulun** were the two cities associated with **Jesus'** upbringing and early ministry. Therefore, His presence and His ministry certainly honored those areas and made them distinct. **During the life of Messiah, the rabbis viewed Galilee in general, and Nazareth in particular, with extreme contempt (John 1:46 and 7:52).**



Isaiah continued to prophesy that **Zebulun and Naphtali** would be honored **by the way of the sea** (see my commentary on **Genesis, to see link click [Lh](#) - Zebulun Will Live by the Seashore and Become a Haven for Ships**), **along the Jordan River** (see the commentary on **Genesis [Lm](#) - Naphtali is a Doe Set Free that bears Beautiful Words**). **The way of the sea** was an expression that referred to the western shore of the Sea of **Galilee**. This also is a major area of **Christ's** ministry. **Along the Jordan River** is also mentioned and refers to the east bank of **the Jordan** where **Jesus** had an extensive ministry as well (**Matthew 4:12-17**).

The darkness would give way to **light**. Throughout the Scriptures, **ADONAI's** presence is

equated with **light** (**Second Samuel 22:29; Job 29:3; Psalm 139:11-12; Isaiah 42:16; First John 1:5**). The people walking in, or living out their lives, in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned (**9:2**). **Isaiah** describes the effect of the **Messiah** on the northern part of Israel in typical Hebrew parallelism. The people were in darkness (**8:22**) and in the shadow of death. Then they saw a great light and light dawned on them. They did not produce it nor were they responsible for it. Where they had been groping in darkness, now they would find themselves blinking in the light. All these events were in the future, yet all the verbs are in the perfect tense (an action that was brought to completion and whose effects are felt in the present). **Isaiah**, even in the uncertainty of his own time, could look into the future and describe events with the certainty of completed actions. Neither spiritists nor mediums could do that (**8:19-22**). They could not explain the origins of the earth, let alone the end of it (**41:21-24**). But **God** could give that kind of insight to **His** prophet **Isaiah**. **Matthew** also applied this passage to **Christ**, who began **His** preaching and healing ministry in **Galilee** (**Matthew 4:15-16**).

Now the immediate cause of the rejoicing is explained. Speaking to **God**, **Isaiah** said on behalf of the nation: **You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before You as people rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder** (**9:3**). They rejoice because **the LORD** has freed them. **Isaiah** spells out the future messianic glory as a result of the coming of the **Light**. The **Light** will increase **their joy** like the joy **at the harvest** or the **joy** of winning a battle and **dividing the plunder**. Joy is another emphasis of **Isaiah's**, mentioned two dozen times in the book.

*What **Isaiah** deals with here are the basic fears of people and he says that in place of fear there is joy. However, it is important to see that the real source of joy is **Yeshua**. It is before Him that they (and we) rejoice (**Second Samuel 6:16; Psalm 27:4 and 6**). The truth is that apart from the presence of **God**, who gives meaning to life, all other joys in this world are merely dust and ashes. **You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand. (Psalm 16:11).***