



Highlights From the Book of Isaiah

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The Sign of Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14-17)

¹⁴ *For this reason the Lord himself will give you a confirming sign. Look, this young woman is about to conceive and will give birth to a son. You, young woman, will name him Immanuel.* ¹⁵ *He will eat sour milk and honey, which will help him know how to reject evil and choose what is right.* ¹⁶ *Here is why this will be so: Before the child knows how to reject evil and choose what is right, the land whose two kings you fear will be desolate.* ¹⁷ *The LORD will bring on you, your people, and your father's family a time unlike any since Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”*

Recap of Isaiah 7:1-13

- Two neighboring kingdoms – Syria and Israel – attacked Judah in hopes of *deposing* King Ahaz and putting someone else on the throne in his place.
- Though they were unsuccessful in their attack, Ahaz was greatly shaken up by their attempt.
- The LORD sent word to Ahaz through Isaiah that he has nothing to fear from his neighbors:
 - Their attempts to defeat him *will not* succeed
 - And in the not-so-distant future both kingdoms will be destroyed by Assyria
- The Lord, knowing that Ahaz had no confidence in this assessment, proposes that Ahaz ask him for a *miraculous sign* so as to confirm that what he promised through Isaiah was, in fact, *beyond doubt*.

Recap of Isaiah 7:1-13

- Ahaz made a pious sounding excuse and ***declined*** the Lord's offer of a miraculous sign, because, in reality, he didn't ***trust*** the Lord to protect him and had ***instead*** asked the ***king of Assyria*** to come to his aid.
- Isaiah ***rebukes*** Ahaz and his ungodly Davidic predecessors for trying the patience of the nation over the years, and for trying the patience of God in this present circumstance with his lack of faith.
- Furthermore, Isaiah tells Ahaz that though he ***refuses*** to accept the Lord's proposal to ***ask*** for a sign, the LORD will still ***give*** the nation a sign, ***not*** to encourage Ahaz's faith (because he has none) but to confirm God's ***truthfulness***.

¹⁴ ***For this reason the Lord himself will give you a confirming sign.*** Look, this young woman is about to conceive and will give birth to a son. You, young woman, will name him ***Immanuel***.

- “*For this reason*” – because Ahaz refused to ***ask*** for a sign, God in his ***sovereign mercy*** to the nation (and as a ***condemnation*** of Ahaz’s unbelieving response) will give a miraculous sign of his ***own choosing***.
- The sign that God gives ***confirms*** Isaiah’s ***earlier*** promise (that there’s no reason to fear Israel and Syria), but it also confirms the ***foolishness*** of Ahaz not trusting that promise.
- Had Ahaz received Isaiah’s promise in ***faith***, the appearance of “***Immanuel***” would have ***vindicated*** the house of David.

¹⁴ *For this reason the Lord himself will give you a confirming sign. Look, this young woman is about to conceive and will give birth to a son. You, young woman, will name him **Immanuel**.*

- But now “*Immanuel*” will appear as a *shame* to the house of David.
- Ahaz refused to believe, and so he will suffer the *consequences* of that unbelief.
- Nevertheless, God, in *faithfulness* to his own promise, would raise up from the wreckage a *true* Son of David.

¹⁴ *For this reason the Lord himself will give you a confirming sign. Look, this **young woman** is about to conceive and will give birth to a son. You, young woman, will name him Immanuel.*

- The word translated “**young woman**” here is the Hebrew word *almâ*, which typically refers to “a young woman of marriageable age.”
- However, conservative scholars have pointed out that the word is never used of a married woman in the OT.
- So they have argued that the word refers to a sexually mature, but unmarried, young woman and, in **Hebrew society**, such a woman would be a **virgin** (an unmarried young woman who was **not** a virgin was to be stoned according to Deut. 22:23-24).
- This understanding of the word therefore would explain why the **Septuagint** translators used the Greek word for “virgin” (*parthénos*) when they translated this verse.

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- It does not necessarily imply that the person spoken of would be a virgin **at the time** the child was born.
- It means simply that one who was a virgin of marriageable age, would at some point “*conceive and... give birth to a son*”.

