

ENDORSEMENTS

Tom's decades of preaching and meditation on the truths of the incarnation are evident in, *As the Darkness Clears Away*. If you are looking for a heavy dose of Biblical Christology accompanied by the practical insights of a seasoned pastor, this advent devotional will be a great encouragement to you.

Graham Gunden

Assistant Pastor | Grace Baptist Church
Dean of Theology and Philosophy | The Fletcher School
Cape Coral, FL

This magnificent Christmas devotional masterfully shows how all of history is centered on Jesus Christ, who came humbly into this world to roll back the darkness of Satan, the broken world, and the flesh, to establish an everlasting kingdom of light, and to reign over His people in wisdom and love. This book is dripping with wisdom, grace, and hope for poor and needy sinners. Tom Ascol moves easily from sound biblical doctrine to heartfelt devotion and worship, leading his readers not only to understand Christ, but to see and delight in Him personally, calling them to live their lives for His glory in submission to His kind rule. This is the book I'll be recommending and giving to my friends and relatives for Christmas.

Tom Hicks

Pastor | First Baptist Church
Clinton, LA

If you are looking for a devotional for the Christmas season, look no further. *As the Darkness Clears Away* is both educational and accessible. With brief yet profound contemplations on the Christ of Christmas, every single one deeply rooted in the text of sacred Scripture, your appreciation for the birth of Jesus will grow. The devotions begin with the Word of God and close with practical, discussion-prompting questions. There is even a bit of poetry! By the grace of God, the Light of hope will shine brighter in your soul with the turn of each page. Read it on your own, or even better, go through it with family or friends this December.

Ben Seewald

Pastor | Immanuel Baptist Church
Springdale, AR

Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year! Hardly anyone in the Western world disagrees that it is but there is a diversity of belief as to why. Christians recognize that this is the time of year we celebrate the arrival of Jesus Christ to earth. Yet so many believers struggle to disentangle the biblical truth of Christ's coming with the hype, traditions, and fables repeated by culture. Tom Ascol's new book, *As the Darkness Clears Away*, is a welcome devotional filled with biblical and theological insights and doxological praises. Each chapter is a deep dive into passages that showcase the reality and reasons for the coming of our Savior. I warmly commend this little gem as a Christmas companion that will guide you toward a heartfelt appreciation for the advent of our glorious Savior.

Nate Pickowicz

Pastor | Harvest Bible Church
Gilmanton Iron Works, NH

Christmas is not just an important event on the church calendar but is the hinge of history and the Rosetta stone for decoding the whole of God's work in redemption. In this brief but incisive volume, Dr. Ascol weaves together biblical texts, rich theology, and his hallmark down-to-earth, pastoral tone together into a dazzling tapestry displaying the sheer wonder of our Lord's first advent. I encourage everyone to explore this book, work through each reading, and celebrate the season by reveling in the glory of Christ's incarnation and present reign by which he is making all things new.

Alex Kocman

Director of Communications and Engagement | ABWE

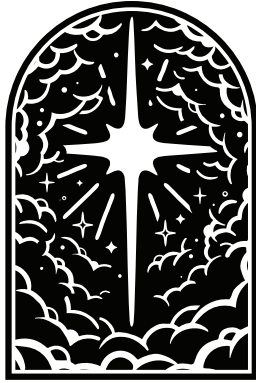
Dr. Ascol has, once again, beautifully compiled the abiding truths Christians need most in these turbulent times. Each devotional is jam-packed with soul-soothing reminders of God's faithfulness, and every question inspires the reader to think more deeply about eternity and its implications for our lives today. Now, as ever, you need the wisdom presented in this book.

Allie Beth Stuckey

Author and Host of *Relatable*



**AS THE
DARKNESS
CLEARS AWAY**



AS THE DARKNESS CLEARS AWAY

THOMAS K. ASCOL



FOUNDERS
MINISTRIES

As the Darkness Clears Away

25 Daily Devotions on How the Incarnation Has Shifted History

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IN MEMORY OF MARZELLE EILAND ASCOL,
*who taught all six of her children,
of whom I am the youngest,
to know and trust the Lord Jesus from our earliest years.*



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When will blind eyes be made to see,
Deaf ears be made to hear?
When will mute tongues sing rhapsody,
And lame legs leap like deer?

