

**Just Before the Dawn**

**The Importance of Isaiah 8:16-23 for Understanding Isaiah 9:1**

In Partial Fulfillment of  
Isaiah-Malachi OT516

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December 6, 2017

Darkness is uniquely terrifying. A horror movie that would be laughable in the light of day leaves us shaking after the sun sets. At night our imaginations come alive, turning every hooting owl and creaking branch into a ghost or ghoul out for blood. Even the real cares of life such as a fractured relationship or tension at work have the tendency to blow up in our minds as day turns to night. Darkness often brings with it terror and hopelessness.

In Isaiah 8:16-23 [9:1]<sup>1</sup> God uses the natural hopelessness of darkness to express the state of Israel. Through the prophet, God depicts Israel's and Judah's situation as one of utter despair and without hope. The purpose of this paper is to analyze Isa 8:16-23 in order to show how these verses lead into and affect our understanding of Isa 9:1, because the utter despair in Isa 8:16-23 is meant to magnify the brilliance of the hope and light in 9:1. Just as we are blinded when we go from a completely dark room into the brightness of the sun, the reader should be overwhelmed by the brilliance of 9:1 when he or she steps into it from 8:16-23. We will start by looking at those things in the passage that contribute to the overall feeling of hopelessness: the context of the Syro-Ephraimite war (7:1-8:15), rejection of true and embracing of false sources of hope (8:16-20), and the existential experience of hopelessness (8:21-23). Then we will look at the shining of the light of hope upon God's people (9:1).

## **Context**

The passages prior to Isa 8:16-23 address the events surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite war. Therefore, some understanding of these events is needed to understand this passage. The political tension in the ancient Near East escalated in 745B.C. when Assyria began to reassert

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<sup>1</sup> The MT places the chapter break after verse 23. Most English translations place the chapter break after verse 22. I will be following the MT numbering from here on out.

its power following the ascension of Tiglath-pileser III to the Assyrian throne.<sup>2</sup> In response to the Assyrian threat, Israel, under King Pekah, aligned itself with Rezin, the king of Syria. The two kings then sought to persuade Judah to join their alliance against Assyria by besieging Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 7 takes place in the context of this siege. King Ahaz is afraid of the combined strength of Israel and Syria, so Yahweh sends Isaiah to promise Ahaz that He will remove the threat of Syria and Israel. Although Isaiah 7 does not specifically mention this, Ahaz responds by appealing to the king of Assyria for help rather than trusting Yahweh (2 Kgs 16:7). True to His promise to deliver Judah from Israel and Syria, God uses Assyria to end the siege on Jerusalem. In 732B.C., Tiglath-pileser III marched on the region of Palestine, destroying Damascus and conquering Israel.<sup>4</sup> In the same year, King Pekah was replaced by Hoshea on the throne of Israel.<sup>5</sup> However, in the process of freeing Judah from the Syro-Ephraimite threat, Assyria also subdued many cities in Judah (2 Chr 28:20).

Isaiah 7:23-8:23 describes the judgment that God is bringing on Israel and Judah as a result of their unfaithfulness towards God in placing their trust in political alliances. Because they chose to trust in Assyria rather than Yahweh, Judah will not get a free pass when Assyria comes to remove Syria and Ephraim. The judgment that Isaiah 8:16-23 depicts is the result of Ahaz and the people of Judah choosing to put their trust in Assyria rather than Yahweh.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> B.E. Kelle and B.A. Strawn, "History of Israel 5: Assyrian Period," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books* (ed. Bill T. Arnold and H.G.M. Williamson; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005), 467.

<sup>3</sup> Kelle, "History," 468.

<sup>4</sup> Kelle, "History," 468.

<sup>5</sup> Kelle, "History," 468, attributes this to a rebellion in Pekah's kingdom. Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 106, argues that Tiglath-pileser III placed Hoshea on the throne.

<sup>6</sup> Homer C. Hoeksema, *Redeemed with Judgment: Sermons on Isaiah* (vol. 1; ed. Mark H. Hoeksema; Jenison, Mich.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2007), 132.