¹⁴ *For this reason the Lord himself will give you a confirming sign. Look, **this young woman is about to conceive and will give birth to a son.** You, young woman, will name him Immanuel.*

- Because this verse is quoted by Matthew's gospel in connection with Jesus' birth, it has been regarded since the earliest Christian times as a prophecy of Christ's **virgin birth**.
- The Greek word for "virgin" (*parthénos*) used by the Septuagint translators also appears in the citation of this verse in Matt 1:23:
 - *Look! The **virgin** will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will name him "Emmanuel," which means "God with us."*
- Therefore, regardless of whatever **other** meaning this term might have in the OT context, in the NT, Matthew's usage of the Greek term (*parthénos*) clearly indicates that the fulfillment of this prophecy by Jesus involved a virgin birth.

¹⁴ *For this reason the Lord himself will give you a confirming sign. Look, this young woman is about to conceive and will give birth to a son. **You, young woman, will name him Immanuel.***

- Furthermore, the “*young woman*” is to name her child “*Immanuel*” which means “God with us”.
- The custom of the mother’s naming her child is not uncommon in the OT (cf. Gen. 4: 1, 25; 29: 31– 30: 13, 17– 24; 35: 18; Judg. 13: 24; 1 Sam. 1: 20; 4: 21), especially if the mother has reason for a unique emotional investment in the child or if the father cannot perform the task.
- This emphasis upon the mother and the corresponding de-emphasis of the father’s role cannot help but be suggestive in the shaping of the ultimate understanding of this sign.
- No man sired by a human father could be the embodiment of “God with us.”

¹⁵ *He will eat sour milk and honey, which will help him know how to reject evil and choose what is right.* ¹⁶ *Here is why this will be so: Before the child knows how to reject evil and choose what is right, the land whose two kings you fear will be desolate.*

- Some, misled by a superficial resemblance to “*a land flowing with milk and honey*”, interpret “*sour milk and honey*” as the food of plenty.
- But, according to verses 21–22, “*sour milk and honey*” is the food of **poverty**.

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- “*Sour milk and honey*” will epitomize the devastation that God’s judgment will bring upon the land.
- Cultivated crops will be gone, and the people will be forced to live off the milk produced by their goats and the honey they find in the thickets.
- As the child is forced to eat a steady diet of this “*sour milk and honey*”, he will be reminded of the consequences of sin and motivated to make correct moral decisions in order to avoid further outbreaks of divine discipline.

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- The time factor is probably *deliberately* vague.
- Within *three* years Damascus had fallen to Assyria, and *thirteen* years later Samaria was taken.
- The implication, however, is that Immanuel's birth is imminent, and surely Isaiah's hearers would have understood it in this way; that some girl, at present a "*young woman*", would in due course bear Immanuel.
- There are a number of suggestions how this might have been fulfilled.

¹⁵ He will eat sour milk and honey, which will help him know how to reject evil and choose what is right. ¹⁶ Here is why this will be so: Before the child knows how to reject evil and choose what is right, the land whose two kings you fear will be desolate.

- So, who is this special child?
- Although a handful of very conservative scholars insist on seeing solely a messianic prophecy here, most recognize that there is at least a provisional fulfillment in Isaiah's day, given these explicit statements.
- The most probable interpretation is that Isaiah's prophecy refers to his own son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.
- In order to see this, we need to briefly skip ahead to the next chapter of Isaiah and read the description that Isaiah gives of the birth of his second son.

A Child is Born for a Sign (Isaiah 8:3-10)

- ³ I [Isaiah] then approached the prophetess for marital relations; she conceived and gave birth to a son. The Lord told me, “Name him Maher Shalal Hash Baz [which means “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil”], ⁴ for before the child knows how to cry out ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.” ⁵ The Lord spoke to me again: ⁶ “These people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and melt in fear over Rezin and the son of Remaliah. ⁷ So look, the Lord is bringing up against them the turbulent and mighty waters of the Euphrates River—the king of Assyria and all his majestic power. It will reach flood stage and overflow its banks. ⁸ It will spill into Judah, flooding and engulfing, as it reaches to the necks of its victims. He will spread his wings out over your entire land, O Immanuel.”