When will the parched ground burst with springs
The desert grow the rose,
The wasteland sound with one who sings
And ceaseless work repose?

A highway paved with holiness
Will make rough places smooth.
Before whose face is joyfulness,
He will our sorrows sooth.

Now singing bursts on Zion's hill
Redemption's work begun.
A ransom sighing hearts will still,
The payment, Mary's son.

TOM NETTLES



INTRODUCTION

A story is told about a traveler in ancient England who came across three masons chipping chunks of granite from large blocks. When the traveler asked them what they were doing, he got three different answers. The first mason, who seemed bored by his job, responded, rather curtly, “I’m hammering on a rock to make it into a smaller shape.”

The second, who was more interested in his work and hammering diligently at the same task, answered, “I’m molding this block of rock so that it can be used with others to construct a wall.”

The third mason was hammering at his block fervently, regularly taking time to stand back, measure, and study his work. When he responded, he pointed toward the west and proudly proclaimed, “I am building a cathedral for my king!”¹

The three men were doing the same job, but they had vastly different attitudes because each viewed his purpose differently.

1. Jim Baker, “The Story of Three Bricklayers—A Parable About The Power of Purpose,” Sacred Structures, April 9, 2019, <https://sacredstructures.org/mission/the-story-of-three-bricklayers-a-parable-about-the-power-of-purpose/>

The first one was largely thoughtless, just doing what he was told to do. The second one had a little awareness that what he was doing was connected to the work of others.

It was only the last man who had a true sense of purpose because he realized that his work was a part of a larger plan for his king. As he measured and cut stones, he recognized that he was playing a role in a much bigger undertaking. He was helping build his king's cathedral.

It makes a great difference in how you think about what you are doing if you understand that it fits into a bigger purpose. Chiseling a stone gets transformed into important service for your king if you understand and remember why you are doing what you are doing.

This is an important reminder as we contemplate how and why we celebrate Christmas. The birth of Jesus Christ is the revelation of God's purpose for this world. That is true both universally and personally—at a macroscopic level as well as a microscopic level. When believers consider this and remember what a cataclysmic event the birth of Jesus was and how it fits into God's still-unfolding eternal plan, we will see the celebration of that event in a whole new light, and change our lives accordingly.

The birth of Jesus changed everything. God became one of us. There can no longer be any doubt that He is intimately and purposely involved in the world. This knowledge transforms the way we think about our lives and carry out our day-to-day

responsibilities. Our lives, individually and corporately, are a part of God's great work of glorifying Himself by bringing salvation to men, women, and children around the world and throughout history. We are a part of something big. Something cosmic! God has chosen us to participate in the manifestation and ultimate culmination of His kingdom coming in "a new heaven and new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

As we approach this season during which much of the world will celebrate the birth of Jesus, it is good for believers to take time to study how the incarnation has shifted history. During the busyness of the holidays, it often becomes easy to lose sight of the significance of what we are celebrating. The temptation is great to celebrate Christmas in a merely perfunctory way.

This little book is meant to be used as a daily devotional guide throughout the Christmas season. It is broken into five sections of five devotions. Each section focuses on one passage of Scripture that is considered verse by verse. The book is designed for use as a personal or family devotion tool. Each individual study has some questions to help apply the passage and each section has a text to commit to memory. As a bonus, there are several original Christmas poems in this work from my dear friend Dr. Tom Nettles that I am sure will be an encouragement to you.

"As the darkness clears away" is a lyric from the old hymn "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence." It is my hope that this guide will be a helpful reminder during the Christmas season that Jesus, the light of the world and giver of life, came and defeated

death and darkness. It is through the life, death, and resurrection of our incarnate God that we can sing, “That the pow’rs of hell may vanish, as the darkness clears away.”