Because they trusted in Assyria, they will experience the negative consequences of Assyria's invasion alongside of Syria and Israel (8:6-8). As noted above, this is exactly what happens; in their attack to break the siege of Jerusalem, the Assyrian army conquered several cities in Judah.

### **Despair and Gloom: Isaiah 8:16-23**

Isaiah 8:16-23 builds on the preceding context of God's judgment and leads to a picture of utter despair as God removes His presence from His people. This passage is divided up into two sections: true and false sources of hope (8:16-20) and the experience of hopelessness (8:21-23).

#### True and False Sources of Hope (8:16-20)

*<sup>16</sup>Bind up [the] testimony; seal [the] law among my taught [ones]. <sup>17</sup>And I will wait for Yahweh, the one hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope for him <sup>18</sup>Behold, I and the children that Yahweh gave to me [are] for a sign and for a wonder in Israel from Yahweh of hosts the one dwelling on Mount Zion. <sup>19</sup>And when they say to you, "Seek to the necromancers and to the spiritists, chirping and murmuring. Will a people not seek for its gods, to the dead on behalf of the living?" <sup>20</sup>[Then go] to [the] teaching and to [the] testimony! If they will not speak like this word [it is] because there is not for it [the people] a dawn.*

Isaiah 8:16-20 follows up the statements of God's judgment in 8:1-15 by focusing on the unifying theme of these judgments (the ultimate Judgment behind the other judgments): the removal of God's presence. 8:17 sets up the problem/conflict in these verses, which carries through to the end of the chapter, in the words, "Yahweh, the one hiding his face from the house of Jacob." God no longer shines His face upon them, meaning that God is

expressing His disfavor towards Israel.<sup>7</sup> All of the hopelessness in the verses that follow are the result of God hiding His face, because God's presence is the source of all true hope.

The removal of God's presence results in a second problem, which is the driving problem of vv. 17-20. How should they live in this dark time? If God is removing His face and the blessing that comes with it, where are God's people to look for hope? In v. 16, God commands Isaiah to bind up the testimony and the teaching among His disciples.<sup>8</sup> This binding most likely refers to the process of setting God's word on the hearts of believers; God is commanding Isaiah to prepare the remnant for a time of testing and tribulation by impressing on them the word of God. And this is exactly what Isaiah is doing in vv. 17-20; he is binding the teaching and testimony on the hearts of God's faithful ones by reminding them where their true hope lies.

In order to bind the teaching of God on the hearts of his hearers, Isaiah addresses a situation that they are likely to face in this period of God's absence. How are Yahweh's disciples to respond to the temptation to seek a word of insight or prophecy from other sources? Isaiah answers this question in two ways, and he does so by bringing his own response into juxtaposition with the response of the wayward people of God. He starts by presenting himself as an example for the faithful of Israel to follow. Notice his words in v. 17: "I will wait for Yahweh... and I will hope for him." Isaiah is telling the disciples of

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<sup>7</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 96. See also, George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, ICC (ed. S.R. Driver, A. Plummer, and C.A. Briggs; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1980), 154, which argues that vv. 16, 17 taken together show that God is removing Isaiah as prophet to Israel and Judah for a time. In other words, God is removing His blessing and His presence by removing His prophet. While this is possible, the important point is the removal of God's presence, not Isaiah's presence.

<sup>8</sup> John L. Mackay, *A Study Commentary on Isaiah*, EP Study Commentary (Webster, N.Y.: Evangelical Press, 2008), 228, makes the point that since the imperatives are singular the most likely recipient of these commands is Isaiah. If Isaiah is the recipient, then the only person who could be giving these commands is God Himself.

