

Holy Trinity Bible Study - Isaiah Lesson #8a

Primary Sources:

Webb - [The Message of Isaiah](#), Barry G. Webb

Motyer – [The Prophecy of ISAIAH](#), J. Alec Motyer

Isaiah 8:1-16

Isaiah Sent to King Ahaz

¹ In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. ² When the house of David was told, "Syria is in league with Ephraim," the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

³ And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. ⁴ And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, ⁶ "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it, ⁷ thus says the Lord GOD:

'It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. ⁸ For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. And within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. ⁹ And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.'"

The Sign of Immanuel

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." ¹³ And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

Reading: [The Message of Isaiah pages 61-63](#)

Questions to Consider

1. What is the setting for chapter 8?

“A resurgent Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser III has begun to push west and south into Palestine. The kings of Israel and Syria have formed an anti-Assyrian pact and are determined to force Judah to join them by deposing Ahaz and installing a puppet king in his place. It is the year 734 BC.”

Webb - The Message of Isaiah, Barry G. Webb, page 61

2. What does King Ahaz fear? What does he see as his options?

He is afraid of joining with Syria and Ephraim against Assyria and incurring Tiglath-Pileser’ wrath. According to Webb, it appears he has already decided to hold out and submit to Assyria.

Webb - The Message of Isaiah, Barry G. Webb, page 61

3. Why is Isaiah instructed to take his son Shear-jashub with him to see King Ahaz? (Verse 3)

“Shear-jashub means “a remnant shall return” or “a remnant shall repent”.

Webb - The Message of Isaiah, Barry G. Webb, page 62

“So certain was Isaiah of coming events that he was prepared for the word to ‘become flesh’ in the person of his first son. Shear-Jashub was thus an ‘acted oracle’, a visual aid bringing home the word of God.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 81

4. What Ahaz is planning to do?

“Ahaz was under pressure from his advisers to play the astute politician by allying himself with Assyria against the threat of the northern powers.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 81

2 Kings 16:7-9 – ⁷ So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." ⁸ Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasures of the king's house and sent a present to the king of Assyria. ⁹ And the king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria marched up against Damascus and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin.

5. What is the alternative that Isaiah offered.

To forget all alliances and to trust in the promise of God.

“But Isaiah’s word was equally astute: Aram and Ephraim were indeed spent forces, smoldering stubs. Their combined might was as nothing compared to Assyria and they would soon be stamped out and no longer a threat. Beyond that, the issue was not one

of politics but of faith.” Motyer – *The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 81*

6. What does God mean when in verse 4 he tells Isaiah to tell Ahaz to “Be careful and Keep calm”?

“If only Ahaz could be persuaded to do nothing, to keep clear of compromising alliances, the Lord could be trusted to keep his promises to David and to deal with the Assyrian threat.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 82

7. Based on last week’s lesson, do you think Isaiah expected to accept this alternative?

8. Why does Isaiah refer to the kings of Syria and Ephraim by referring to them as sons?

Isaiah is prompting Ahaz to think in dynastic terms.

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 81

9. Whose son is Ahaz?

“Ultimately, the son of David, the occupant of a throne with divine validation, resting on divine promises.” ... “The head of Judah is Jerusalem, and the head of Jerusalem is David’s son. Here was a situation of divine strength and a kingship sustained by divine promises. Hence the call to faith and the warning that to abandon faith is to lose all.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 82

10. Why does God ask Ahaz to ask a sign from him?

He is testing him. Trying to move Ahaz to faith.

“The Lord is ready to ‘stop at nothing , whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights, for the sake of the Davidic king and the chosen city.” ... “The magnitude of the offer (as we might say, ‘to move heaven and earth’) highlights the seriousness of the crisis and also the importance the Lord attaches to the exercise of faith.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 83

11. Why does Ahaz say he refuses?

It is a sin to but God to the test.

“Essentially it is the sin of unbelief. Characteristically it says, ‘I will trust if God proves himself trust - worthy’ or ‘I will not believe unless God so proves himself’.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 83

12. Why does Ahaz really refuse?

“To refuse a proffered sign is proof that one does not want to believe. Pious though his words sound, Ahaz by using them demonstrated himself to be the willfully unbelieving man”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 83

13. In Judges, why does Gideon ask for a sign?

Judges 6:36-40 – ³⁶ Then Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said, ³⁷ behold, I am laying a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If there is dew on the fleece alone, and it is dry on all the ground, then I shall know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you have said." ³⁸ And it was so. When he rose early next morning and squeezed the fleece, he wrung enough dew from the fleece to fill a bowl with water. ³⁹ Then Gideon said to God, "Let not your anger burn against me; let me speak just once more. Please let me test just once more with the fleece. Please let it be dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground let there be dew." ⁴⁰ And God did so that night; and it was dry on the fleece only, and on all the ground there was dew.

Gideon is asking for a confirmation from the Lord of his battle plan and is not asking for a confirmation of faith.

14. Why is Ahaz's (aa Hez') refusal to ask for a sign and important turning point in the narrative?

It is the moment of decision by Ahaz to trust his own path rather than that of God's.

"The only way we can have God is by relying on him and using him. For the only way it is possible to accord God's deity to him is by using him and risking one's life upon God's word by trusting his promises and obeying the revelation of his will."

