

**Isaiah 10:33–11:16 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power; the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low. <sup>34</sup> He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe, and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One.

<sup>1</sup> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. <sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. <sup>10</sup> In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious. <sup>11</sup> In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea. <sup>12</sup> He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. <sup>13</sup> The jealousy of Ephraim shall depart, and those who harass Judah shall be cut off;



Ephraim shall not be jealous of Judah, and Judah shall not harass Ephraim. <sup>14</sup> But they shall swoop down on the shoulder of the Philistines in the west, and together they shall plunder the people of the east. They shall put out their hand against Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites shall obey them. <sup>15</sup> And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the River with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. <sup>16</sup> And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt.

### **DISCUSSION:**

1. Why do we have Christmas trees? Shouldn't we have Christmas stumps!?

*(Joke)*

2. In the past we have discussed the fact that biblical prophecy often has "near" and "far" components. What are the "near" components of Isaiah 10-11 that were immediately applicable to the original audience? What are the "far" components?

*Near: God will cut down the leaders of Israel (the kings) and ultimately the rulers of Assyria and Babylon. Eventually God will deliver his people from exile (after 70 years)....but these events fall short of the magnificent events and the leader described, so there is a "FAR" component.*

*Far: The coming (and ultimately second coming) of the "root of Jesse", Jesus the Christ. The Spirit was upon Him (cf. his Baptism Matt 3:16). His enemies will ultimately be dealt with (Rev 1:7) and His people will be gathered. His ultimate fulfilled kingdom will be a renewed / re-Creation like the one described.*

3. What "Spirit" is being described in Isa 11:2-4?

*Holy Spirit. Some have called this the "seven fold Spirit of God", the seven showing it's completeness and perfection.*

4. In what way is Jesus the "root of Jesse?" Why do you think Isaiah didn't say "the root of David?"

*I DON'T KNOW. But, I will offer some conjecture. I'm not the only one to wonder (see blog post at the end of the "Supplemental Material"). I think it shows a return to square one, going even beyond David, who although he was a man after God's own heart, had his own failures. God cuts down all the kings of Israel and Judah, and starts over.*

5. Jesus didn't come the first time in the form of vegetation, and we're not looking for a shrubbery the second time either, so obviously there is some symbolism in Isaiah 11. What else in this passage do you think is meant to be symbolic?

*One of the bad things about this passage is how it gets mangled by people determine to shoehorn it into a 1,000 year millennial reign on earth. Maybe it will literally occur, but I think the animals' behavior is a very symbolic statement; it's a world so peaceful we can hardly grasp it. Same thing with the highway, drying up the sea and subdividing the river— God will remove all barriers to the reunion of His people (even Death!).*

6. What is important about the last part of Isaiah 11:4? What is Christ using to rule?

*His Word. He is "The Word." When He speaks things happen, people are raised from the Death, whole Universes are created (Col 1). He rules with His word and He rules over us even today with His word.*

7. What are the characteristics of the rule/ kingdom of Jesus described here? When will this occur? Compare Isaiah 11 with Rev 21:1-5.

*As noted earlier. Fear and Danger will disappear. Perfect peace and harmony. Reconciliation of old wounds.*

8. Can we know complete "peace on earth" until Christ's kingdom has come in fullness?

*People want it, because we are made in His image, but we won't know it completely until sin and the curse are removed.*

9. Christ will return and will gather all his people. How does this make you feel about those faithful people you know who have passed away?

*Reunion!*

10. In our current culture it can seem like God's people are being attacked from every angle. What does this passage teach us about the ultimate fate of God's enemies?

*Do not fear, in the face of impending immediate disaster, God has plans and always gets the last word.*

11. Ephraim is the term often used for the Northern Kingdom, Judah is the Southern Kingdom. What is v. 13 saying? Is there any application for us today?

*God will heal this rift in the Nation of Israel. Yes, He has given us the ministry of reconciliation. Ultimately he will heal all the rifts among his people (personal, theological, racial, national). There will be a day when we can all sit at his table enjoying Him and each other in true and complete fellowship. (Remember this when you sit down to a difficult Christmas meal this year!).*

# The Root of Jesse

[December 24, 2016](#) on [Isaiah 11:1-9](#) by [David Strain](#)

Now again if you would take a copy of the Scriptures in your hands and turn with me to the prophecy of Isaiah, chapter 11. Isaiah chapter 11 on page 575 in the church Bibles. It is the night before Christmas and I suspect that in most of our homes at least the stockings are hung by the chimney with care. I don't know about you, but whatever the famous poem says, on the night before Christmas we've always found it quite difficult to get our creatures to stop stirring all through the house, much less tucked up in bed! Whatever sugar plums are, unless they're some kind of new video game I've not heard about yet, it's highly unlikely that mine will have visions of them dancing in their heads tonight! Excitement runs pretty high; tomorrow is the big day! But I for one am very glad that we take this time out from all of that, all the preparations – probably you still have some to do. Maybe there's some preparation for the Christmas meal tomorrow or some presents still to be placed under the tree, but isn't it good to take some time out from all of that to worship together on Christmas Eve, to remember why we celebrate at all?

I want to invite you, if you would, to look at the passage before us because it is one place where we are reminded why we celebrate who Jesus is and what He came to do that first Christmas more than two millennia ago. And as we contemplate this passage together just for a few brief moments, I hope it will stir in all our hearts renewed wonder and gratitude for His birth and for our salvation. Before we read it together, would you bow your heads with me as we pray?

*God our Father, we bless You for Your holy Word. We pray that in all the happiness of these moments You would use Your Word by Your Holy Spirit to transpose these lesser joys to a higher key enabling us to rejoice in the gift of Christ, our great Savior. For we ask it in His name, amen.*

Isaiah chapter 11 at verse 1. This is the Word of Almighty God:

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put

his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples – of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”

Amen, and we praise God for speaking to us in His holy Word.

Probably the great symbol of Christmas is the tree. I love a good Christmas tree, don't you? All decorated, sparkling with lights, covered in ornaments; those ornaments, many of them perhaps in your home, tell a story of some significance to your family. Well, Isaiah suggests a different Christmas symbol for us in the opening verse of chapter 11. Not a Christmas tree, but the stump of a tree that has been chopped down. It probably wouldn't look quite so nice in your living room I don't suppose. It has the virtue at least of not shedding pine needles all over your floor, though I doubt there would be much market for it at Lowes in the month of December – Christmas tree stumps!

Nevertheless, it is a powerful metaphor that Isaiah is using. If you look with me at verse 1, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” Isaiah is saying that Israel, God's people, will suffer judgment and war. The line of the Davidic kings descended from Jesse will appear almost entirely destroyed. Nothing but the ruined stump of a once majestic tree. But the vital roots remain intact and so from the stump new life will one-day spring – a shoot, a branch that will bear fruit – the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the true and final King will be born.

And verses 2 to 10 tell us about Him, about the Lord Jesus, about this coming King. They tell us why we celebrate. Here's what all the fuss is about, what all the festivities commemorate. Here's something worth rejoicing in. Notice three things very quickly! I promise I'll be brief. First, Isaiah tells us about His qualifications for rule in verse 2. Then in verses 3 and 4 he tells us about the characteristics of His rule. And then finally in verses 6 to 10, he tells us about the consummation of His rule, the climax of His rule. The qualifications, characteristics, and consummation of Christ's rule.