Yahweh how he is going to react during this difficult time in order to set himself up as an example to be followed. The implication is, “You too should hope patiently for Yahweh’s presence.” Both of the words used in 8:17 (חכה and קוה) describe “the experience of patiently looking for divine intervention.”<sup>9</sup> Isaiah is looking forward to the time when Yahweh will intervene on behalf of His people, specifically the faithful remnant, and work great things on their behalf. Then in v. 19, the people of Israel are seen seeking after mediums and necromancers, a practice condemned in Lev 19:31; 20:6,<sup>10</sup> 27; and Deut 18:10-12. Compared to Isaiah, who is waiting with expectation for Yahweh, the rest of Israel has already rejected Him and is seeking after mediums and necromancers for guidance regarding the future. But not only are these rebellious people participating in these practices, they are also trying to lead the faithful down this same path.<sup>11</sup> Isaiah knows that the temptation to go after these things is all around them.<sup>12</sup> Israel and Judah were full of syncretistic and rebellious practices by this point, and the people often turned to these forbidden practices during times of difficulty.<sup>13</sup> His advice to them in this situation is to flee to the word of God: “To the teaching and to the testimony!” There has been much discussion about the meaning of this phrase, for

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<sup>9</sup> Mackay, *Isaiah*, 229.

<sup>10</sup> This passage is particularly insightful because it states, “If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people.” Here in Isa 8, the people of Israel are turning to mediums and necromancers and God is hiding His face from them. He is not simply cutting off one person from the rest of the people; He is cutting off the entirety of the people of Israel from His covenant presence.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah* (vol. 1; trans. William Pringle; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 287.

<sup>12</sup> Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (2d. ed.; trans. John Bowden; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 201.

<sup>13</sup> Allan Harman, *Isaiah: A Covenant to be Kept for the Sake of the Church* (Fearn, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2005), 96.

it seems to interrupt the previous stream of thought with no warning.<sup>14</sup> However, it is best understood as an interjection from Isaiah telling Yahweh's disciples how they are to respond to the abominable teachings of those who visit mediums.<sup>15</sup> Rather than following in the footsteps of idolaters, they are to turn to the word of God for hope in times of crisis.

And why should they turn to the word of God? Because only in God's word can true hope be found during this time of despair. This is the meaning of the enigmatic phrase:

אִם-לֹא יֹאמְרוּ כְּדִבְרֵי הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֵין-לוֹ שָׁחַר (“If they will not speak like this word, [it is] because

there is not for it a dawn”).<sup>16</sup> The point is that the word of God is the only word that can

provide hope. Here Isaiah first begins to use the light and dark imagery that will come to

dominate the next several verses. Because the people of Israel have rejected God's word and

sought after mediums and necromancers, they will never again see the light of dawn.

#### Experience of the Loss of Hope (8:21-23)

*<sup>21</sup>And [the people] will pass over on [the land], hard pressed and hungry. And it will be when [the people are] hungry that [the people] will be angry, and [the people] will curse against its king and against its God. And [the people] will turn upwards, <sup>22</sup>and to the earth [the people] will look. And behold, distress and darkness, twilight of anguish, and a casting out [to] deep darkness.<sup>17</sup> <sup>23</sup>For [there will be] no twilight to her that was hard-pressed. At this time, he first made light the land of Zebulun and*

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<sup>14</sup> One possible interpretation of this phrase is that it is part of the previous sentences. For instance the NEB translates 19-20a as, “But men will say to you, ‘Seek guidance of ghosts and familiar spirits who squeak and gibber; a nation may surely seek guidance of its gods, of the dead on behalf of the living, for an oracle or a message?’” The problem with this is that the repetition of *tôrâ* and *tē'ûdâ* implies that the teaching and testimony in view are the same teaching and testimony as in v. 16. This means that the teaching and testimony in v. 19 refer either to God's word given to Israel on Mt. Sinai (Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 200) or Isaiah's own teaching (Mackay, *Isaiah*, 228, 232).

<sup>15</sup> Mackay, *Isaiah*, 232.

<sup>16</sup> The debate centers around the meaning of the word *'ăšer*. Normally translated as the relative pronoun “that,” it can also be used as a conjunction meaning “because.” William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 30. See Gen 30:18 for a similar instance. For a commentator that takes *'ăšer* as the relative pronoun, see John D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, WBC 24 (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 125.

