

Advent 1

Isaiah 9:1-7 – Leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

1. The word 'advent' means 'coming'. Why do you think Christians celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ?

What does the passage say and mean?

60 minutes

Explain: Isaiah was a prophet, who lived 700 years before Jesus was born. God gave Isaiah a message to tell the people, which we now call 'the book of Isaiah'. In chapters 1-8 we read that God's people had rejected him. Some had followed other gods, others had made rules for themselves to follow, thinking this would keep God happy. But they had made God very angry by their sin. God tells them repeatedly that judgement is coming, there will be destruction of the nation of Israel and of their land. But the people were spiritually blind and deaf and ignored God's warning. However, God says that there will be a group of people who survive and the nation of Israel will be restored from this group.

Read Isaiah 9:1-7

*2. What does God promise at the start of v1, and what do you think he means?

'There will be no more gloom for those who were in distress.' He is saying that judgement will come (it did – the nation of Israel was attacked, and the people were taken to foreign lands in captivity) but it will end (it did, they came back after 70 years).

Note: It may be that Isaiah was looking back on the recent past, or prophesying in the past tense about something that has not yet happened – with the eye of faith he can look ahead and see the future as a past event. Don't try to explain this to the group unless someone queries the tenses!

3. Read the second half of Isaiah 9:1. This tells us that the lands mentioned are somehow involved in the prophecies about Jesus. Look up Matthew 4:12-16. What do you notice?
Matthew says that Jesus grew up in Nazareth in Galilee and went to the areas of Zebulun and Naphtali, fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies.

*4. Read Isaiah 9:2 and then John 8:12. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the light of the world?

In Isaiah 9, the light signifies relief from living 'in the shadow of death' (under the curse of death due to sin, i.e. separation from God because of our sin). Isaiah prophesies that this light will come. In John 8, Jesus says that he is the light – he is the one who will take away the darkness (our separation from God).

5. Isaiah 9:2 is a promise to the people that their troubles will come to an end. How do you think hearing v2 might have helped the people during captivity?

God is telling them that there will be light in their darkness. The darkness will end, and things will come right – God will save them. This verse would give them hope.

Note: in v2, the tenses differ between NIV and KJV. The meaning of the verse is the same however.

*6. In the Bible, prophecies (like v2) often apply to more than one situation. Isaiah 9:2 applies to us today, as well as to the coming of Jesus 2000 years ago. Read 2 Corinthians 4:6. Where does the Bible tell us that the light of Jesus needs to shine, and do you know why this is?

It needs to shine in our hearts, because sin comes from inside us - from our hearts, see Mark 7:21-23. If the light of the Jesus is shining in our hearts, it will be evident in our attitudes and behaviour.

*7. John 8:12 tells us that Jesus is the light of the world. What does the light of Jesus (the gospel) give us? (see 2 Corinthians 4:6)

'The knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.' The way that we can have knowledge of God, is through Jesus. There is no other way to know God (John 14:6).

You may like to spend some time re-capping the main points of the gospel – that God created each one of us, we have sinned, sin separates us from God because he is holy, and sin causes death. Jesus is fully God and fully man, and he died in our place, and rose again because he had overcome death. This means that if we repent and trust in Jesus' death in our place, our sins are forgiven and we have eternal life with Jesus.

8. **SHOUT OUT** Read Isaiah 9:6. These are prophecies about Jesus. What do you learn about Jesus from v6? *(Write the answers on the flip-chart)*

He is born – he would be a human.

He is born to us – he would be a Jew.

He is given to us – he is a gift.

He has the government on his shoulders – interestingly, on his shoulders not on his head, a cross not a crown.

4 names – Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God (his divinity is prophesied too), Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Divide a flip-chart sheet into 4 boxes. Put the headings 'Wonderful', 'Mighty', 'Everlasting', 'Peace', one in each box. Write the answers to the following 4 shout-out questions in the appropriate boxes. (Only write answers that are true, so that Q13 works!)

*9. **SHOUT-OUT** What does the word 'wonderful' mean?

*10. **SHOUT-OUT** What does the word 'mighty' mean?

*11. **SHOUT-OUT** What does the word 'everlasting' mean?

*12. **SHOUT-OUT** What does the word 'peace' mean?

*13. The Bible tells us that these things are true of Jesus. What does this tell us about Jesus?

Co-ordinate a discussion, using the flip-chart from 9-12, on what Jesus is like.

*14. In Isaiah 9:6, Jesus is called Counsellor, Father, God and Prince. Do the same thing with these words on a new piece of flip-chart. What more do you learn about Jesus from these words?

nb. care with Father – many prisoners may have had a poor experience of their fathers and their understanding of the Fatherhood of God may be skewed. Only write down the positive aspects of 'father'. Counsellor refers to wisdom – not a psychologist or a local government officer – you might want to make this clear before you start!!

15. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. What difference does that make in our lives?

Jesus came in order to bring peace between God and man, Romans 5:1. There is no other way to be made right with God, to be forgiven. Discuss how the knowledge that you are right with God makes a difference to the members of your group.

16. In v7, we start to find out what it will be like for Jesus to be King. What do you find?

There will be no end to the increase of his government (it will reach the ends of the earth, Matthew 28:19).

There will be peace.

He will reign over David's people (a famous OT King, from whose descendants the promised Messiah would come – Jesus reigns over David's spiritual descendants i.e. those who love God).

He will be just and righteous.

This will be forever.

17. How can all these things happen - who will do all this? (end of v7)

God.

How can I live according to these truths in my life?

20 minutes

*1. Read John 1:9 which is talking about Jesus. If someone on the wing who was 'walking in darkness' or 'living in darkness' asked you how Jesus could make a difference in their lives, what would you say?

2. In what ways does the gospel of Jesus give you hope?

Encourage personal, rather than theoretical, responses.

3. What new things have you learnt about God today?

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.



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17. How can all these things happen - who will do all this? (end of v7)

How can I live according to these truths in my life?

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