## **The Qualifications of His Rule**

The qualifications of His rule first. Do you see them in verse 2? In a way that will surpass anyone else before or since, in His human nature, Jesus Christ will be endowed with the fullness of the Holy Spirit. “The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,” Isaiah says. And the fullness of the Spirit will produce in Him six characteristics that fit Him for His office as the Messianic King. Let me just list them as we look together again at verse 2. The Spirit of the Lord, Isaiah says, is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and of might, of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. These are the attributes of a great king. He understands what we need and what He needs to do for us. He has the wisdom to respond well to every challenge and meet every crisis. He has the power to effect lasting change. And above all, He trembles in awe and reverence before the Lord His God.

## **A Perfectly Qualified King**

And when you read through the Gospel accounts we discover that really is a marvelous short description of the character of Jesus Christ. “He grew in wisdom and in stature before God and man,” Luke says of Him. Mark chapter 6 verse 2 tells how, “Many who heard him were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?’” And then toward the end of His ministry in the Garden of Gethsemane, in agony, submerged beneath the enormity of the final climactic task still ahead of Him, we hear Him saying to God, “Not My will be done, but Your will be done.” And He goes obediently to the cross as the Father calls Him to make full payment for our sin. So here is a Man marked, even at this moment of unimaginable pressure and temptation, to turn aside and to go His own way; here is a Man marked, rather, by the fear of the Lord. And so we rejoice this Christmas because Jesus Christ is a perfectly qualified King. There is no deficit in Him, no area of incompetence. There are not blind spots, no gaps in His ability. He is a sufficient Savior, perfectly qualified to receive your trust, infinitely deserving of your obedience and unfailingly able to save you. The shoot that comes from the stump of Jesse, the child who was born of the virgin and laid in a manger that first Christmas, is a perfect King under whose reign we find refuge. The qualifications of Christ’s reign.

## **The Characteristics of His Rule**

Then secondly, Isaiah tells us about the characteristics of Christ’s reign, verses 3 to 5. Really all Isaiah is doing here is applying the qualifications he’s just listed. The wisdom and the knowledge and the power and the fear of the Lord with which the Spirit-endowed the humanity of our Savior qualifying Him to rule, are now applied and worked out as He takes up that great work. Notice that His rule here is preeminently marked by justice and righteousness in judgment. He shall not judge by what He sees or decide by what His ears hear. How unlike us Jesus is! We judge a book by its cover all the time, don’t we? We are quick to pass sentence on people based on hearsay or rumor. We form our opinions often far too readily. We dismiss those we are called to love and serve sometimes with a self-justifying shrug. But never King Jesus! “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart.” Jesus sees all the way to the truth and nothing is hidden from His gaze. Instead, verse 4, “with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”

## **The Royal Scepter of His Word**

And the great instrument by which King Jesus shall accomplish all of this, Isaiah says is the Word of God. “He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.” As Calvin put it, “The prophet here extols the efficacy of the Word which is Christ’s royal scepter.” He rules by the royal scepter of His Word. He speaks and sinners are saved and the wicked are judged. “He speaks and listening to His voice new life the dead receive. The mournful, broken hearts are healed and the humble poor believe.” One of the great grounds for joy this Christmas Eve is that King Jesus, who was born to rule, rules us still by the royal scepter of His holy Word. The baby of Bethlehem, the Man of Calvary, the King on the throne speaks to us today in holy Scripture.

## **The Consummation of Christ’s Rule**

The qualifications of Christ's rule, the characteristics of His rule; finally, the consummation of Christ's rule. Now it's Christmas Eve. We're all anticipating tomorrow when we remember Jesus' birth. But Isaiah chapter 11 summons us not just to look back at the first coming of Jesus with gratitude but also to look forward to the final coming of Jesus at the end of the age with joyful expectation. You may have heard it pointed out that Isaac Watts' famous and beloved Christmas carol, "Joy to the World," was Watts' meditation on Psalm 98, was not originally written to celebrate the birth of Christ. It was originally written to celebrate the return of Christ. And I think it's wonderful that at Christmastime when we remember the birth of Jesus we're singing a carol that actually looks forward to His return when the work He came to do that first Christmas is brought to its completion at last.

And that is the picture Isaiah gives us in verses 6 to 10, of the work, finished, at last, the final removal of the effects of sin. There are echoes of Eden that was lost by our first parents' disobedience. Here they are now restored by Christ's obedience and blood. It is creation absent death and suffering where all things live together in harmony and security and peace. Isn't that something to long for this Christmas Eve? A day will come when the reign of Christ will reach its consummation. When, verse 9, "they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

### **Why the Birth of Jesus is Worth Celebrating?**

So why is the birth of Jesus worth celebrating with all the festivities that surround the Christmas season? Because the baby that was born was filled with the Spirit and perfectly qualified to be King and Savior to all of us. Because He reigns in righteousness and wields the royal scepter of His Word even now in our hearts. And because the Baby who was born, the Man who was crucified and the King who reigns on heaven's throne, He's coming back again one day soon. He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. He will put all things to right. Death will die, sin will be removed, sorrow will dissolve and every tear wiped from our eyes, and the world to come, the new creation will be a perfect realm of peace under the reign of the Prince of Peace. The final gift of that first Christmas will be a new creation, a home of righteousness, where we and all those who have gone ahead of us trusting in Christ shall be marvelously reunited in the adoration of our Savior.

I wonder if this Christmas you will come with the angels and with the shepherds and with your friends and family gathered here this evening if you will come and bend your knee before King Jesus. There is no greater joy, no greater joy, than knowing Him. Joy to the world, the Lord has come! Let earth receive her King! Let every heart prepare Him room and heaven and nature sing! Let's bow our heads as we pray together!

*God our Father, we praise You for the gift of Jesus. As we open presents, maybe tonight, maybe tomorrow, as we rejoice in the company of loved one and perhaps for some of us as we mourn the passing, the loss of others for whom we care, give to us the greater and deeper and untouchable joy of knowing Jesus, bending our knee before King Jesus and finding under His rule joy and peace for our hearts for time and for eternity. For we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.*

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#### (4) *The Reign of a Righteous King (11:1–16)*

THEOLOGY. This new hopeful section returns to the theme of God's kingdom provisions and the messianic hope for the world, corresponding to the initial discussion of this theme in 9:1–7. Although the audience may presently suffer under adverse conditions as a consequence of Ahaz's sins and Assyria's oppression (11:16), they should trust God because of what he will do in the future. He will not abandon his people, but will cause the remnant to return (10:20–27; 11:10–12), deliver them from oppression, re-establish them as his holy people in Zion (cf. 4:2–6), and inaugurate an era of peace between the nations (2:1–5). This future glorious kingdom and its just ruler (9:1–7; 11:1–9) are set in contrast to the Assyrian kingdom and its arrogant ruler in 10:5–14. A Davidic king who rules with justice and gathers people from the far reaches of the world will replace the proud Assyrian tyrant who destroys and scatters many nations. The wisdom, strength, and Spirit of the LORD will empower this new king (11:1–4); he will not arrogantly depend on his own wisdom and strength as did the haughty king of Assyria. God's people will no longer be weak and under a foreign yoke (10:10–11, 24–27), but will be powerful and free of

domination (11:10–16).