<sup>17</sup> The parallelism in this verse might also lead to the translation, “Distress and darkness: Gloom! Anguish and darkness: being cast out!”

*the land of Naphtali, and later he made heavy the way to the sea, what lies across the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.*

Isaiah 8:21-23 is a confusing and contested section of Hebrew. Almost every commentator has a slightly different theory for how to make sense of the text,<sup>18</sup> and at the end of the day, none of the arguments for one understanding over the other are particularly convincing. Each one has problems and leaves questions unanswered. However, while the specifics of these verses are highly contested, the main idea of vv. 21-22 is universally accepted. And it can be summed up in one word: despair. There are three main exegetical issues that must be solved before vv. 21-23 can be understood: the identity of the “he/it” and the “she/it” and the meaning of v. 23.

The first question that must be answered in order to understand vv. 21-23 is, “Who do the masculine singular subject and הֵנָּה refer to?” The first option, which is presented by Knud Jeppesen, is that the “he” refers to Isaiah and “her” refers to Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup> According to Jeppesen, vv. 21-22 depict Isaiah going through a time of spiritual depression in which he is disillusioned by his ministry and God’s work among Israel. While this is an interesting theory (and actually fits very well with the removal of God’s presence that v. 17), there are some serious flaws with the view. The first is that Isaiah has already declared in v. 17 that he will hope in Yahweh. Therefore, if Isaiah is taken as the subject, there is no explanation for the sudden shift in his perspective. What changes that would cause him to spiral into depression?

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<sup>18</sup> The prominent theories include: some sort of text critical solution, interpreting the passage as a description of Israel in exile with a future hope, and interpreting the passage as a description of Israel’s demise both past and future. The more outlandish theories include: interpreting the passage as Isaiah’s experience of despair and rebellion (see below), and positing multiple speakers for these verses (Watts, *Isaiah*, 125-128).

<sup>19</sup> Knud Jeppesen, “Call and Frustration: A New Understanding of Isaiah viii 21-22,” *Vetus Testamentum* 32.2 (1982): 149-150.

The second problem is that this view depends on an assumed break between v. 20 and v. 21.

The statement in v. 20 about the lack of a dawn for the people leads so naturally into the darkness of v. 21 that it would be exegetically irresponsible to separate the two. Instead, the subject of this section should be understood as referring to אֶל, a singular collective noun in Hebrew. לוֹ at the end of v. 20 naturally leads into this understanding of the subject of vv. 21-22.<sup>20</sup> This means that Is 8:21-22 depicts the darkness that the people of God face after their rejection of God's law and testimony as the only source of hope. Because they have run off to necromancers, God has thrust them into deep darkness.

The final issue of interpretation in this section is over the meaning of v. 23.<sup>21</sup> This verse has engendered a variety of interpretations, many of them exact opposites from one another. Ultimately, one's understanding of this verse depends on two things. The first is the meaning of מִיָּצֵף. How is this word to be understood in light of the preceding verse? How can there be both "gloom" and "no gloom?" The second is the meaning of הִקְבִּיד/הִקְלָה. Literally these two verbs mean "he made light" and "he made heavy," respectively. While הִקְלָה is always understood negatively (i.e. "he brought low"), there is debate about whether הִקְבִּיד means "he made glorious" or "he oppressed." How one interprets these leads to one of two conclusions: either the verse begins the hopeful shift that is continued in 9:1 or the verse continues the despair of 8:21-22. This paper will argue that 8:23 continues the despair

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<sup>20</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah: Volume 1* (trans. Rev. James Martin; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 241.

