

They should not seek advice for the living from the dead, but rather should seek the living God. This message is equally vital for our own day. If we do not seek our direction in life from God's law and His testimony, there is no true light for us at all, and the result is bound to be what is described in verses 21 and 22, -- darkness and misery, with people blaming their leaders and blaming the Lord, instead of blaming the sin within themselves. All this is to find its beginning in the coming of the terrible Assyrian invasion, which will sweep over the northern kingdom and on into Judah.

Isaiah 8:22-9:1: A Startling Transition

In Isaiah 8:21, we have a vivid picture of people in terrible misery as a result of sin. In 9:2-3 we have a picture of people in great rejoicing because God has brought wonderful light to them. The two verses between (8:22 and 9:1) are very difficult to translate literally. They are highly poetic, and contain a number of phrases which are susceptible of two different interpretations. This is abundantly clear if one simply examines the translation of 9:1 in the King James Version, and compares it with that in the American Standard Version. Various commentators show a remarkable diversity of opinion as to the point at which the theme changes from rebuking sin and declaring future punishment to giving a wonderful promise of God's blessing upon His people.

Although it is difficult to decide exactly where this change occurs, it is clear that it happens somewhere between 8:21 and 9:2, and that the region where it begins is described in 9:1 as "the land of Zebulon and the land of Naphtali, . . . the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the nations." This area is either designated as a place of special gloom and anguish (as in the King James Version), or as the place where light breaks out with special glory (as in the American Standard Version). It would be foolish to argue about which rendering to prefer, since the context clearly shows that both characteristics could properly apply to this region. The only uncertainty is to know at which exact point in the statement the prophet ceases to describe the misery of the area and begins to indicate its later joy. This is the area in northern Palestine where the Assyrian army naturally began its