Common theological themes play an important part in linking chaps. 10 and 11. For example, the remnant's return to the land in 11:10–14 is consistent with the remnant's return to God in 10:20–23. In both 10:26 and 11:15–16, the prophet recalls God's mighty deliverance of his people from Egypt at the Red Sea in order to arouse faith in the listeners. Throughout these chapters hope comes from trusting and fearing God (as in 7:3–9, 8:12–13, 17; 9:13; 10:20–24), not from relying on some strong foreign power. Though there is little historical information that would help date this message, these themes would be an appropriate message of hope (similar to 9:1–7) during the difficult time of Ahaz when everything seemed hopelessly lost. The future orientation of this chapter means that there are almost no hints concerning the actual date when this message was spoken.<sup>408</sup>

<sup>408</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 469, hypothesizes that this message reflects Isaiah's disappointment in Hezekiah when he turned to Egypt for help. Thus Isaiah realized that Hezekiah was not that ideal Davidic king he was looking for, so in chap. 11 he envisions another hope for the nation. This, along with Sweeney's, *Isaiah 1–39*, 204, attempt to connect the "little boy will lead them" in 11:6 with

The text describes a new ruler from Jesse's Davidic line (11:1) who fears the Lord (11:2–3), practices justice (11:4–5), establishes peace (11:6–9), slays the wicked (11:4), restores the oppressed people of Judah and Israel (11:10–16), and causes the earth to be full of the knowledge of the Lord (11:9). This figure calls to mind another kingly figure who will rule justly (Ps 72:1–2, 7), establish a time of peace and prosperity (72:3, 7, 16), deliver the oppressed (72:2, 4, 12–14), and cause the earth to be full of the glory of the Lord (72:19).<sup>409</sup> This king in Ps 72 will rule the whole earth, from sea to sea, forever. He appears to be the same messianic figure mentioned in Ps 2, the one in the Davidic covenant in 2 Sam 7:11–16, and the one ruling justly on the throne of David in Isa 9:1–7. It seems totally inappropriate to identify this new king with Ahaz or Hezekiah.<sup>410</sup>

<sup>409</sup> Although these pictures of this new king may seem somewhat fantastic, some of the “Assyrian apocalyptic prophecies” also foresee times of great peace, prosperity, justice, joy, and the end of oppression. See W. W. Hallo, “Akkadian Apocalypses,” *IEJ* (1966): 231–242, or A. K. Grayson, “Akkadian Prophecies,” *JCS* (1964): 7–30.

<sup>410</sup> Hayes and Irvine, *Isaiah*, 213, think the author is presenting his great expectation of

GENRE. These messages begin with an announcement of the coming of a royal savior in 11:1–5 (not a birth announcement as in 9:1–7), a vision of a peaceful kingdom in 11:6–9, and a salvation oracle concerning the restoration of Israel in 11:10–16. The common theme of hope and divine deliverance from the evils of corrupt national and international relationships infiltrates the whole section. Although 11:10–11 fits the themes of the second half of the chapter, its narrative form is surprising in the middle of the poetic oracles all around it.

The idyllic description of a paradise-like condition in 11:6–9 presents numerous hermeneutical problems for interpreters. Hosea already has introduced the theme of God's covenant with the animals (Hos 2:18) and one of the covenant blessings looked forward to a time when there would be peace with the animals (Lev 26:6), but none of these are as explicit or

Ahaz after the end of the Syro-Ephraimite War, while Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 174, believes “the context calls for a near fulfillment.... This was fulfilled: Hezekiah (and a century later, Josiah) was to occupy the throne.” Oswalt, “God's Determination to Redeem His People,” *RE* 88 (1991): 153–65, argues strongly for connecting this figure to the messianic figure in 9:1–7.

as detailed as the peaceful relationship between the animals and mankind in 11:6–9. Some regard this as a later insertion based on similar motifs in 65:25, but J. van Ruiten has shown that it makes more sense to see 65:25 as dependent on the traditions in 11:6–9.<sup>411</sup> It was not uncommon in the ancient Near East (and still today) to expect that the rise of a new political leader will produce an idyllic time of peace<sup>412</sup> and a return to Eden-like conditions (51:3). One might interpret these animals metaphorically (Ezek 22:27 calls Judah’s officials wolves and Ezek 34:6 calls the people sheep) though later

<sup>411</sup> J. T. van Ruiten, “The Intertextual Relationship between Isaiah 65. 25 and Isaiah 11. 6–9,” in *The Scriptures and the Scrolls: Fs A. S. van der Woude*, ed. F. G. Martinez, et al., VTSupp 49 (1992): 31–42, examines the evidence and develops argument to show that the shorter discussion in 65:25 was based on the whole context of 11:6–9. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, 265, also holds 11:6–9 as the source of 65:25.

<sup>412</sup> The Egyptian “prophecy” of Nefer-Rohu (*ANET*, 444–446) and similar Mesopotamian “prophecies” (*ANET*, 606–607) expect ideal days ahead when the new king begins his rule. There is some question about whether these were actually prophecies about the future; instead, they appear to be political propaganda to support the coronation of a new king.

prophets also seem to understand the ideal that God will restore the paradise of Eden once again at the end of time (cf. Ezek 34:25; 36:35). One should not be concerned with trying to explain the biology of how lions can survive by eating straw or how it is possible for there to be such dramatic changes in the animal behavior of vicious wild beasts. The prophet draws a picture of how God will transform the world. The picture communicates the beauty of his revolutionary transformational power, no matter how one interprets the scene (literally or metaphorically).

STRUCTURE. The hopeful promises of a Davidic shoot out of a stump in 11:1 is not directly connected to the fallen trees of Assyria in 1:29–31.<sup>413</sup> The section

<sup>413</sup> Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12*, 251,254, takes 10:33–34 as a description of God’s destruction of Judah in 586 BC and 11:1 as God’s development of eschatological hope (the shoot) out of the fallen trees of Judah in 10:33–34. Beuken, “Emergence of the Shoot of Jesse,” 88–108, found syntactical continuity in the verbs within chaps. 10 and 11, so he interpreted 10:5–11:16 as one unit made up of two diptychs (one negative and one positive) in the same temporal era. However, this ignores the change of genre in 11:1–9 that points to a new literary unit. The eschatological focus of chap.

includes two main paragraphs:

The just and peaceful reign of a Davidic Branch	11:1–9
The Davidic ruler	1–5
The idyllic kingdom	6–9
The Gathering of the nations to God	11:10–16
Reclaiming the remnant	10–12
Relations between the nations	13–14
God will bring the nations	15–16

Through the repetition of the same words, the emphasis of the first paragraph is directed toward how the “Spirit” will give “knowledge/wisdom” in order to establish “righteousness and justice.” The second half of the chapter focuses on the gathering of the remnant of both Gentile and Hebrew peoples from the distant corners of the earth (11:10–16). This paragraph is introduced by two “in that day” clauses (11:10–11) that were probably added when Isaiah put this material into written form. This conclusion seems evident because (a) 11:10–11 is prose and not poetry like the rest of the chapter; (b) the introductory “in that day” clauses are not found elsewhere in the chapter; and (c) 11:10 repeats much of 11:1, 12, while 11:11 summarizes 11:12, 16.

## THE JUST AND PEACEFUL REIGN OF A DAVIDIC BRANCH (11:1–9)

<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.

