

Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse,
and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him:
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³He will be delighted with the fear of the LORD.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
nor will he render decisions based on what he hears with his ears,
⁴but with righteousness he will judge the poor,
and he will render fair decisions in favor of the oppressed on the earth.

He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath from his lips he will put the wicked to death.

⁵Righteousness will be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his hips.

⁶The wolf will dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat,
the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together,
and a little child will lead them.

⁷The cow and the bear will graze together,
and their young ones will lie down together.
The lion will eat straw like the cattle.

⁸The nursing child will play near a cobra's hole,
and the weaned child will put his hand into a viper's den.

⁹They will not hurt or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD,
as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰This is what will take place on that day. The peoples will seek the Root of Jesse, who will be standing like a banner for the peoples, and his resting place will be glorious.

Root of Jesse

I.

Picture it in your mind's eye. A huge, towering, straight, beautiful tree. It's branches stretch out wide, covering a huge area.

From the outside, it looks immovable. It looks as though it is the mightiest thing around. On closer inspection, there are signs that the tree might not be as healthy as it seems. A massive hole has been punched in by the relentless pounding of a group of woodpeckers. They could sense that there was something else there. Beneath the bark of the mighty tree were thousands upon thousands of insects, eating away at the core. The tree was diseased.

Eventually there was nothing that could be done other than to cut it down, leaving only a stump. The stump of that once mighty tree has thick roots that stretch out to the sides. You can see the roots. Once they gathered moisture and nutrients for the tree, but now they are lifeless. That mighty tree once held so much promise, but now—there is nothing. The bits that were hauled away couldn't even be used for lumber, they were good for nothing but firewood. The stump that remains is nothing but a useless chunk of wood.

It's a sad picture. A once vital tree reduced to nothingness.

That's the sad picture of the people of Judah. The glory years of their nation were long past. Israel had been a mighty and proud kingdom under King David. Israel had been feared and respected by her neighbors. God had made a promise that a king would remain on the throne of David forever.

"...the stump of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1, EHV). Now there was nothing. Isaiah doesn't even mention King

David and his glory years. He goes back further, to the family line of his father. Jesse's family had been obscure and insignificant. As the youngest member of Jesse's family, David wasn't even thought to be in the running to be selected when Samuel came along to anoint one of Jesse's sons.

So eaten by disease had Israel become that Isaiah doesn't even bother mentioning David. The disease of godlessness had resulted in Israel being broken into two kingdoms. The northern kingdom had been hauled off into captivity, never to be heard from again. The southern kingdom of Judah was nothing more than a lifeless stump.

II.

"A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit" (Isaiah 11:1, EHV). Have you ever seen a stump that seemed to be lifeless for years, but then a little piece of the trunk starts growing a new shoot again? The tree wasn't totally dead, after all. Everything seemed to be dead and lifeless in Judah. Isaiah pointed ahead to the time the seemingly lifeless stump would send out a shoot. The shoot itself didn't look like much.

Mary and Joseph were somewhat similar to Jesse. They were obscure people from obscure families. Each of them was a descendant of King David, but what an unlikely pair they were.

Royal? Not so much. They lived in Nazareth. Nothing good ever comes from there, some of those who were called to be disciples told us. When they headed to Bethlehem for the census requirements, Joseph led the donkey Mary rode. When they arrived, there was nowhere to stay. When Mary was about to give birth, there was no special treatment for this obscure family—they had to make do with what was available.

It was a humble beginning for the little shoot from the stump of Jesse.

When looking back at Israel and Judah's history, one would find much to be disappointed in. The kings were a mixed bag, at best. Occasionally one is mentioned who did what was right; one who walked in the ways of the Lord. But all too often the kings listed were kings who did evil in the sight of God. Even King David, the most renowned and respected of the kings who came from Jesse, was flawed and did things that were evil.

The One Isaiah prophesied about would be different. "The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him: the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. ³He will be delighted with the fear of the LORD" (Isaiah 11:2-3, EHV). The little shoot from the stump of Jesse had some impressive qualities.

Throughout his earthly ministry Jesus displayed the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, giving insight into heavenly things. Even as a young boy, the teachers in the temple were astonished at his wisdom and understanding. After he grew to adulthood, Jesus taught like no one else ever did. He taught with authority.

Jesus had a Spirit of counsel and might. Counsel is the ability to devise an adequate plan. "Might" indicates the ability to act and bring about victory for that plan. Jesus acted to defeat the enemy on the cross and bring victory.