<sup>21</sup> Note to the professor: At the risk of saying too much prior to receiving a grade, I was extremely frustrated by the exegetical options for this verse. The options that make the most sense are text critical solutions with no textual basis. The options that make are attested from manuscripts don't seem to flow logically. I would greatly appreciate any insight or sources that you could provide.

depicted in 8:21-22.<sup>22</sup>

Most English translations interpret 8:23 as the beginning of the hope found in chapter 9. The ESV for instance reads, “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.” The main advantage of this translation is that it is a straightforward understanding of the text. Additionally, it does not have to play games with the מוֹעֵד/מְעוֹדָה parallel like many interpretations do.<sup>23</sup> And while not the normal translation of כִּי, “But” is still a legitimate translation.<sup>24</sup> Finally, it is based on extant manuscripts rather than hypothetical readings. The main problem with this interpretation is that it makes no sense when taken on the heels of vv. 21-22.<sup>25</sup> Whether it is understood as “for” or “but,” כִּי clearly implies some sort of logical relationship between this verse and what precedes it. It borders on non-sensical for Isaiah to talk about the people experiencing “gloom of anguish” and then immediately say, “For/but no gloom for her.”

Therefore, the more likely option is that this verse continues the gloom and despair

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<sup>22</sup> Two things should be noted about the two options in regard to the interpretation of this verse. The first is that it is ultimately of very little consequence regarding the overall flow of 8:16-9:1. Regardless of how one interprets 8:23, the overall idea is still one of despair moving into restoration and hope. The second thing to note, as suggested in F.C. Jennings, *Studies in Isaiah* (New York: Bible Truth Press), 107, is that the ambiguity and uncertainty in this verse could be intentional. While understood negatively in its original context, it is possible that the divine author has retained this grammatical ambiguity in order to show how the light, Jesus Christ, has made glorious what was once weighed-down.

<sup>23</sup> C.F. Whitley, “The Language and Exegesis of Isaiah 8:16-23,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 90.1 (1978): 33.

<sup>24</sup> Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2003), 152.

<sup>25</sup> John P. Peters, “Notes on Some Difficult Passages in the Old Testament,” *JBL* 11.1 (1892): 45.

from the preceding verses.<sup>26</sup> The main positive of this view is that it allows the verse to be taken in its natural flow from the preceding verses and makes sense of the use of כִּי as a conjunction bridging v. 22 and v. 23. The only difficulty is what to make of מוֹצֵף. How can “no gloom” be understood in a negative light? This word appears only here in the Bible, and its cognate מוֹצֵף is only used once: in the immediately preceding verse. This means that there is some debate about the actual meaning of this word and what words it is related to. Most English translations follow Brown, Driver, and Briggs in translating it “gloom.”<sup>27</sup> But Holladay gives the gloss “glimmer.”<sup>28</sup> Given what these two glosses have in common, it is possible that מוֹצֵף carries the idea of a faint light in the midst of darkness. So when it is used in conjunction with “anguish” (v. 22), it carries the idea of despair, but when v. 23 speaks of a lack of מוֹצֵף, the idea is that there is no light, no dawn, no hope. This would parallel nicely with the lack of a dawn for idolaters that is described in v. 20.

How then are we to understand Isaiah’s message in vv. 21-23? It is one of despair and hopelessness. This despair begins with the end of v. 20 in which those who seek after idols are described as having “no dawn,” an objective description of their lack of hope for a future.<sup>29</sup> 8:21-23 then describe the hopeless night that comes because Judah has rejected the word of Yahweh, who is now pouring out His covenant displeasure.<sup>30</sup> As an angry response

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<sup>26</sup> There are many different ways that the specifics of this passage have been interpreted from the perspective of despair. Whitley, “Exegesis,” 33-37, summarizes some of these.

<sup>27</sup> Francis Brown, *The Brown-driver-briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 734.

<sup>28</sup> Holladay, *Lexicon*, 186.

<sup>29</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 97.

<sup>30</sup> Hunger points to a lack of food, which is one of the covenant curses described in Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

to their difficulties, the people curse God and their king.<sup>31</sup> Their despair increases as they look all around them (up to the sky and down to the earth), and everywhere they look they see despair and misery.<sup>32</sup> Here is Israel's darkest hour. Hope and light are nowhere to be found as the people experience the consequences of their rejection of Yahweh. But, as is the case so often, God's grace will come in the darkest hour.

