

What If? - Hope

By Pastor Greg
November 29, 2009

Luke 1:26-38

Bunkertown COB

Ever since King David had died, Israel seems to have lost its focus. Solomon lost his focus, and the nation becomes divided. The tribes to the north completely abandon God. To the south, Judah sways back and forth between worldliness and godliness; never seeming to make up its mind. Eventually the north falls to the hands of Babylon, then so too does the south. The splendor and majesty seen under the rule of King David has been lost. And this nation, once the talk of the world, becomes nothing more than some obscure providence under the rule of the Roman Empire. And yet the talk was that one day God would restore their splendor and honor among the nations of the world. To this promise, some held their hope.

For 700 years the people had been holding on to God's promise found in Isaiah 7:14 *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."*¹ They believed that God would fulfill His promise found in Isaiah 9:6-7. *For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.*² And in Isaiah 11:1-5: *Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness*

¹New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Is 7:14). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

²New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Is 9:6-7). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

*will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist.*³ For 600 years they looked to the city of Bethlehem for this Child of Hope. *“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past.”*⁴ (Micah 5:2)

These words of promise were given so the people would not lose hope; so their hearts would not grow weary, and so they would remain steadfast in their faith. But sometimes I wonder if it really worked. Oh, I know there were a few who did not abandon their faith and continually looked for the coming Messiah. But I get the impression that most did not. A glimpse at Matthew’s account of the Wise Men leads me to believe that this hope had not just been abandoned, but forgotten. *“Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.” King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, “Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?”*⁵ (Matthew 2:1-4) And yet, as I said, within a few, hope remained.

Listen to how Mary, and later Joseph, responded to the incredible task God asks them to perform. (Read Luke 1:26-38) These two individuals seemed willing; eager almost, to be the instruments through which Hope would come to this world.

That was then. Hope came through Christ the Messiah. And the people living in darkness saw a great light. But what of today? Hope, it seems, is lost once again. As a matter of fact, hope began to wane less than 40 years after Christ ascended, even though He promised to return. Peter argues against those who have lost hope. (2 Peter 3:3-9)

I look at our world today and I see a people who have lost this hope. There is constant discussion and debate on how the world may end. From giant killer tornados, a global Ice Age, menacing asteroids that have the earth in its sights, right

³New American Standard Bible : 1995 update. 1995 (Is 11:1-5). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁴Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

⁵Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

down to this madness about the Mayan prophecy of 2012. My word, the world is even seriously talking about how to survive a Zombie attack! ⁶ I see a world without hope. I see His church abandoning its faith in the promises God made through this Messiah we worship. And without hope, even the church begins to question the truth behind the words of Jesus. Even the church today has begun to speculate that perhaps we misunderstood all that Jesus has said and promised.

Mary and Joseph were willing to put their lives on the line to be the instruments that brought hope into their world. What if God asked you to do the same? What if God is asking you and me to be the voices of Hope to this dark and despairing world? Would we be willing? Would we hold fast to the word of God; to His promises? Would we be willing to speak sense to those whose minds embrace this senseless? Or maybe we've lost hope as well. Maybe we've begun to question what God said and what He did.

Our world is on the brink of utter despair; a world that has no hope for tomorrow, a world that is even losing hope in its own cleverness. What if you were the only person standing between that despair and hope? Would you lift a finger, say a word, let this light of hope shine in this dark world?

⁶ I kid you not. A team of mathematicians from Carleton University and the University of Ottawa have created a series of mathematical models to explore the effects of a zombie outbreak and determine the best course for human survival. See <http://www.mathstat.uottawa.ca/~rsmith/Zombies.pdf>