

The Road to Jesus: The Gospel According to Isaiah
Fall & Winter Quarters 2015

INTRODUCTION:

What we know so far... Isaiah is preaching to God's people during a time when they have recently experienced material prosperity but now they are engaged in war or potential war - northern tribes of Israel have allied themselves with Syria (Damascus) against Assyria (Syro-Ephraimite War, 734-32 B. C.). Assyria is going to destroy Israel (Samaria) and come against Jerusalem. It's not going to be pretty.

The *reason* why is because of sin. Jerusalem has revolted against her Father, against her husband. She is sinful, weighed down with iniquity, evildoers, and corrupt (1:4). Forgiveness will be possible; it will be made available (1:18) but Judah was to "consent and obey" (1:19).

Idol worship is their fundamental problem. They do not know God (1:3; that is, they do not have a relationship with Him) because they are worshipping under the terebinth (oaks) false gods (1:28-31).

The new, spiritual temple is going to be established in Jerusalem to which Gentiles will join and from which the law of God will be proclaimed (2:1-3).

In this new, spiritual temple peace will abound (2:4).

Israel needs to repent of pride, abusing the poor, and trusting in man, in his gods, his business, or his military.

Israel's leaders were not guiding men back to God. Subsequently, God would provide His own leader (4:2). To *Him*, the "survivors" would listen!

Israel's problem is that they do not accept and follow the law of the Lord. They despise the word of the Holy One (5:24). That is why they are experiencing a lack of knowledge (5:13). They need a Teacher who will teach them but also give them the right *motivation* to learn and follow the Law of the Lord.

If/when Judah will be holy, it will take the God of heaven to make them holy. Their responsibility will be to open their eyes and ears and understand His expectations for them (6:9-10). We also saw in 6:13 that the "holy seed" from the stump will remain.

THE SIGN OF IMMANUEL - 7:1-16:

The Historical setting - 7:1-9:

This particular passage is given a specific historical setting. Once again, we see the Syro-Ephraimite War (735-734 B. C.). In 745 B. C., Tiglath-Pileser III took the throne of Assyria. From him until King Esarhaddon (680-668 B. C.), Assyria was the dominant world empire. The Palestine area, including Syria to the north, were pawns in the battles between Assyria to the north and Egypt to the south. Each wanted a buffer state.

Syria (Aram), with its king, Rezin, formed an alliance with Israel to the north, with its king, Pekah. But, they had an issue - the southern tribes of Judah, with their king, Ahaz. When the two nations came against Jerusalem and King Ahaz, their hearts melted from fear. According to 2 Kings 16:7, King Ahaz is now considering forming an alliance with *Assyria* against Syria and Israel.

So, God sends Isaiah to King Ahaz with a message, embodied in the name of Isaiah's son - Shear-jashub. The boy's name means "a remnant shall return." At that time, King Ahaz was at the "conduit of the upper pool," probably examining their defenses against an invasion by Rezin and Pekah. Isaiah's message to King Ahaz is in verses 4-5.

Two stubs of smoldering firebrands shows that these two men are not producing much heat and they are about to become extinguished. We see in verse 6 that Rezin and Pekah actually had it in mind to replace King Ahaz with someone else on the throne.

Samaria, the capital of Israel, with its largest tribe being Ephraim, will be shattered within 65 years. This would stretch into the reign of King Esarhaddon when Assyria moved a number of non-Israelite people into northern Israel and ended their independent existence as a nation. *Do not fear!* So, Isaiah warns King Ahaz not to distrust the word of God - vs 9. Back in verse 2, we have the reference to the "house of David." This is the first of 14 times in Isaiah that uses this expression. King Ahaz was of the house of David. Would the house of David survive? Is King Ahaz a good representation of the house of David? Will King Ahaz follow David in his faith in God? Ahaz - like everyone of us - has to decide: Is he going to trust God or not? Did Ahaz believe that simply because he was of the family of David, Rezin and Pekah would not be successful in the coup attempt?

The Sign offered, refused, and given - 7:10-16:

So, for the only time in biblical history, God gives a man an opportunity to ask for his own sign: "Ask a sign from the Lord: make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven," Isaiah challenges Ahaz. Incidentally, verse 10 is another clear statement of verbal inspiration for Isaiah. This message *is God speaking*. "Isaiah did not claim to speak *about* God, he claimed to speak *for* God" (Oswalt, 204) - a difference between prophets and preachers.

In a show of pseudo-piety, King Ahaz declines. Isaiah rebukes Ahaz for his lack of faith in God (vs 13). "The prophet was suggesting that by its unbelief, the house of David had shown itself unfit for a relationship with the living God" (Beyer, 73).

So, God gives *him* a sign:

"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."

There is no doubt that this prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Jesus through Mary, a virgin (Matt. 1:23) and that Jesus was the ultimate sign to Israel that they needed to trust God to deal with their biggest problem - not Assyria or Israel but their biggest problem was sin.

The challenge, however, is to see how this prophecy can be a sign to *Ahaz* with the fulfillment in Jesus not being for another 700 years. This question has vexed Bible students for centuries and I doubt I'll solve it definitively. However, I'll give my thoughts.

The word translated "virgin" from the Hebrew language (*'almah*) is not a word that *exclusively* means "virgin" (Gen. 24:43; Exodus 2:8; Psalm 68:25; Prov. 30:19; S of S 1:3; 6:8; Isa. 7:14) but it does apparently portray the idea of an *unmarried woman*. The word "*'almah*" means a young woman (RSV, NRSV) or "maiden" (NASV marg.) without reference to her sexual experience. It is like the designation "Miss" in English, "mademoiselle" in French or "domnisoara" in Romanian. A young woman who may or may not be a virgin; that's not necessarily a part of the discussion. Could it be that Isaiah is using the word and it has two

connotations, two fulfillments? A young woman gives birth to a son and before he knows to discern right from wrong, Syria and Israel will no longer be a threat to Judah.