### **God Provides Hope (9:1)**

*<sup>1</sup>The people walking in the darkness saw a great light. The ones sitting in a land of shadow, a light shines upon them.*

Suddenly in the midst of the darkness, a light shines. God provides hope for those who are lost in the dark of night. The parallels and contrasts between this verse and the ones that came before are numerous, but only a few will be mentioned here. The first is the thematic contrast between darkness and light. 8:21-23 is full of words reflecting darkness and night: "darkness," "gloom," "deep darkness." In comparison, 9:1 describes "a light shin[ing]." This contrast in themes is strengthened by the use of אִשְׁרָאֵל in 9:1, which is also used in 8:22.<sup>33</sup> Those who walked through the darkness of 8:22 are now seeing the light of 9:1. Another parallel in these verses that is related to this theme of darkness and light is the contrast between "no dawn" in 8:20 and the light shining in 9:1. Motyer translates ("shines") as "has dawned,"<sup>34</sup> bringing out this contrast more explicitly.

Why do these parallels matter? What is the author trying to get at? The point of these vivid contrasts is to teach that God is bringing hope out of a seemingly hopeless situation.

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<sup>31</sup> Harman, *Isaiah*, 97.

<sup>32</sup> Mackay, *Isaiah*, 233.

<sup>33</sup> Mackay, *Isaiah*, 237.

<sup>34</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 100.

For those who put their faith in Yahweh, darkness does not have the final word. No matter how dark things may seem, Yahweh can always break through the darkness. And not only can God bring good out of the darkness, but in some way, Yahweh uses the darkness to bring about the good that He purposes. His light is brighter because of the darkness that comes before. As Delitzsch says, “Salvation would not break forth till it had become utterly dark along the horizon of Israel... till the land of Jehovah had become a land of the shadow of death on account of the apostasy of its inhabitants from Jehovah.”<sup>35</sup> God waited until the darkness had reached its deepest, and in this moment, He chose to shine forth His light.

### **Consequence**

Reading Isaiah 9:1 in light of 8:16-23 produces a greater understanding of the text. It does so in three ways. The first way that 8:16-23 sheds new light on 9:1 is by showing that Yahweh can bring hope out of the most hopeless situations; He gives us hope in the darkness. It is important to remember that for Isaiah’s audience the promise of light was still just that: a promise. Because these words would not be fulfilled for many years (either in Hezekiah or the exile<sup>36</sup> and ultimately in Jesus Christ), at the time that Isaiah wrote them they were still just words of hope. The people’s circumstances had not changed. They were still living in the midst of a sinful nation destined for judgment and exile.<sup>37</sup>

The second thing that 8:16-23 reveals in conjunction with 9:1 is that there are two types of people going through the darkness. The first are those described in 8:19-20 who have “no dawn.” Apart from trusting in Yahweh and His word, there is no hope during the

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<sup>35</sup> Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 245.

<sup>36</sup> Samuel A.B. Mercer, “Critical Note: Isaiah 9:1-2,” *Anglican Theological Review* 2.2 (1919): 152.

<sup>37</sup> Hoeksema, *Redeemed*, 149.

times of darkness and despair. But for those who trust in Yahweh, who look “to the teaching and to the testimony,” a light will one day shine on them.<sup>38</sup> Related to this is the fact that both types of people go through the darkness. Trusting in Yahweh and His word does not exempt us from the tragedy and seeming hopelessness of life. What separates those who trust in Yahweh is the presence of a dawn, not the lack of night.

Finally, any discussion of 9:1 would be incomplete without a word about where this light comes from. The gospel of Matthew answers this for us: “And leaving Nazareth [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled... the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light” (Matthew 4:13-14, 16).<sup>39</sup> Jesus is the great light that shines on we who were once in darkness. Jesus is the one who brings the dawn. Jesus is the one who comes to us in the midst of our hopelessness and sin and provides forgiveness and hope. Jesus can do this because experienced the darkness and hopelessness of the cross only to rise again at dawn three days later. No matter how dark the night, Jesus’ light can shine through it.

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<sup>38</sup> Hoeksema, *Redeemed*, 147.

<sup>39</sup> Frustratingly, Matthew’s quotation of these verses omits all the controversial aspects of Isaiah 8:23.