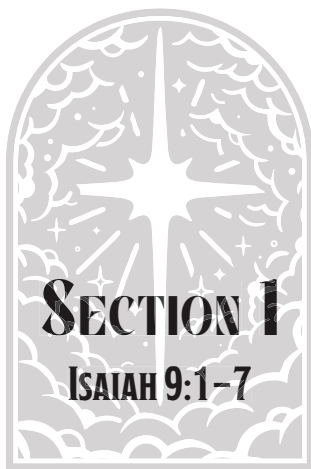
Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly-minded,
For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of old on earth He stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture,
In the body and the blood;
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heav’nly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the pow’rs of hell may vanish
As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six-winged seraph,
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the presence,
As with ceaseless voice they cry:
“Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Lord Most High!”

—Gerard Moultrie



MEMORY VERSES:

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

Isaiah 9:6-7

Seed of Woman, source of life,
Fought against the death of man.
Sin, death, hell all caused the strife,
Full salvation was the plan.

“Strike His heel with poisoned fang!
Now He’s gone and in the grave,
Me He will no more harangue,
Vain the plan from death to save.”

Myst’ry baffled every one.
Man by Holy Ghost conceived,
God the Father’s only Son
Crushed the snake and wrath relieved.

Bethlehem, the starting place
(Little town of no esteem),
In His body dwelt the race,
By His death He would redeem.

TOM NETTLES





But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

*The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle
tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

Isaiah 9:1–5



GOD WILL RESCUE HIS SUFFERING PEOPLE

The only proper way to understand the birth of Jesus is to see it in its larger context of God’s eternal plan and purpose to save His people from sin and death. Before the foundation of the world, God determined that He would save a people for Himself and that He would do it in a most unexpected way. This is what we see in Isaiah 9.

Chapter 8 ends on a very hopeless note—one of darkness, distress, gloom, and anguish. But chapter 9 begins with hope. “But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish.” Isaiah announces hope, and he does so by employing three themes: light, joy, and victory.

Tomorrow we will focus in on the theme of light, but today let’s look at joy and victory. Isaiah describes the whole land as being in “deep darkness.” Such imagery suggests that there is no hope of things getting better. Life is hard. Things are bad.

And there is no prospect of change. The hopelessness that Isaiah describes is deep. It is pervasive. The people “walked in darkness” and “dwelt in a land of deep darkness.”

Such moral, spiritual, and emotional darkness had simply become a way of life for the Jews of Isaiah’s day. He poetically describes a mindset that has set in on people who experienced such penetrating, pervasive, and persistent hopelessness that they now expect it to be simply the way that life is and will always be.

Into such hopelessness the prophet announces God’s coming salvation. God promises to rescue His people by exchanging their sorrow for joy. Isaiah communicates this by employing two metaphors, one from agriculture and the other from warfare.

First, God will cause them to rejoice like a farmer rejoices at harvest. The idea of harvest can seem distant to us today, but it would have resonated intensely with Isaiah’s original hearers and with most generations prior to the modern world. It is the inexpressible joy and relief of a farmer who sees his labors rewarded and can rest in the knowledge that, at least for a season, his family has the provisions they need to live.

Not only will God give them the joy of a successful farmer, but verses 4 and 5 also promise that He will cause His people to rejoice like an army that defeats their enemies. Their oppressors will be overthrown through triumph in battle. Every enemy who opposes and attempts to destroy His people will be conquered, and all their enemies will be finally vanquished.

In verse 4, the images of a yoke, staff, and rod describe how difficult life had become for God's people because of their sin and its consequences. Verse 5 describes how all these elements of warfare will be consumed because they will become obsolete. The promise, again spoken as an accomplished fact, is that God has "broken [these implements of oppression] as on the day of Midian."

Just as God used lowly Gideon to save Israel from the Midianites (Judg. 6–7), He promises to save His people in a similar way by sending them a King who doesn't look much like a Savior. When Christ arrived on the scene, there was nothing about Him that caused people to automatically recognize Him as the long-awaited Messiah. And the work that He accomplished through His death on the cross certainly did not look like a victory. In those hours He looked nothing like the Savior of His people. But that is exactly what He was. By His death He was rescuing His suffering people.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are some of the words that Isaiah uses to describe the lost in this passage? How do those words compare to "the hope" that Isaiah proclaims?
2. Why is the eternal plan and purpose of God the "only proper way to understand the birth of Jesus"?
3. In light of the two common metaphors of agriculture and warfare that he uses, what can we learn about God from how He communicates to His people?