Yet, the Septuagint translation uses the word *parthenos* or “virgin,” which is the translation Matthew quotes and applies to Mary.

This *boy* is a message to Judah: *God is with you: Immanuel*. We’ll see this phrase used twice more in our study (8:8, 10). He will be a poor boy - eating curds and honey - as he grows and learns the difference between evil and good. By the time he grows up, the threats from Rezin and Pekah will have ended.

THE COMING ASSYRIAN INVASION - 7:17-8:22:

The destruction of the Land - 7:17-25:

Because of Ahaz (and broader, Israel) refused to trust God, He would punish Judah through the king of Assyria - the very nation Ahaz was wanting to trust against Israel! Their invasion would be like an invasion of flies or bees (verses 18-19). This is the first time Isaiah mentions that nation of Assyria in his preaching; he’ll mention them 38 times in his book.

The invasion would be as humiliating as being shaved unwillingly (verse 20). The Ammonites did this to David’s men in 2 Samuel 10:1-5.

Economic depression will result (verses 21-22).

Their vineyards and fields will be devastated - “like briars and thorns” (used three times; verses 23-25).

The Birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz - 8:1-4:

This chapter begins a new message from Isaiah to Judah. He is to take a tablet and write on it, in Hebrew: *maher-shalal-hash baz* (which means “swift is the booty, speedy is the prey”). Two men faithful to God will serve as witnesses to Isaiah’s message: Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. This is the only time in Isaiah that either men are mentioned. In 2 Kings, we learn that Uriah was a priest for King Ahaz (16:10) and Zechariah was Ahaz’s father-in-law (18:2). So, they would be witnesses to the testimony that Isaiah is delivering to King Ahaz.

But then Isaiah approaches his *wife*, we presume, who was a prophetess in her own right, and she gives birth to a son, named by the Lord *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*. Just like the *Immanuel* who was mentioned and described in 7:14-16, so before Maher can cry out “My father” or “My mother,” Damascus (capital of Syria) and Samaria (capital of Israel) will be destroyed by Assyria. “Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey” - the birth of a child is coming quickly and so is the coming destruction of Israel and Syria.

In 734 B. C., Tiglath-pileser III marched down the coast of Palestine to the Egyptian border. Trusting in Egypt, then, became pointless. Galilee, beyond the Jordan, was lost the next year. Hoshea, king of Israel, paid tribute to Assyria and delayed their destruction by a decade. In 732 B. C. Damascus, capital of Syria, fell to Assyria.

The Judgment of the people - 8:5-22:

Isaiah gives yet another sermon to King Ahaz and the people of Jerusalem. The people rejected the “gently flowing waters of Shiloah” (the city that supplied Jerusalem with water, through the Gihon spring), and have “rejoiced in Rezin” (vs 6), God will bring on them the king of Assyria (vs 7). This coming invasion is pictured as strong flood waters from the Euphrates river and it will inundate and engulf Judah (vs 8). These waters are contrasted with the “gently flowing waters of Shiloah” (vs 6). Notice at the end of this verse that Isaiah describes Judah as

“Your land, O Immanuel.” He directs a short prayer to Immanuel on behalf of his own people and their coming destruction. (This shows us that “Immanuel” from 7:14 is not referring to either of Isaiah’s two sons.)

In verses 9-10, Isaiah calls on other peoples to take notice. They thought the God of Judah is defeated when Judah is defeated. They made plans and proposals, but God would be with Judah (“Immanuel”). God has a plan to fulfill, a plan that involves the house of David. It will not be thwarted by unbelieving nations nor by unbelieving Israelites!

In verses 11ff, God turns His attention to Isaiah himself, and the remnant who were still faithful. Don’t be afraid of the unfaithful. Regard the Lord as holy and fear Him. In verse 14, the Lord is a sanctuary to the remnant, but a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over for the unfaithful, a snare and a trap for Jerusalem.

We recognize this imagery fulfilled in Jesus: Matthew 21:44; Luke 2:34; and quoted by Paul (Romans 9:33) and Peter (1 Peter 2:8). In fact, verses 17-18 are quoted by the Hebrew writer (2:13) in reference to the nature of the Messiah, Immanuel. These children reflect the nature of the Lord, or better said, the Lord reflects the nature of the children (Hebrew’s point in quoting this passage).

Isaiah, and the remnant (his “disciples,” vs 16), will wait for the Lord while He punishes Judah. They will look eagerly for God, for the salvation and deliverance that He will bring. Isaiah writes in verse 18 that he, Shear-jashub, and Maher-shalal-Hash-Baz are all “signs” for Israel from the Lord of hosts.

The unfaithful in Judah are still trying to go to mediums and spiritists to learn how to live. “To the law and to the testimony (vs 20)!” Isaiah cries out - Go back to the law. Do biblical things in biblical ways. Call Bible things by Bible names. Speak where the Lord speaks and be silent where the Lord is silent. “If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.” “More than anything else today there is need that all our thinking be based upon and in conformity with the Holy Scriptures” (Young, 320).

Turning their backs on the law and the testimony, Isaiah pictures Judah and Jerusalem in verses 21-22 as sitting in distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. They need a light. They need the virgin’s son. They need *Immanuel*. Isaiah will describe Him further in chapters 9 & 11...

KEY POINTS:

God is going to give a *sign* to Judah: a virgin will give birth to God-incarnate (Immanuel; 7:14). The *land* belongs to Him (8:8). *He* will not abandon it (8:10). He will separate the remnant from the unfaithful (8:14). He has the same nature as His children (8:18).