**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.**

**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 around  
his waist.

<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.  
7 The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the  
ox.  
8 The infant will play near the hole of the  
cobra,  
and the young child put his hand  
into the viper's nest.  
9 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.

11:1 The contrast between the lofty/proud trees of Assyria and the lowly “slip, stump”<sup>414</sup> of Jesse confirms that God is in the business of demonstrating his glory by raising up people of humble means. This has always been God’s methodology. The unimpressive green

<sup>414</sup> N. Stokholm and S. R. Willeson, “geza’,” *Scandinavian Journal of Old Testament* 18 (2004): 147–56, views גֵּזַע as coming from the Semitic root meaning “to cut, saw, lop off,” so this noun would refer to what was cut off: a “slip, cutting.” This would be a cutting from a branch that would be stuck in water to root and later planted. K. E. Pomykala, *The Davidic Dynasty Tradition*

“shoot” (*hōṭer*) that will sprout from the stump of Jesse is a person from the Davidic royal line of Jesse,<sup>415</sup> apparently the same Davidic son mentioned in 9:6–7. Although 4:2, 9:6 and 11:1 employ different Hebrew terms to refer to this messianic figure, the writer seems to be making a conscious connection between the “Branch of the LORD” in 4:2, the Davidic ruler in 9:7, and the shoot that will come from the stump of Jesse in 11:1.<sup>416</sup> This twig/branch/shoot, which is the sign of life within the stump, will bear fruit—it will not die out or be cut off. The “shoot” (*hōṭer*) is a symbol of hope and a clear contrast to the hopelessness of Ahaz’s policies, which nearly destroyed the nation and its Davidic line of rulers (the stump).

11:2 This Davidic individual will experience God’s abundant blessing on his life. Israelite history causes one to expect that

<sup>415</sup> Essarhaddon, the Assyrian king about seventy years later, was called a “precious branch of Baltil, an enduring shoot” according to *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien* (ed.

<sup>416</sup> In 4:2 גֵּזַע, “growth, sprout, branch” is found, but in 11:1 הֹטֵר and נֹצֵר, “shoot” and “twig, branch,” are used because they describe the growth coming from the roots of a tree. The stump imagery was used earlier in 6:13.

God would give his chosen kings a special measure of his spirit so that the king will follow God's ways (1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6; 19:9; 20:23). As the Spirit of God rested on his servant David in the past (1 Sam 16:1–13; 2 Sam 23:2), so the divine Spirit will dwell or “rest” (*nāḥâ*) on this new Davidic Branch, enabling God to use him in a special way.<sup>417</sup> Three pairs of explanations define the Spirit's impact on the character and abilities of this person. First, the Spirit's influence will affect the mental abilities of wisdom and understanding as well as the moral ability to make right choices in judicial decisions (11:3; 1 Kgs 3:12, 28). Although the focus is on the internal capacity to perceive the

<sup>417</sup> The Spirit of God (רוּחַ יְהוָה) gives special abilities to this person, just like he filled Bezalel and gave him “skill, ability and knowledge in all crafts” (Exod 31:3–5). The Spirit came upon Gideon and Samson to give them the courage to fight (Judg 6:34; 14:6), and he dwelt in Moses, Joshua, and the seventy elders of Israel to give them the authority and ability to lead the nation (Num 11:17; 27:18). Later Isaiah connects the coming of the Spirit with the transformation of nature, revival and just behavior, and a time of peace (32:15–18; 44:1–5). The so-called “Servant Songs” also indicate that God will pour out his Spirit on God's special servant (42:1; 61:1–2).

relationships between factors and consequences, this gifting was aimed at the practical enabling of this future leader to rule with God's wisdom (11:3–5), not just to create an extremely smart person. Wildberger contrasts these two characteristics by relating wisdom to handling problems of daily living, while understanding is the ability “to see beyond the details of a particular situation, make an appropriate assessment, and come to conclusions about necessary decisions.”<sup>418</sup> This new ruler will not make the foolish mistakes of Ahaz who acted based on what made sense from a shortsighted, human, political perspective.

Second, the Spirit of God will equip leaders with gifts related to the practical accomplishment of tasks. Because God will guide him, this person will give counsel (“wonderful counsel” in 9:6), devise amazing plans, and have the power to carry them out. This equipping does not relate to military planning alone (cf. 36:5), but would certainly include it (see 11:14–16). His action stands in contrast to Ahaz (2 Chr 28; Isa 7:1–13) and the Assyrian king (10:5–14), who made arrogant and unwise plans with the main purpose of surviving militarily rather than honor-

<sup>418</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 472, believes these were given to enable to rule and judge justly.



ing God by trusting in his power (cf. [7:1–25](#)).

Third, God will grant this person experiential knowledge of God that will be characterized by a fear of God.<sup>419</sup> These two factors, knowledge and fear, point to an intimate relationship between this ruler and God.

Through the work of the Spirit and his close contact with God, this new leader will allow God to speak through his words and reveal himself through his actions. These are characteristics of an ideal charismatic royal leader who trusts God. These are the kind of spiritual leadership qualities that believers should use as a model when they are looking for godly leadership even today.

**11:3–5** These gifts of the Spirit will enable the new Davidic ruler to govern very differently from Ahaz. Kings were ultimately responsible for establishing justice in each nation and the establishment of a just society was an ideal of ancient Near Eastern kings.<sup>420</sup> Godly

<sup>419</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, 103, says, “The knowledge (*da’at*) of God is the essence of the right relationship of a creature to the creator ([Hos 2:22\[20\]; 4:1](#)). It is based on love and devotion.”

<sup>420</sup> The prologue to the Lipit Ishtar Laws indicates that the gods made Lipit Ishtar king “in order to establish justice in the land” ([ANET](#),

kings like David, Jehoshaphat, and Josiah did what was just in their judgments ([2 Sam 8:15; 2 Chr 19:5–7; Jer 22:15–16](#)), and the expectations for the future included a strong emphasis on an ideal era of justice ([Ps 72:1–4](#)). When a king “enjoys, delights in”<sup>421</sup> his close relationship with God, he has a source of moral direction derived

[159](#)), while Danel in the Keret Epic from Ugarit speaks of his role of “Judging the cause of the widow, adjudicating the case of the fatherless” ([ANET](#), 151). F. C. Fensham, “Widow, Orphan, and the Poor in the Ancient Near Eastern Legal and Wisdom Literature,” *JNES* 21 (1962): 129–39, has an overview of the literature that discusses this ideal.

<sup>421</sup> The root [נִיַּחַ](#) means “to smell an odor” ([Gen 8:21; Lev 26:31](#)), but it metaphorically expresses the idea of the “delight, pleasure” one has in smelling a good odor ([Am 5:21](#)). This verb is a *hiphil* infinitive construct, which often introduces a circumstantial clause when it is preceded by a preposition (causal, purpose, result, means, temporal), or in a looser connection to express attendant circumstances ([GKC §114 f, o](#)). If the latter approach is taken here (since there is no preposition before the infinitive construct), one might read the first clause, “by his delighting in the fear of the Lord, he will ...” making the first clause subordinate to the main verb in the second line.

from a divine perspective on judicial affairs. This will cause him to make decisions as God judges, not based on the outward appearance of the person (that one can see) or on false claims (that one may hear). Decisions will be based on the true nature of the heart (1 Sam 16:7). Status, money, or political influence will not derail this new Davidic ruler's perspective on justice, for idle boasts, excuses, deceptive lies, and false information by the guilty will not prevent the truth from being known. This is the kind of justice and righteousness already attributed to the eternal reign of the one who will sit on the throne of David in 9:7. This justice will be available to all (Lev 24:15; Deut 19:20), especially for the needy and poor, who frequently were cheated by the upper class (1:17, 23). This would contrast greatly with the oppression of the poor and robbing of the fatherless that existed in the reign of Ahaz (10:1–2).