The ability to be successful in the long run requires deep roots. Jesus had the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His knowledge of God was deep. Jesus was intimately connected with his Heavenly Father. He always knew the Father's will and was always willing to carry out the Father's plans perfectly.

"This is what will take place on that day. The peoples will seek the Root of Jesse, who will be standing like a banner for the peoples" (Isaiah 11:10, EHV). The plan was that Jesus would become the banner for the peoples.

A banner is a signal flag. In the military, each unit has its own flag. Symbols on the flag identify the primary function of that particular unit. These days those flags are mostly used for show on the parade ground. In Isaiah's day soldiers on a battlefield would look for the flag—the banner—to see where their unit was so they would know exactly where they were to go to join the battle.

How would the little shoot, the Branch from the stump of Jesse, become a banner? In fact, there's something else that's puzzling in this verse. How could the little shoot, the Branch from the stump of Jesse, also be called the *Root* of Jesse?

Jesus himself posed this same riddle to the Pharisees. He said: “How is it that they say that the Christ is David’s son? ⁴²David himself says in the book of Psalms: ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, ⁴³until I make your enemies a footstool under your feet.’ ⁴⁴So David calls him ‘Lord.’ Then how is he his son?” (Luke 20:41-44, EHV). In the Psalms David called Jesus, his great-great-great Grandson, his Lord, because Jesus is the God who existed in all eternity.

Isaiah identified Jesus as the Root of Jesse in verse 10 because he was there from all eternity. Yet Jesus is also the shoot and Branch from the seemingly-dead stump of Jesse who would be the long-promised Messiah the people were waiting for.

“The Root of Jesse...will be standing like a banner for the peoples” (Isaiah 11:10, EHV). Jesus *is*—from eternity to eternity. The banner is raised. Though he looks only like a little sapling at Christmas, his roots stretch to all eternity. Jesus served as King by dying on the cross to defeat our enemies completely, just as the Father wanted him to do.

The tender shoot from the dried-up stump of Jesse is the mighty oak of our salvation. He is the perfect King.

III.

“The peoples will seek the Root of Jesse, who will be standing like a banner for the peoples” (Isaiah 11:10, EHV). Troops on the battlefield needed a rallying point. They were to seek out their banner—to form around it—to prepare for their next maneuver.

The shoot who is also the Root of Jesse is the rallying point for all of God’s people. Christians from everywhere—from every nation—rally to the Root of Jesse. Even as the tiny shoot, when Jesus lay in the manger in Bethlehem, visitors came, rallying to him. Shepherds came from the nearby fields. The Wise Men came from far away.

People from every nation rally to the banner of Jesus, but it is really the Savior-God who is doing all the work. Having taken action as our Perfect King, he has done everything to make it possible to gather the people from everywhere.

“He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, nor will he render decisions based on what he hears with his ears, ⁴but with righteousness he will judge the poor, and he will render fair decisions in favor of the oppressed on the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath from his lips he will put the wicked to death. ⁵Righteousness will be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his hips.” (Isaiah 11:3-5, EHV).

The little shoot, the Branch, the Root, has become the Judge. He does not need to judge by physical evidence alone—by what he sees with his eyes or hears with his ears. The Lord Jesus can look into the heart. While human beings cannot live up to God’s standard, Jesus *did* live up to that standard.

In fact, he lived up to God’s standard of perfection to *give* righteousness to all people. Some have rejected it. With the breath of his lips, he will sentence them to eternal death.

He will render fair decisions in favor of those oppressed on the earth. The oppressed are those who have believed in him. Jesus has actually *given* us his own perfection, so the fair decision he will render is that we are declared innocent because of what he has done.

Are you looking forward to Christmas? Isaiah was too. We have just seen that in his picture of the shoot from the stump of Jesse who was also the Root of Jesse.

When Isaiah looked at that picture, he saw not just the *first* coming of Jesus, but the second one, too. He saw Jesus second coming as standing right next to the first. Jesus would come, do his work, then judge the living and the dead.

Heaven was right there waiting, where predators and prey will live side by side. Where no harm will touch us. “They will not hurt or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9, EHV). The knowledge of the Lord is so complete in heaven that everything is good and everything is peaceful.

As you look forward to Christmas, do so with the same kind of eyes Isaiah had: eyes that look forward also to Jesus’ second coming. We know that Jesus *did* complete the work of the Father, and that he will, without a doubt, come to take us to be in that glorious heaven with him, where everything is good and everything is peaceful. Amen.