A Child is Born for a Sign (Isaiah 8:3-10)

- ⁹ *You will be broken, O nations; you will be shattered! Pay attention, all you distant lands of the earth. Get ready for battle, and you will be shattered! Get ready for battle, and you will be shattered!* ¹⁰ *Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted. Issue your orders, but they will not be executed! For God is with us!*

Parallels Between Isaiah 7:14-16 and Isaiah 8:1-10

- Isaiah 7:14 tells us a “*young woman is about to **conceive and will give birth to a son.***”
- Isaiah 8:3, introducing this son, echoes the language of 7:14 when he says: “*I [Isaiah] then approached the prophetess for marital relations; she **conceived and gave birth to a son.***”

Parallels Between Isaiah 7:14-16 and Isaiah 8:1-10

- Isaiah 7:16, says that – *“Before the child knows how to reject evil and choose what is right, the land whose two kings you fear will be desolate.”*
- Isaiah 8:4 says – *“before the child knows how to cry out ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.”*

Parallels Between Isaiah 7:14-16 and Isaiah 8:1-10

- Isaiah 7:14 says that the “*young woman*” was instructed to name her child “*Immanuel*”
- Isaiah 8:8 calls this same son “*Immanuel*”, which is explained in Isaiah 8:10 as “*God with us*,” which probably indicates that Matthew’s citation in Matthew 1:23 is actually *linking* these two portions of Isaiah together:
 - *Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will name him “Emmanuel,” which means “God with us.”*

Parallels Between Isaiah 7:14-16 and Isaiah 8:1-10

- In Isaiah 7:14 says the “*young woman*” giving birth to a son who is to be called “*Immanuel*” is “*a confirming sign.*”
- Several verses later, in Isaiah 8:18, Isaiah describes his two sons as “*signs and symbols in Israel.*” (NIV)

Parallels Between Isaiah 7:14-16 and Isaiah 8:1-10

- Taken together, all of these suggest that there is more going on in this “*sign*” than meets the eye and that Matthew has not merely (mis-) appropriated some ancient text for his own purposes, as some modern (liberal) commentators suggest.
- I believe that the “*sign*” as originally given had a *single* meaning but a *double* significance.
- Its *meaning* is that “*God is with us*” and we need not fear what other human beings may do to us.
- The *first* significance is for Ahaz’s own day. He need not go to Assyria because “*God is with*” Judah.

The Ultimate Significance of Isaiah 7:14-17

- This brings us to the *ultimate* significance of the sign of Immanuel in Isaiah 7:14-17.
- I believe that the birth of Isaiah's son, "*Maher Shalal Hash Baz*", who is at one point actually referred to as "*Immanuel*" (Isaiah 8:8), actually *prefigures* or *points to* the *ultimate* "*Immanuel*".

The Ultimate Significance of Isaiah 7:14-17

- In the very next chapter of Isaiah, a section that we already covered this past Christmas, *another* description of the birth of a wonderful child appears:

- *For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us. He shoulders responsibility and is called Wonderful Adviser, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His dominion will be vast, and he will bring immeasurable prosperity. He will rule on David's throne and over David's kingdom, establishing it and strengthening it by promoting justice and fairness, from this time forward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will accomplish this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)*

¹⁷ The LORD will bring on you [Ahaz], your people, and your father's family a time unlike any since Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”

- By holding this phrase back until the very end, its impact is doubled.
- It is not at all difficult to see Isaiah using a device like this to give a final blow to Ahaz's self-sufficiency.
- Verses 14-16 had perhaps lulled Ahaz into complacency.
- Even if he had done the wrong thing, it was going to turn out all right. Good days would come.
- But with devastating suddenness Isaiah lets him know that good days will not come.
- What is coming upon Jerusalem is the awful thunder of war-chariots.
- Whatever a man trusts in place of God will one day turn to devour him.

Next Time

I plan to cover Isaiah 8:11-17, a section in which
The Lord Encourages Isaiah.

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- As you can see, I believe that what we have in the sign of Immanuel is a prophecy with two fulfillments:
 - A short term fulfillment in the birth of Isaiah's son and, shortly thereafter, the soon-to-come overthrow of the present enemies of Judah: Israel and Syria
 - An ultimate fulfillment in the coming of the Christ child who will overthrow all the enemies of God.
- Many conservative commentaries reject this idea of a double fulfillment and see only the what I am calling the ultimate fulfillment.
- What do you think? Does the idea of a double fulfillment make sense here?