This reign of justice will require the condemnation of wickedness, the imposition of penalties on the wicked, and the removal of God's enemies (11:4b). The means of judgment will be the mouth of the Davidic ruler (the "rod/scepter of his mouth" and the "breath of his lips"), meaning royal decrees. Although the phrasing is peculiar, since lips do not lit-

erally slay people, it is clear that the authority of the word of this ruler is fully identified with the execution of his will. No one can resist his power and no injustice will remain in his kingdom. The aim is not to present a negative view of uncontrolled slaughter of wicked people, but to emphasize that everything will be guided by principles of justice, upright behavior, and consistent faithfulness (11:5). The righteous character of the Messiah will enable him to do the right thing in all circumstances while his faithfulness will ensure his consistent dependability. He will display perfectly the character of God because the divine Spirit's gifts will hang like clothes (a belt or sash) around him (cf. 59:17–20; Eph 6:10–18).

11:6–9 The future kingdom is described as something similar to a paradise with peace and security, even the removal of the original curse on the relationship between man and the animals (Gen 3:14–19). Natural enemies in the animal kingdom will live together,<sup>422</sup> feed together, and play together,<sup>423</sup> but the

<sup>422</sup> Both in v. 6 and 7 the verb יָרַבַּץ, "to stretch out, lie down," is used to describe how these animals live and relax together without fear.

<sup>423</sup> The first two phrases and the last phrase have a verb in 11:6, but the third phrase, "the calf, the lion, and the yearling together," has



strong or poisonous beasts will not harm anyone. Fear and danger will disappear and they will be replaced with harmony and peaceful relationships. Formerly dangerous animals (like the wolf, lion, or cobra) will not even harm the most vulnerable children. This fundamental change in the nature of animals omits mention of the change in the nature of mankind, but the emphasis on righteousness and the end of evil requires a radical change in man's behavior too. This rather idyllic picture points to a future kingdom when there will be no evil, conflict, or death on God's holy mountain (cf. 2:2-5; 4:2-6; 65:25). The text does not fully explain what has brought about this transformation of the enmity between creatures; it just states that it will exist. One could certainly assume that the coming of the Spirit-filled ruler of righteousness from the line of David will have something to do with this new world order.

This will be the kingdom where God will live on Mount Zion and will teach all the people who come there (2:1-2). All the people there will be holy (4:3-4; 11:9). This will be the time when "the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD" (11:9). This is the time that the seraphim looked forward to in their song of praise in 6:3. It will be a glorious king-

dom that will make everyone forget about "the magical kingdoms" that people build on this earth.

#### THE GATHERING OF THE NATIONS TO GOD (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 toward 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.**

This part of the message is introduced by a parenthetical remark (11:10–11), and the whole is organized around three issues:

Reclaiming the remnant    11:10–12  
Relations between nations    11:13–14  
God will bring the nations    11:15–16

**11:10–11** The second paragraph connects the gathering of many people “in that day” to the Davidic ruler in Zion. Using themes from 2:2–5, 4:2–6, and 11:1, the prophet reminds his audience that God has planned their future, so their hope has not disappeared. The salvation oracle in 2:2–3 predicted a day when the nations will come to Jerusalem to receive

God’s instruction, though a Davidic Messiah is not mentioned. This chapter provides additional information indicating that the “root of Jesse” (from 11:1)<sup>424</sup> plays a central role in the process of gathering people from the nations.<sup>425</sup> This Davidic king “will be standing,”<sup>426</sup> he will not be defeated like Ahaz (see 7:7–9). He will serve as a banner<sup>427</sup> to rally around, so

<sup>424</sup> שֵׁרֵשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל, “root of Jesse,” uses a different word than חֹטֶר מִגִּזְעַי יִשְׂרָאֵל, “shoot from the stump of Jesse,” but the two phrases seem to mean the same thing.

<sup>425</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, I:393, believes the nations are Gentile nations, while Clements, *Isaiah* 1–39, 125–26, considers the whole section as a restoration of the Jews scattered in the exile. Childs, *Isaiah*, 105–106, thinks the root of Jesse is a representative of the remnant of Israel, while Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah* 1–39, 267, rejects this communal approach.

<sup>426</sup> The participle עֹמֵד, “standing,” has no tense, but the “in that day” clause at the beginning of verse implies that this action should be placed in a future time period, so “will be standing” is an appropriate translation.

<sup>427</sup> כִּי in a few instances shows a comparison and means, “like, as” (BDB, 512). In 5:26 God raised another banner/flag to the nations, but there it was a call to war against Judah. Here a

the nations “will seek, consult” (*yidrōšû*) him (reversing 9:13; 45:14–15), implying a level of trust and dependence on his advice (cf. 2:3–4). Their trust will not bring disappointment, for he will provide a glorious place of rest. Elsewhere God promises his people a blessed place of rest<sup>428</sup> (Deut 3:20; 12:9; Josh 1:13; 2 Sam 7:11; Ps 95:11; 132:14) and great glory (4:2, 5; 60:1–3). This presents a context very different from what the nation was presently experiencing during the Syro-Ephraimite War.

The second “in that day” statement (11:11) refers to God’s second act of grace, drawing on idea expressed in the poetic material in 11:12, 16. The verb “will reach out” (NIV) simply means “will add, increase, do” (*yôšîp*) in the Hebrew text, but many translators have smoothed out the sense.<sup>429</sup> God’s purpose will be “to

<sup>428</sup> This theme is dealt with extensively by G. von Rad, “There Remains Still a Place of Rest for the People of God,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 94–102, and W. C. Kaiser, “The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest,” *BSac* 130 (1973): 135–50.

<sup>429</sup> The Old Greek translation has “the Lord will stretch forth his hand again.” Many just add a verb (NIV adds “reach”), while Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 486–87, emends the read-

reclaim”<sup>430</sup> the remnant, an idea parallel to the idea of paying a price to redeem a person from slavery (cf. Exod 15:16). This second divine act draws a comparison with God’s initial redemption of his people from Egyptian bondage.<sup>431</sup> The idea

ing to get תַּשִּׁיחַ, “will raise high,” instead of שֵׁנִית, “second.” A more literal translation is “the Lord will add his hand a second time,” which gives the sense that “God will act once again in power” to accomplish his will. H. G. M. Williamson, “Isaiah XI 11–16 and the Redaction of Isaiah I–II,” *Congress Volume: Paris 1992*, VTSup (Leiden: Brill, 1995): 343–57, finds identical terminology (hand, raising the hand [see 49:22], nations from afar) in 5:25–26 and 11:11–12, which both end major sections of 1–12, with the first using these ideas to point to the fall of Judah and the second pointing to the restoration.

