

*Isa 11:1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— 3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD  
11.10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and the place of his rest will be glorious*

### 1. The End of the Kings of Judah

Isaiah received his call as a prophet in the same year that saw the death of one of the most powerful and prosperous Jewish kings, Uzziah king of Judah (Is.6:1ff). No king had been more prosperous since Solomon. However, on his call, God immediately commanded Isaiah to prophesy an end both to the national prosperity and the kingship of Judah. He was told to prophesy judgement “until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken” (Is. 6:11). Destruction and exile was to be his word. The outlook, therefore, was bleak for Judah and its kings. The nation would no longer spread out like a great luxuriant tree but would be cut down and left like a mere stump in the ground (Is. 6:13), and the same would happen to the kingship (Is. 11:1). Where all had been so fruitful and prosperous, only roots would remain.

### 2. Hope for the Future - The “Root of Jesse”

However, the word of God is never without hope, and this is true of the prophecies of Isaiah. Whilst the word of doom was that Judah and its kingship were to be reduced to mere gnarled stumps, the word of hope was that those very same stumps would, at some future point, spring into life, and in a way never seen before. It was toward those stumps that God directed Isaiah’s attention, and from the imagery of the stump came the extraordinary prophetic pronouncements of Isaiah 11 concerning the future.

In Isaiah 11 God says explicitly that the “*stump of Jesse*”, that is to say the kingly line of David (for Jesse was David’s father), though seemingly dead in the ground, would burst into life and would produce a new “*shoot*” or “*branch*” (Is.11:1). In other words a new king would emerge. A century or so later Jeremiah took up the same imagery as he personally witnessed the final death throes of the Davidic kingship of Judah. Even as he watched it dying Jeremiah’s said: “*The days are coming*”, declares the LORD, “*when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a king who will reign wisely*” (Jer. 23:5. See also Jer. 33:15). Thus the new king, the new David, the shoot of Jesse, the Branch, became embedded in Jewish prophetic thought. It was the great hope of the nation. It was a Messianic hope.

### 3. “The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him” - the Kingly Anointing.

The expression “*shoot from Jesse*” makes it abundantly clear that God is speaking through his prophet about a real human person, someone from David’s line. However unique his character might be in other ways and even if he would be called “*Mighty God*” or “*Everlasting Father*”, the king who was to come would clearly have a human birth.

The fact that he would be human would have, however, an important implication. Because of his humanity this king would need to be equipped with the Spirit of the LORD, for a human person can only fulfil a God given kingly role through the Spirit. Accordingly, the prophecy in Isaiah 11 announces that “*The Spirit of the LORD will rest upon him*” (11:2), and then goes on to describe in detail the nature of the Spirit’s presence on him (vv. 2-5). This would be essentially a kingly anointing to enable him to perform his kingly role.

What God is saying here through his prophet constitutes an unmistakable pointer to Jesus. Jesus was in fact born of David’s line and in his humanity received such a kingly anointing. He came speaking of a kingdom and acting like a king, though not an earthly kingdom of an earthly king. Jesus was an astonishing fulfilment of an astonishing prophecy. The prophecy, however, is immensely valuable not only for its startling accuracy concerning Jesus, but also because of the clarity with which it describes the nature of the kingly anointing that would rest on Jesus.

A “royal”  
anointing  
rested on  
Jesus

First, the Spirit resting on him is said to be the “*Spirit of wisdom and of understanding*”. These two terms, “wisdom” and “understanding”, are reflected in God’s words to King Solomon, “*I will give you a wise and a discerning heart*” (1 Kings 3:12) after Solomon had asked God for “*a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong*” (1 Kings 3:9). “*Wisdom*” here is that which distinguishes what is right from what is wrong, and “*understanding*” is that which sees right to the heart of issues. These two characteristics

of the Spirit enable a ruler to do the right thing in the right way for all those he rules, especially for those who are underprivileged and oppressed.

Second, the Spirit is said to be the “*Spirit of counsel and power*”. These two words appear again in Isaiah 36:5 where they are translated “*strategy and military strength*”. “*Counsel*” (strategy), therefore, refers to an ability to devise a right and successful course of action, to put forward a plan that looks to the future and brings things to a proper conclusion. “*Power*” (military strength) refers to the ability to see the strategy through to a successful conclusion: it is the equivalent of the New Testament “*dunamis*” or “*enabling*” of the Spirit. Thus the new king would have all that was required both in terms of strategy and of power to bring about the Kingdom of God in the world.

Third, there would rest upon him the “*Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD*”. “*Knowledge*” here is essentially the knowledge of God and his ways. The Spirit of God knows God just as the spirit of a man knows a man (1 Cor.2:11). Thus through the

Spirit the king would actually know God, not just know about him. The “*fear of the LORD*” is a true reverence for God, giving due respect to God’s moral nature, his love of righteousness and his hatred of evil. The “*fear of the LORD*” is, therefore, the true motivator for obedience, godly behaviour and worship. Moreover, this “*fear of the LORD*” would not be a hard thing for the king, but will be a matter of delight. When such a Spirit rests upon a man, righteous living and godly behaviour is a matter of intense joy and delight, not a matter for grim determination. “*I delight to do your will, O Lord!*” (Heb. 10:7) was its vocal expression on the lips of Jesus.

