

Isaiah 11:1–9 — The Spirit of the LORD Shall Rest Upon Him

The Sevenfold Spirit, the Moral Character of the Messiah, and the Peaceable Kingdom

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1–9

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: 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 of the fear of the LORD.

And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.

And he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”

Every Expression Illuminated by the Contrast with the Assyrian

These verses about the Messiah follow directly upon the destruction of the Assyrian. That context is not accidental. Every little expression in these first three verses carries greater weight when read against the character of the

Assyrian who preceded them. The spirit of wisdom and understanding — set against an Assyrian who was arrogant and foolish, who boasted in his hand not knowing whose hand he was in. The spirit of counsel and might — against one whose counsel was to cut off nations not a few. The fear of the Lord — against one who feared nothing and no one. These verses are not simply descriptive; they are contrastive. Everything the Assyrian was, this one is the opposite.

The Spirit Resting: The Dove Finding a Clean Place

Verse 2 says the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. The word rest is important. When John the Baptist saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove and coming upon the Lord Jesus, it did not merely touch him and pass on — it abode upon him (John 1:32–33). The dove is the figure. When Noah sent the dove out from the ark, it found no clean place to land and returned. The Spirit of God, coming down like a dove, finally found a clean place — the Lord Jesus. In him was no sin; he did no sin. The Spirit could rest.

Taking the spirit of the Lord as one expression plus the three pairs that follow, there are seven things named — a number of fullness and completeness. The spirit was given to him without measure (John 3:34). Not a quantum amount, not a portion, but without measure. He was sealed in accordance with the perfection of his person, needing no blood applied first as the priests did at their consecration — for in him was no sin, and the oil followed the blood in the ordination of the priests, but he needed only the oil. He was sealed with the Spirit in accordance with his own intrinsic, unblemished perfection.

His Delight in the Fear of the LORD

Verse 3 in J.N. Darby's translation opens: "and his delight will be in the fear of Jehovah." This is a moral excellency of a deep order. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom — and it was always his delight. Not something he strove

for, not a discipline he maintained by effort: it was his delight. He always did those things that please the Father. The moral flow from verse 2 through verse 3 is organic: the Spirit rests upon him, he delights in the fear of the Lord, and therefore he does not judge after the sight of his eyes or reprove after the hearing of his ears.

Man judges by appearances — by what can be seen and heard. Two parties present their cases and each feels his own is just. False witnesses are brought. Evidence is manufactured or suppressed. The wealthy hire talented men to obtain acquittals that justice would deny. None of this touches him. He has insight into the mind and heart of the matter because the Spirit rests upon him and he delights in the fear of the Lord. Hebrews 1:9 gives the foundation of it: “Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” His righteousness was not the output of will-power; it was the expression of what he loved and what he hated.

Righteousness on the Inside and Faithfulness on the Outside

Verse 5 describes the girdle of his loins and the girdle of his reins. J.N. Darby reverses the word order from the King James, and that reversal matters: righteousness shall be the girdle of his reins (the inner parts), and faithfulness the girdle of his loins (the outer). What is on the inside produces what is on the outside. This is the antithesis of hypocrisy, which is precisely the misalignment of inside and outside. In him there is perfect agreement between the two: the inward reality of righteousness produces outward faithfulness without gap, without contradiction, without veneer.

The Rod of His Mouth: The Wicked Slain

Verse 4 says he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. The Assyrian was the rod of God's

anger against the nation — but the Assyrian does not slay the wicked one. The Antichrist is not destroyed by the Assyrian; he is destroyed by the Lord Jesus himself when he comes. That settles the expectation: the Assyrian is in one sense an unsuccessful rod, in that he does not bring affairs to their final settlement. That belongs to the Lord alone.

Revelation 19:15 confirms it: “Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.” When he was in the garden and said “I am,” the soldiers went backward and fell to the ground — not because of any physical force but because of the power of the words in his mouth, with all the divine authority with which he uttered them. At his coming in glory, the earth will feel the rod of that mouth. Jeremiah 46:28 distinguishes the kind of rod used with Israel from the sword used on the nations: “I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee; but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure.” J.N. Darby’s marginal note on verse 4 suggests that the word “earth” may be rendered “the land,” which would narrow the focus to the rod of correction upon Israel in their land, while the breath of his lips slays the wicked one personally.

The Peaceable Kingdom: Not Innocency, but Restraint

Verses 6 through 9 describe the animal kingdom in the millennium. The wolf dwells with the lamb. The leopard lies down with the kid. The calf, the young lion, and the fatling together, led by a little child. The cow and the bear feed side by side. The suckling child plays on the hole of the asp; the weaned child puts his hand on the cockatrice den. None hurt or destroy in all God’s holy mountain.

This is not a picture of innocency restored — as though the fall had been reversed and Eden had returned. The asp is still an asp. The cockatrice is still a viper. In Isaiah 65:25 the serpent still eats dust, the continuation of the original curse upon it. The millennium is not the perfect state. What we see in these verses is not the

removal of what things are, but the removal of what they do under the control of wickedness and the absence of righteousness. With Satan bound in the bottomless pit for a thousand years, and with the righteous one reigning with the rod of his mouth, the conditions that allow violence and predation to flourish are removed. God produces this change — it is not a natural evolution toward peace.

The leopard is almost the emblem in Scripture of things that cannot change: “Can the leopard change his spots?” (Jeremiah 13:23). Yet God will change the leopard’s behavior. If it is beyond human power to change a leopard’s spots, it is still within God’s power to change what the leopard does. At the end of the millennium, when Satan is loosed for a little season, man’s nature proves completely unchanged by a thousand years of peaceable conditions. The flesh is the flesh. But the animals are changed. That contrast makes the amazing power of the coming kingdom all the more striking.

The closing statement of verse 9 is the summary of everything: “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” Post-millennialism appeals to this verse to argue that the gospel going out will gradually fill the earth and bring in the kingdom. But the verse cannot be separated from its context: the smiting of the earth with the rod of his mouth, the slaying of the wicked by the breath of his lips, judgment in the earth. It is when his judgments are in the earth that the inhabitants thereof learn righteousness. It is by direct divine intervention, not by man’s effort, that the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord.

The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.