<sup>430</sup> The *qal* infinitive construct לְקַנֹּת comes from קָנָה and means “to purchase, acquire” something, usually by paying money. This text does not define what will be paid to secure the people’s release from captivity in other nations. In Gen 14:19, 22 and Deut 32:6 קָנָה seems to have the meaning of “create,” thus this purchase creates a new entity, the people of God in their land.

<sup>431</sup> Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 491, believes this refers to a second return from exile and thus

expressed is similar to the concept of paying a ransom (*yôsiṭp*) to gain freedom from slavery (as in 43:3) or the idea of God redeeming (*yôsiṭp*) his people (as in Ps 74:2).

The people being “purchased” (the root *qānâ*) are probably the same ones identified as the remnant that will return to God in 10:20–23. This passage focuses on the nations from which the people will return. Since it is a prophetic statement, one should not assume that these people are exiles in each of these nations, though the Assyrians did exile many from Israel and Judah during this time period.<sup>432</sup> These nations represent places all over the world where Jewish people might live and work: in the south (Egypt and Cush), the north (Assyria and Hamath), the east (Elam and Babylon), and the west (islands of the sea). The Lord’s restorative work will be complete so that none of his peo-

<sup>432</sup> Some find no connection between 9:1–7 and chap. 11 while others see 11:10–16 as a very negative example of Jewish nationalism gone awry (not consistent with Isaiah’s theology) because they are especially offended by the vicious attacks on Judah’s enemies in 11:13–14). Childs, *Isaiah*, 105, rejects such interpretations and warns about creating a “canon within a canon,” by accepting certain verses and rejecting others.

ple will be left behind involuntarily in some distant nation.

**11:12** Here the text returns to the poetic form of communication after the brief parenthetical prose transition in 11:10–11. It is unclear whether the subject of the sentence is God (“he”), who will raise up a signal (the subject of 11:11), or whether the Davidic king (the subject of 11:10) is the one who will raise up the signal.<sup>433</sup> Since they work together as one in the rest of the chapter, the distinction is not of material significance. God will assemble three groups of people: (a) the nations; (b) the dispersed<sup>434</sup> Israelites; and (c) the scattered people of Judah. People from all over the world will return—there is no mention of any supposed “lost tribes of Israel” in Isaiah’s teachings. God knows where all his people are and he will bring them all back.

**11:13–14** Once everyone is back in the

<sup>433</sup> It seems best to make 11:12 consistent with 11:10, so that in both cases God is raising up the Davidic ruler as a signal.

<sup>434</sup> “Dispersed of” and “scattered of” are two *niphal* passive plural participles (one masculine גְּדָחִי, “banished, exiled,” and the second feminine נִפְצוֹת, “dispersed, scattered”) that function as construct nouns expressing the genitive idea in a construct relationship (GKC §116g-i).

peaceful land with a new Davidic king, the people will give up their feelings of inferiority, jealousy, superiority, and acts of war. These conflicting interests and hostilities go back to the time of Saul and David when the northern tribes made Ishbosheth, Saul's fourth son, king of Israel, while Judah made David their king (2 Sam 2:8–11). These conflicts resulted in the division of the nation into Israel and Judah after the death of Solomon (1 Kgs 12). Later Israel and Judah fought several wars against one another (2 Kgs 14:11–14; 16:5–9). But in this new era there will be a reversal of present hostilities between the nations during the Syro-Ephraimite War (7:1–6; 9:21). The verse does not proclaim the unification of the people into one nation, just a period of reconciliation between nations and an end of war (cf. 2:4).

Not only will internal conflict between brother nations end, but Judah and Israel will work together to defeat all their enemies, just as in the time of David. This idea is not contradictory to the idea of peace expressed in 11:6–9, but a prerequisite for peace, for 11:4b also refers to the Davidic ruler slaying the wicked when he initially sets up his kingdom. These conquests also assure the listener that all the land God promised to their forefathers

will be part of this new community. Isaiah does not promise a return to a small province or a partial restoration of a few tribal territories; he proclaims reestablishing the glorious theological ideal of a new Davidic kingdom comparable to or greater than the one that existed in the past. Finally, because of these battles, the people in the surrounding nations “will listen to/obey them” (*mišma‘tām*—better than NIV “will be subject”), suggesting an era of peace and harmony, not a time of oppressive forced subjugation of foreigners.

**11:15–16** The message of hope ends with a description of God's mighty acts that will make the return of the remnant possible. Using exodus imagery to remind the audience of God's great power, the prophet predicts another event parallel to God's “defeat, annihilation” (NIV has “dry up”)<sup>435</sup> of the Red Sea and “the river” (*hānāhār*, probably the

<sup>435</sup> The Hb. הָחַרְיִם from חָרַם, “to devote, ban, annihilate,” comes from the practice of dedicating a city to God through destruction, so the imagery does not quite fit what one does to the sea. NIV follows those who emend the text (see Wildberger, *Isaiah 1–12*, 486–88) to הָחַרְיֵב, “to dry up” (only a change of one letter), based on the Targum's translation “he will dry up.”

Nile).<sup>436</sup> The total annihilation of these obstacles creates an appropriate parallel to his “smiting of it” (*wēhikkāhû*, NIV has “break up”) in the next line. These acts represent the complete defeat of any natural or human force that might try to stand in the way of God’s plans. As in the original event, God used a strong east wind (Exod 14:21) that he “blew with his breath” (Exod 15:8, 10) so that his people could walk across in sandals on dry ground (cf. Exod 14:21–22). This is parallel to the “mighty<sup>437</sup> (NIV scorching) wind” he will use in the future. The prophet communicated to his audience that God’s power to save is unlimited. They can depend on him to deliver them in the future; there is no reason to give up on God even if things looked very bleak in

<sup>436</sup> Since “the river” (הַנָּהָר) is undefined, it could refer to the Euphrates based on a return from Assyria in 11:16 (as NIV) or the Nile based on the context of Egypt in 11:15a. Both usages are found elsewhere in Scripture (“river” refers to the Nile 19:5). The Nile Delta matches the idea of dividing a great river into “seven streams” at the end of this verse.

<sup>437</sup> The meaning of the Hb. word בְּעִים is unknown, though it may be related to an Arabic word that means “with heat” (thus the translation “scorching”). The Old Greek has “with a strong wind”

the days of Ahaz. The people of Judah can trust God’s promises.

God’s promise of deliverance is not some vague hope that applies only to an eschatological future people; it has implications for those listening to Isaiah during the time of Ahaz. Judah could see how the violent Assyrian Empire was sweeping through the land, devastating Israel and taking advantage of Judah during the Syro-Ephraimite War. This military defeat and subsequent captivity might have seemed like a contradiction to Isaiah’s lofty dreams in chap. 11, but God revealed that a remnant from among the exiles in Assyria would return, just like people returned from Egypt (10:23–26; 11:16). God would prepare a highway and lead them home, just like he guided the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness.

THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS. The theological message in chap. 11 provides additional progressive revelation on the earlier themes in 2:1–5; 4:2–6; 9:1–7; and 10:20–27. Some ideas are repeated, others are new, and some connections are made between independent ideas. At this point, Isaiah and his audience understand the character of the Branch from the root of Jesse (11:1) better than they did 4:2 or 9:1–7. His names revealed something



about him (9:6) but the seven gifts of the Spirit (11:2) clarify his intimate connection to God through the Spirit. Although 2:3–4 introduced the idea of a time without war, 11:6–9 demonstrates that this era of peace will encompass all creation—even the animals. The coming of the nations (2:2–3) and the return of the remnant from Assyria (10:20–27) are clarified and connected to the raising up of this new Davidic ruler who will be a signal to all people.