Having described the nature of the anointing in vv.1-3a, Isaiah goes on to give us a short picture of how it would be recognised in the way the king acts (vv.3b-5). He tells us that the king would not judge by mere outward appearance, whether by hearing or seeing, but would act only with justice. His eyes would be on the needy and the poor and he would seek out their cause to give them justice. This is brought out very forcibly in another passage of Isaiah, Is. 61:1ff. There we have the King himself speaking through Isaiah and saying that “*The Spirit is upon me to bring good news*”, “*to heal*”, “*to release*” and to “*comfort*”, and they are words that Jesus used specifically to describe the heart of his anointing. These words bring into focus that fact that the royal anointing is not an expression of some impersonal justice and right-doing on God’s part, but that it is also an expression of his heartfelt mercy and compassion. Justice and right-doing from God are really love in action, and are based on mercy and compassion. Love is the rule of the Kingdom. Thus the “rule”, the “kingdom” is hugely concerned to deal with broken humanity. The righteousness of the king is a righteousness that restores and heals, especially where people have suffered through oppression and injustice. The anointing on the king puts the focus of the king’s attention unmistakably in the direction of the oppressed and the needy.

### **“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me”**

Here, then, in this anointing we see the essence of true kingship or rule. It is totally orientated toward bringing righteousness and justice for those who are under the king’s rule. The king acts with justice always, motivated by a love of what is morally upright and by a hatred of evil. Such a king exercises all his power and authority to make sure that righteousness is promoted and injustice removed. Such a king was Jesus, and his essential work was to build his kingdom. This is what he proclaimed throughout Galilee – “*the kingdom of God is near*”, for the king had arrived. As Jesus walked through Galilee, he walked not simply as “rabbi” but as “king”. His actions, his authority, his righteous wisdom, his love and respect for his “Father”, his concern for the poor were all manifestations of the kingly anointing.

### **A “Banner for the Peoples”**

It is not difficult, therefore, to see the prophecy of an “anointed” shoot of Jesse as pointing to the earthly ministry of Jesus and being fulfilled in that ministry. There is, however, an aspect of the prophecy about the Shoot of Jesse in Isaiah 11 that seems to take us beyond that earthly ministry. This aspect is expressed in verse 10, “*In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and the place of his rest will be glorious*”. One thing in particular indicates that this was not fulfilled by the Galilean ministry; it has in focus a ministry not to Galilee and the Jews but to the “peoples” (the Gentiles), and the ministry to the Gentiles did not properly begin until after the ascension of Jesus, Jesus himself being sent in his earthly life only to “*the lost sheep of the House of Israel*”. It must have meaning, therefore, beyond the earthly ministry of Jesus in Galilee.

The description of the Root of Jesse as a “*banner for the peoples*” is both powerful and suggestive. There are three important features of a banner. First, a banner proclaims something or someone. Second, it is something that people rally to. Therefore, third, a banner is always made to fly where all can see it. Thus in saying that the root of Jesse would be a banner to the nations, Isaiah implies that the Root of Jesse and what he stood for (salvation and justice), would be exhibited in such a way that the nations could see it and rally to him. The image of the banner amounts to a direct prophecy that the new king and his kingdom would have a high profile and he would be proclaimed throughout the nations.

The same “banner” theme appears in other parts of Isaiah. Take for example the following; “*This is what the Sovereign LORD says, ‘See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples’*” (49:22); “*Prepare the way for the people, build up, build up the highway! Remove the stones. Raise a banner for the nations*” (62:10). The same concept underlies Is.52:10, “*The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all nations and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.*” The banner is always associated with the Gentiles or the nations. This king had a work to do among the nations; indeed his destiny was to become king of all the nations. The theme is written large in the prophets, and in nine more so than Isaiah.

Such verses could, of course, point to the reappearance of the Shoot of Jesse at an end time in history. But the simple fact is that from the very earliest days of the church the name of the one who laid claim to title the Son of Jesse, who is Jesus, has been raised in a very obvious way as a banner for the Gentiles. One of the most important themes of the New Testament is the manner in which the gospel, under the direction and power of the Spirit, became quickly available to the Gentiles and, also, was widely responded to by the Gentiles. It would seem fairly obvious that Jesus himself must have recognised immediately in these prophecies of a banner that, after his death, resurrection and ascension, the good news of the salvation that he had won would be preached throughout the entire world. Indeed anticipated it would be so, and commanded his disciples to embark on the task. He was determined his name would be proclaimed to the nations, to the “*ends of the earth*”. The proclamation of what he had done through his death and his resurrection would be the unfurling of the banner. In his ascended glory he, the Root of Jesse, stands as a banner to bring to all who will rally to it a peace that is glorious.

So, Isaiah prophesied that out of the gnarled stump of the devastated kingship of Judah would come a new king with a pure and righteous kingly anointing. His destiny would be one, however, not simply of being king of the Jews but king of the nations. The restoration that Isaiah is speaking about is nothing less than a world-wide restoration. His words are magnificent in their scope and in their hope.