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Every Christmas season, we turn to the prophecy in Isaiah 9, remembering the words that foretold the birth of Jesus some 700 years earlier. These words are read and sung each Christmas season about Jesus, who is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. The prophet Isaiah spoke these words of hope to the people of God who were in darkness and despair. We often quickly read Isaiah 9:1-2 to get to the good news about Jesus. But there is good news hidden in the temporal and geographical layers of Isaiah 9:1-2:

*Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of **Zebulun** and **Naphtali** will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when **Galilee** of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory. <sup>2</sup> The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.*

We have no familiarity with the geographical locations of Zebulun, Naphtali, and Galilee. To us, they are just points on a map. However, these geographical places are full of layers in time that reveal God's fulfilling light in Jesus. In God's story, geography is theology. Land matters. Today, we'll uncover four layers of the grand story of God's redemption that reveal Jesus is the fulfilling light of God's promise to bring light into darkness.

**Layer 1: Abraham (Genesis 12:1-8; 15:18-21; 17:7-8)**

- Long before Israel ever knew the names Zebulun and Naphtali, God spoke to one man wandering in tents. God promised Abraham countless descendants, a land of their own, and a blessing to the entire world through his people.
- Abraham enters the Promised Land, which he never fully possesses in his lifetime. God promises, but the fulfillment stretches beyond him. Abraham's grandson Jacob had twelve sons, two of whom were named Zebulun and Naphtali (Genesis 30:3-8; 20-21). These sons would become the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.
- The Promised Land was the place where God would fulfill his promise, the place where God's people would dwell. God's vision was for one covenant with one people, in 12 tribes, in one land, with one mission to bless the entire world.

**Layer 2: Joshua and the Land Division (Joshua 11:23; Judges 1:30, 33)**

- After years in Egypt, then God's dramatic rescue of his people, and forty years wandering in the desert, the people of God eventually enter the Promised Land in the book of Joshua by crossing the Jordan River (Joshua 3-5).
- After defeating most of the people of the land of Canaan, the Israelites controlled the Promised Land. In Joshua 11:23, Joshua divided the land into twelve portions for each tribe as their own possession.

Specifically, the lands of Zebulun (Joshua 19:10-16) and Naphtali (19:32-29) were in the northeast part of the Promised Land, bordering the Sea of Galilee.

- However, after Joshua's death, the people of God neglected to follow God. Both tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali "failed to drive out the residents of the land" and moved in to live among them (Judges 1:30-33). This created a syncretistic distortion to their faith in Yahweh alone. They adopted the gods, the customs, and the beliefs of the people of the land, and they forgot the God who made a covenant with Abraham.
- We often continue to live in or beside the things that God commands us to remove. The people of Zebulun and Naphtali coexisted with sin; they combined their belief in Yahweh with other beliefs. This created a spiritual darkness among the people. Partial obedience always becomes deep darkness. What are the dark places of compromise in your life?

### **Layer 3: Darkness in Zebulun & Naphtali (Isaiah 7:20, 9:1-2)**

- Isaiah prophesied that the King of Assyria would invade and destroy the Northern nation of Israel (7:20). The King of Assyria would be God's instrument of judgment on his people for their sins.
- Zebulun and Naphtali would bear the brunt of the invasion of Israel first. War leads to casualties, destruction, exile, and darkness. The fear of geopolitical invasion gripped the people of Zebulun and Naphtali.
- However, Isaiah promised a future when these people "will see a great light...a light will shine."

### **Layer 4: Fulfilling Light of Jesus (Matthew 4:12-17)**

- 700 years after Isaiah's prophecy, Matthew records the beginning of Jesus' ministry. After his baptism and temptation, Jesus begins his ministry in *"Nazareth, then [he] left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali."*
- Matthew specifically quotes Isaiah 9:1-2 to reveal that Jesus fulfilled this promise of light.
- In Luke 4, Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah 61:1-2, that his mission was to comfort the broken-hearted, to proclaim release to captives, and to bring sight to the blind. The promise to Abraham is fulfilled in the light of Jesus.

Like the layers in the grand story of God's redemption, our lives are layered. We all have personal histories with layers of meaning, hurt, and purpose. We have visible layers of our lives and hidden layers in the shadows. Jesus longs to shine his fulfilling light into the dark places of our lives. His light shines into our darkness. What layer of your life needs the light of Jesus?

God begins his work in the places we would rather forget. Darkness in your life is the end of the story. However, we cannot cohabitate with what God calls us to remove. God desires to enter the darkness of our layered lives to shine his light in and through us.



### **Advent: Born to Dwell Reading Plan on the Bible App**

Spend 20 days recounting the Bible's Christmas story from Old Testament passages and the Gospels. Slow down, worship Jesus, and cherish Him by faith. Receive and rejoice in God's greatest gift. Jesus Christ is the Word made flesh to dwell among us. Scan the QR to set Harvest Spings as your church and join the featured plan.