In analyzing and comparing these future promises, it is evident that God is the one who will accomplish all these things for his people. It is his kingdom and he will rule it (2:2–4; 4:5–6). Initially, the Davidic sprout is pictured in unusual ways as a child on the throne of David (9:1, 6), but later he will rule as a powerful king. Since people in this kingdom will be cleansed of their sins and holy (4:3–4) and desirous of learning divine truth from God at Zion (2:2–4), many earthly duties of a king will not apply in this new setting. Consequently, the Davidic Messiah is not even mentioned in 2:1–5, only hinted at in 4:2–6, and never called a king in any of these salvation oracles. His glorious names are highlighted in 9:6, while 9:7 focuses on the peace and justice of his kingdom. 11:1–3 lists his

Spirit-filled qualities and 11:6–9 illustrates the peace of his kingdom. Most of the typical kingly characteristic (defeating enemies, giving justice to the needy, bringing captured people home, making laws, etc.) relate only to his role at the initial establishment of his kingdom.

The distinctions between what will happen in God's future kingdom and what was happening during the time of Isaiah force the interpreter to assess carefully the hope presented in these chapters. Some portions address the concerns of an audience that needed to know how its present situation could be transformed and a new kingdom established. These prophecies of hope show how the old world will pass away and a new one will be established. These words were intended to give the audience confidence in God's eternal plan for his people and this world. Other parts of this message of hope address life in the future kingdom that God will establish (2:2–4; 4:2–5; 9:6–9), promising that one day the ideal will become reality. Both aspects of the nation's hope contribute to their faith in God in a time of deep distress that offered no peace. These promises can motivate any believer in periods of depression or times of oppression under the forces of ungodliness. Present problems must be

evaluated in light of God's eternal promises. God will be victorious; the Messiah will reign over all the earth! Nothing will stop him from establishing his kingdom.



## The Jesus Question

*Tracing the identity of Jesus through history, art, and pop culture*

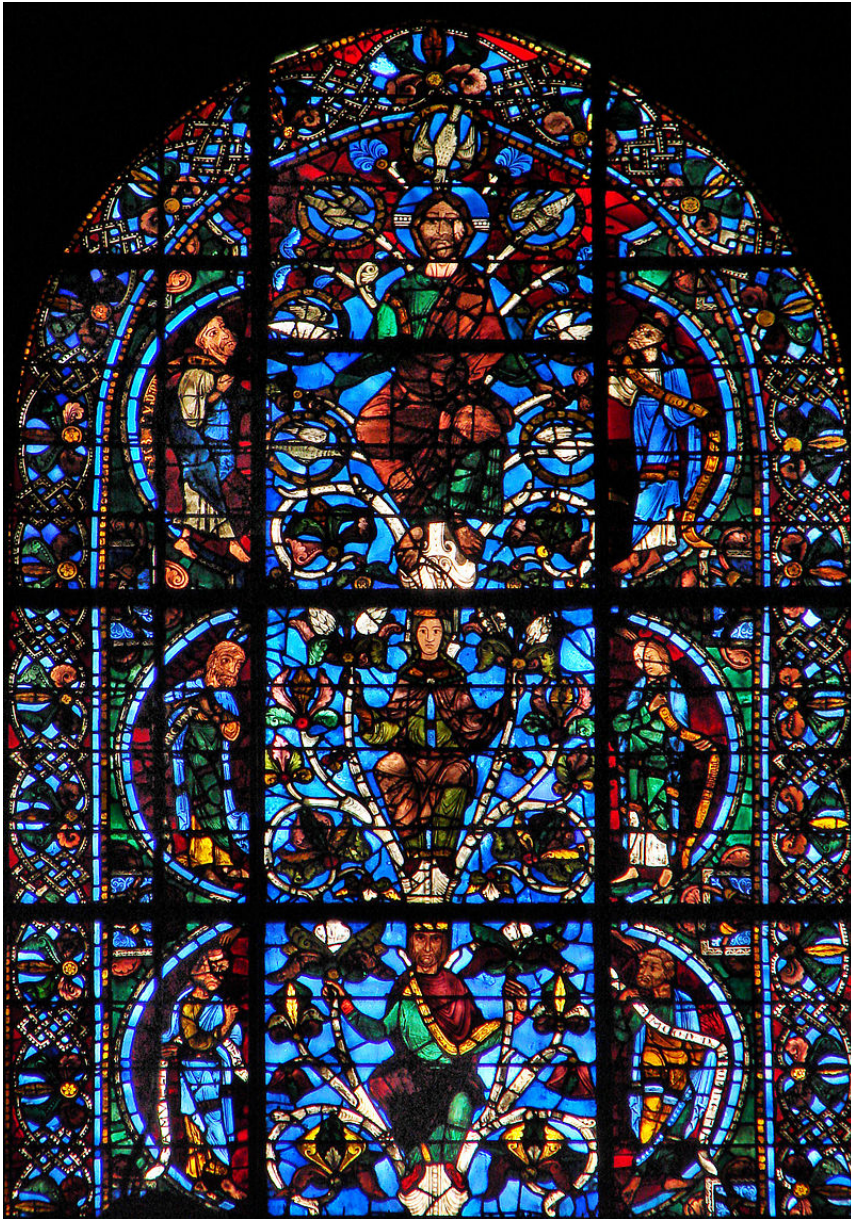
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### Jesus as the Root/Shoot/Branch of Jesse

Posted on [December 18, 2015](#)

The Tree of Jesse—a representation of Jesus’s genealogy in the form of a tree—was a popular subject in medieval Christian art. Its name derives from the messianic prophecy of [Isaiah 11:1 and 10](#): **“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. . . . In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.”**

Paul paraphrases this passage in [Romans 15](#), linking it explicitly to Christ: “For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. . . . Isaiah says, ‘The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope’” (vv. 8–9a, 12). Here Paul drives home the plural *peoples* and *nations* that Isaiah uses: the messiah has come not just for the Jews but for the whole world.



The upper section of the 12th-century Jesse Tree window at Chartres Cathedral in France showing Jesus at the apex and Mary below him.



Tree of Jesse with the Madonna and Child (Cod. St. Peter perg. 139, Blatt 7v), from the Scherenberg Psalter, ca. 1260. Held at the Badische Landesbibliothek (Baden State Library), Karlsruhe, Germany.





Jan Wierix (Flemish, 1544–1625), *Tree of Jesse*, 1573. Engraving [MH 223] after Peter van der Borcht (1530–1613). Published in Antwerp by Christoph Plantin.



Russian icon of the Tree of Jesse, 17th century.

