

## Is This My Story?

### Isaiah 60:1-6 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. <sup>2</sup> See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you. <sup>3</sup> Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. <sup>4</sup> "Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. <sup>5</sup> Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. <sup>6</sup> Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.

Reading books is an escape. When you read, you can relate to the characters, sympathize with them, even live vicariously through them as your mind transports you into the situation. However, reading a book is a safe activity. Although your protagonist, your main character, may be going through life or death situations, you can put the book down any time you choose. If you are tired and want to take a break, you can do that even though the main character may be trapped in a seemingly inescapable scenario. If there's a riddle or puzzle or mystery that is hurting your brain trying to solve it with the clues you have, you don't have to figure it out yourself; eventually the story will reveal the answer to you. Books are safe because things happen in them while you are not actually in them.

But what if when you were reading a book, you became a part of the book, were literally transported into that world, became one of the characters? What if by reading *Lord of the Rings* you found yourself as Frodo carrying the one ring to Mordor, or when you reading *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* you were Captain Nemo in that submarine being attacked by the giant squid? What if you were actually in the story?

That's the premise of one of my favorite childhood movies called *The NeverEnding Story*. (And yes, it was a book first, but only by a couple of years.) Shortly into the movie the main character from our world is told that this book, *The NeverEnding Story*, is not safe like all the rest of the books he reads. All the other adventure books he reads are only stories, and when he finishes reading them he goes back to being a normal boy. But by reading *The NeverEnding Story* he becomes a part of the actual story.

That got me thinking: When you read the Bible, do you ever find yourself reading it as if it were just a book, a story, a series of events? Do you read the Bible and hear about great heroes and genealogies and bloodlines like those of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and think you are just reading a history book about events long in the past, events that don't involve you? Do you read these verses in Isaiah and think, "I don't see any herds of camels. So, this is not about me or my time or my culture."? To be fair, the Bible does follow a distinct history, a history of what we often call "God's chosen people." Many times when we hear that phrase we think of the Jewish people, the Israelite nation, that family that eventually became a great nation, the nation and people through which Jesus came to earth. But do I have any stakes in that story? As far as I know, I don't have Jewish family history. I'm not of direct Jewish descent, and this book is pretty much centered around the Jews. Am I a part of this story? Do I have a place in the Bible? Is this my story?

Yes, the Bible does follow very specific family lines and a very specific nation that rose from them. Just in reading it, even as a history of the Jews, we can appreciate the message. This is a people who had been given great and miraculous things by their God. Then they lost everything through their own decisions, their own disobedient, rebellious hearts and actions. Their sins had made a wall between them and God, a wall that they could not deconstruct nor overcome no matter how hard they tried. No amount of sacrifices they could offer and no amount of fasting they did would ever break down that divisive wall. They were in a hopeless, bleak situation. They were suffering in the darkness of their sin.

To the Jews Isaiah says, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you." (verses 1-2) Light has come upon them, and that Light is the glory of the LORD, God himself and what he is doing to save the Jews, of sending the Immanuel, the God with us, born of a virgin, born of David's line, born of the Jews, of God's chosen people. Their rescuer has arrived and he is the Light. His Light makes the darkness of their sin scatter.

That's great for the Jews, but is this my story? Isaiah makes it clear throughout his book of prophecy that this Light, this glory of the LORD, was not just for the Jews, not just for one specific ethnicity, for one bloodline. Isaiah says, "Nations will come to your light,

and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you.” (verses 3-4a) This story was for nations, not just a nation. This Light that had dawned on the Jews was meant to beckon non-Jewish nations to them. Midian and Sheba are mentioned as examples. These are not Jewish nations, but Isaiah says that they are part of this story. They have come to the Light that had risen upon the Jews and now they also have the darkness of their sins scattered as they bask in that same Light.

700 years after this prophecy was recorded, a group of wise men for a non-Jewish land noticed a star in the sky. They followed it expecting to find the one who has been born the king of the Jews. They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honor this king of another nation because they recognized that this newborn King, this Jesus, was also their King. They brought the very gifts that Isaiah foretold that they would – the gold and the incense. These gifts were not brought to honor the Jews, but to honor the Light that had come upon the Jewish people, through them. It took 700 years, but now the Magi were a part of this story. They came to Jesus and now had his Light scatter the darkness of their sins as well. And so they proclaimed the praises of the LORD for bringing them to this Light.

This idea that God would use his Light through other people to beckon them to him to enjoy his Light that scatters the darkness of their sin is now made plain to us. The mystery of God’s story is now revealed. Paul put it this way: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 3:6) The Bible is not just a story about the Jewish people; it is a story that is meant for all people, that involves all people. You are a part of that story. You are not just a passive observer reading some ancient piece of literature. You are the people that have come to the Light of the world, just like the Magi. The glory of the LORD was first revealed to the Jews but this glory was always meant for all people on earth. The Jews were simply the first beacon of that Light.

We have come to that Light and the Light has scattered the darkness of our sins. We are part of the fulfillment of this prophecy given in Isaiah. We are part of this story, His story. This is our story.

Looking back on the history of God’s people, and I don’t mean that in the narrow sense of the Jewish people but referring to the people upon whom the glory of the Lord has risen, we see that those who have the Light of God, his revealed salvation that scatters the darkness of sin, have used that Light as a beacon for others to draw them into this story. Who was that beacon of Light who brought you into God’s story? Was it a parent or grandparent who brought you to church, made sure you got baptized, encouraged you to learn God’s story in confirmation class? Was it a spouse or a friend who shared the Light they had with you, who dispelled the darkness of sin that had entrapped you and instead showed you that salvation had dawned on you and them in the form of Jesus Christ, the one who saves us from our sins? Was it a postcard or a letter or a phone call that invited you to come and see what the Light of the world was, that invited you to come and worship with us?

No matter what the beginning of your story is, God has made you a part of His story. What he tells us in the Bible is your story. It’s about your God and what he has done for you so that you can be and are now a part of this story, His story, the story of salvation, the story of how he as the Light of the world broke you out of the darkness of sin. He has directly involved you in it. You are a part of it. It’s about you. Now you are living out this story, not as a passive observer but as an active participant. You assembled here today around the Light of the world, the brightness of the glory of the LORD, the Light no darkness can overcome. You came here to proclaim the praise of the LORD because you were drawn by the Light. You came here today drawn by God’s Light to bring gifts to him. This is your story.

The glory of the LORD has risen upon the Jews and scattered the darkness of their sin. That Light has risen upon you as well and scattered the darkness of your sin. This is His story, and he has made you a part of it. This is now our story. You have his light that scatters the darkness of our sin. May God use you to shine his Light so brightly to draw others into your story, his story, our story. Amen.