Otto Kaiser, Isaiah 1-12

15. In verse 14, how does the nature of the sign change?

It is no longer an invitation to Ahaz to confirm his faith but now a promise of destruction and eventual restoration but not in the way Judah was expecting.

16. What is the sign that God offers Ahaz and the people of Judah?

The birth of Immanuel.

"The birth of Immanuel would confirm all that the Lord said through Isaiah to Ahaz – that this was indeed the moment of decision and that the consequences were divine retribution on unbelief."

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 84

17. Was Isaiah speaking of Christ?

- a. **Translation of Virgin.** Isaiah speaks of a virgin who will be with child. In Hebrew he uses the word 'alma' which strictly speaking means 'young woman'. This is the translation that Jews use today while our translation is based on the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew text which translates it as 'virgin'.

“In Genesis 24:43 and Exodus 2:8 the reference is unquestionably to an unmarried girl, and in Song of Solomon 6:8 the *’almôt*, contrasted with queens and concubines, are unmarried and virgin. Thus, wherever the context allows a judgment, *’almâ* is not a general term meaning ‘young woman’ but a specific one meaning ‘virgin’. It is worth noting that outside the Bible, ‘so far as may be ascertained’, *’almâ* was ‘never used of a married woman’.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 85

b. The expectation of a divine Messiah.

2 Samuel 7:12-17 ¹² Your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, ¹⁵ but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. ¹⁶ And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.” ¹⁷ In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Matthew 22:12-44 ⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, ⁴² saying, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, ⁴⁴ “‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’? ⁴⁵ If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?”

c. What is the meaning of Immanuel?

‘God is with us’ or ‘God be with us.’

d. Might this be no more than a prayer that of a Mother in Judah in times of trouble?

“We can weigh the probability of this interpretation by putting ourselves into the situation. Leaving aside the momentous possibilities that she is a virgin (*’almâ*), a young woman becomes pregnant and calls her child Immanuel, either as an expression of faith in the face of adverse facts or as a prayer for help. Where is the ‘sign quality’ in this – especially after Isaiah has spoken the name and set the idea in motion? Even supposing that virgin is collective and that a rash of Immanuels appears in the land, such naming would be cynically dismissed in the palace as the product of female hysteria and not seen as a heaven-sent sign.

“What a depressing anticlimax following the Lord’s expressed willingness to ‘move heaven and earth’ and Isaiah’s dramatic outburst about the Sovereign himself giving a sign!”

“it is impossible to separate this Immanuel from the Davidic king whose birth delivers his people (9:4–7<3–6>) and whose complex name includes the designation Mighty God.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 85-86

18. Does the Messiah that Isaiah describe meet the expectations of the people of Judah?

19. How should we interpret the prophesy of verse the first part of verse 15, “He shall eat curds and honey... “

“Some, misled by a superficial resemblance to ‘a land flowing with milk and honey’, interpret it as the food of plenty.³⁶ The latter is, however, the spontaneous outflow of a land that cannot do enough for its inhabitants whereas the former is the monotonous diet of hard times (22). The divine child is to be born into the poverty of his people.

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 86

20. What does it mean “when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good”?

Jeremiah 24 ¹ After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the craftsmen, and the metal workers, and had brought them to Babylon, the Lord showed me this vision: behold, two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the Lord. ² One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, but the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten. ³ And the Lord said to me, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” I said, “Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they cannot be eaten.”

⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to me: ⁵ “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. ⁶ I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. ⁷ I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

⁸ “But thus says the Lord: Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat Zedekiah the king of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. ⁹ I will make them a horror[a] to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them. ¹⁰ And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them, until they shall be utterly destroyed

from the land that I gave to them and their fathers.”

21. How are we to interpret the timing of the coming of the Messiah from verse 16?

“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 an’almâ, would marry and in due course bear Immanuel. There are a number of suggestions how this might have been fulfilled.³⁷ A common idea is the ‘pious mother(s)’ theory noted above; a theory which perishes by requiring for a prophecy so solemnly announced a fulfilment so drab that no-one bothered to record it!

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 86

“These events must lie beyond the Assyrian times, for Isaiah knew that Judah would not suffer its coming exile (6:11f.) at Assyrian hands (10:27–34; 29:1–8; 31:4–9; 38:6). Specifically, the birth of the royal child is scheduled for ‘the future’, ‘the afterwards’”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 87

22. What is the significance of the sign given to Ahaz?

“Ahaz, he was jeopardizing the Messianic hope resident in the house of David. Because of his unbelief the promised Messiah would be born into poverty, heir to a meaningless throne in a conquered land... Every next king in David’s line was the focus of a longing that he would be the Messiah, and every actual king was guardian of that longing inasmuch as he might be the Messiah’s father. To all this Ahaz had played false.

“From the time of Ahaz there never was again a ‘house of David’ in the true sense but only a line of puppet, pretend-kings under alien domination until, at the exile, even they disappeared into the sand of history never to re-emerge. The name of the overlord power would change, from Assyria to Babylon to Persia to Greece and finally to Rome, before Immanuel would be born, but when he was born it was to share the poverty of his people, to inherit a non-existent throne and to feel the full weight of the oppressor. The blame for all this rested on Ahaz and his failure to believe the Lord’s word. The promise awaited its time but the threat was immediate.”

Motyer – The Prophecy of ISAIAH, J. Alec Motyer, page 87