Unlike the schematic family trees with which we are familiar, which place the first ancestor at the top and the present generation at the bottom, the Tree of Jesse is read from bottom to top, so as to give Jesus top billing. The figures depicted underneath him, taken from Matthew's and Luke's genealogies, vary, but because the Tree's main purpose is to map the messianic line, most depictions at least include David and Solomon, two of the few godly kings of Israel. Taken altogether the Tree represents a dynasty whose rule has been established eternally in Christ. As God promised David,

*And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.* ([2 Samuel 7:16](#))



Jesus is the one who has fulfilled this promise, which the angel Gabriel emphasized to Mary during his annunciation visit:

*The Lord God will give to him [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:32b–33)*

The Tree of Jesse is not to be confused with the Tree of Life, another botanical metaphor used elsewhere in scripture to stand for Christ himself. Though the analogies are certainly related, their iconography is different: the Tree of Life usually has the crucified Christ as its focal point and oftentimes a river flowing from its base (based on [Revelation 22:1–4](#)), whereas the Tree of Jesse, in addition to having a much larger cast of characters, features Jesus as a babe in arms or enthroned, and the trunk is usually growing out of Jesse's side. Both trees speak of the salvation wrought by Christ, but one via the ultimate act of atonement, and the other via the Incarnation, with an emphasis on the long period of waiting Israel had to endure.

The root/shoot/branch imagery of Isaiah raises several questions for me.

### **Why is Jesus called the root of Jesse? Isn't Jesse the root of Jesus?**

The “root” terminology ([sheresh](#) in Hebrew) is a bit confusing to me, because when I think “root,” I think “source” or “origin”—in which case Jesse, as biological predecessor, would be the root of Jesus. However, here the writer uses the word in the opposite sense, to describe something that grows out of: Jesus grew out from Jesse; he is an extension, a descendent, of Jesse. This is the most literal reading.

But perhaps my instinctual interpretation isn't so far off either. In terms of earthly lineage, Jesse may have come first, but in another sense, the eternal Christ is Jesse's root and the root of all humanity. Paul expressed this idea in [Colossians 1:15–17](#):

*He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

### **Jesus is referred to within the same passage as root, shoot/stem/rod (depends on the translation), and branch. Which part of the tree is he?**

One of the rules of writing that I've heard since grammar school is don't mix your metaphors—that is, don't use different metaphors in relation to the same subject, at least not close together, because doing so creates visual confusion. Mixed metaphors, however, are common in ancient Hebrew literature, where they are often used very intentionally, sometimes to establish [synonymous parallelism](#).

My inclination as a reader of scripture is to try to reconcile all the incompatible metaphors it gives me. I think, *Well, if Jesse's the root, then Jesus is the shoot; but Jesus is also called “root,” so then where on the tree does that place the the rest of the family line? And what of Mary—maybe she's the shoot, and Jesus the fruit-bearing branch . . . ?* The thing is, the metaphors aren't meant to be reconciled. Each one is supposed to give us just a little glimpse of some aspect of its subject, not to suggest that A is like B in every way and can never be not-B.

Thus Jesus can be root, shoot, and branch—all three. (Isaiah mixes the root and shoot metaphors again, in reference to Christ, in [Isaiah 53:2](#).)

I already discussed Jesus's "rootness" above.

Jesus is a tree trunk—a "shoot," or some translations have "stem"—in the sense that he sprang up from Jesse, bringing the Davidic dynasty to new heights.

Artists, though, most commonly show Jesus as branch—the highest-reaching branch of the tree (cf. [Isaiah 4:2](#); [Jeremiah 33:14–16](#)). In the Tree of Jesse, he is usually shown as an infant in the arms of Mary, with the crown of the tree fanning out behind him, reinforcing his kingship. Jesse, on the other hand—who is called both stump and root in Isaiah 11:1—is traditionally shown at the base of the tree, while the lineage in between makes up the trunk.

Whichever tree part you prefer to picture Jesus as, the main idea is that he came through the royal line of David as *the* messiah Israel was waiting for.

(Related post: ["Jesus, the 'Forever-Blooming' Rose"](#))

### **Why is Jesse's name rather than David's invoked in the messianic title "Root of Jesse"?**

David was the founder of the dynasty through which the Jewish messiah was to come. Jesse was David's dad—which I suppose makes him royal by association . . . but he was no king. What is so foundational about Jesse, such that his name is commemorated in a title for Christ and his likeness given prominence in the iconography of Christ's family tree? John the Evangelist shifted the name in the title down a generation, using "Root of David" instead in reference to Jesus (see [Revelation 5:5](#) and [22:16](#))—which seems more appropriate.

All I can guess is it's because Jesse is mentioned in the story of David's anointing as king ([1 Samuel 16:1–13](#)). God tells Samuel, "I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons" (v. 1). Also, David is referred to many times as "the son of Jesse."

### **What is the "stump" of Isaiah 11?**

In 11:1 Isaiah gives us a picture of a forest that has been so devastated that only a single stump remains: this is his prophecy for Israel (cf. [6:13](#), [9:14](#)). The preceding chapters describe God's anger at his people's continual disobedience and his resolve to bring judgment on them by giving them over to oppression by enemy nations.

From the eighth to sixth centuries BCE David's dynasty dwindled, eventually coming to apparent extinction with the Babylonian captivity. God seemed to have forgotten his promise, seeing as there was no king on the throne of Israel (Davidic or otherwise) for six hundred years. A stump was all that was left of the once-great nation.

But life remained in the stump. With his prophetic eyes, Isaiah saw a shoot emerge, and then he saw it grow into a mighty tree. That shoot is Christ, through whom the throne of David has been restored.

### **A modern artistic interpretation**

I love the Tree of Jesse painting by Ansgar Holmberg of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

She created it as part of her [O Antiphons series](#), which comprises one painting for each of the seven names of Jesus that Isaiah uses and that are traditionally sung at Vespers during the last week of Advent: Wisdom, Adonai (Lord), Root of Jesse, Key of David, Dayspring, King of Nations, and Emmanuel.



Sr. Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ, *O Root*.

*O Root* shows Jesus's family tree, starting with Adam and Eve at the root, asleep in their burial clothes as they await the arrival of the messiah. The figures that sit on and dangle from the branches and that are embedded in the twisted trunk are too generic to be identified, but then you have Mary emerging in green at the top, holding high the crowning glory of this royal lineage: her son Jesus, who is surrounded by a bright red blossom that billows out like a skirt and that is backlit by the sun.

The stump that Isaiah prophesied about is visible at the bottom of the tree, alluding to the wrath God had carried out on his disobedient people but also his grace in cultivating a new stem of promise to rise out of that punishment.

For centuries the church has chanted the following antiphon, a solicitation of Jesus's intervention in our world and praise for his beneficent rule:



O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,  
 an ensign of thy people be;  
 before thee rulers silent fall;  
 all peoples on thy mercy call.

You may recognize it as one of the verses of the Advent hymn "[O Come, O Come, Emmanuel](#)"—though sometimes it is excluded in favor of the related but more stirring verse

O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free  
 thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
 from depths of hell thy people save,  
 and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

*Check back in a few days for a companion post on the genealogy of Christ, which will explore the discrepancies between Matthew's and Luke's lists as well as the curse of Jeconiah, which some people say disqualifies Jesus from being the messiah.*

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### 3 Responses to *Jesus as the Root/Shoot/Branch of Jesse*

Pingback: [Stumped: An Advent Poem | Marginalia](#)



**Brandon Rathbun** says:

August 10, 2019 at 9:50 pm

Interesting, do you think that there is any correlation between the stump passages in the OT and Jesus' last words to the nation in Luke 23:31?

[Reply](#)

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## The Jesus Question

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