

Isaiah 7:10-25
March 4, 2018

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What is your theology regarding “asking the Lord for a sign?” Is asking for a sign an indicator that we’re weak in our faith? Or is it more like “testing the Lord,” (x-ref Ex 17:2, Deut 6:16, Matt 4:7, Lk 4:12) which we understand is not allowed (exception is Malachi 3)? Where are you on this?

Transition: As a refresher, Isaiah came to Ahaz with a message of assurance: “Be careful, stay calm; don’t be afraid, and don’t lose heart.” (v. 4). This roadmap was given to Ahaz to help him find inner peace. But Ahaz needed to believe God’s promise that Judah’s enemies would be defeated. In God’s eyes, the two threatening kings were nothing but “two smoldering stumps of firewood” (7:4, NIV), who wouldn’t be on the scene much longer. So Isaiah emphasized to Ahaz, “If you don’t stand firm in your faith, you won’t stand at all.” (v. 9, NIV). It reminds me of another Isaiah passage in 26:3, “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (NKJV).

All of us CAN find peace in the midst of trouble BY trusting God’s PROMISES. Let’s read v.10-12.

BOOK (NIV 1984):

V.10:

- Again, the LORD spoke to Ahaz,

V.11:

- “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

V.12:

- But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q V.11: The Lord tells Ahaz, “Ask me for a sign.” “Ask anything. Be extravagant; Ask for the moon!” (The Message) Why do you think the Lord invited Ahaz to ask boldly for a sign? [He wanted to keep reassuring Ahaz that His promise to Him was good. He wanted to give Ahaz a sign of His mercy. He wanted to **strengthen his faith.**]

Q: But Ahaz declines. On what basis? [“I will not put the LORD to the test.”]

Q: How do you interpret Ahaz’s response? [Let people engage. Was he acting being pious? The Lord obviously knew that Ahaz had placed his trust in the king of Assyria! His disobedience was a sign of his unbelief, not piety. Giving the Lord a spiritual answer was false humility.]

Q: What was the real reason Ahaz declined to ask God for a sign? [Perhaps he didn’t believe God. Instead he trusted in the Assyrians.]

Q: If the Lord invites you to ask for a sign, what would be your reason for declining? Or would you?! [Let people engage – Ahaz’s refusal should serve as a warning to us.]

Bottom Line: If the Lord is telling us to ask for a sign, I think we can safely conclude that it’s okay to do that!

Transition: Given that Ahaz declined to ask the Lord for a sign, the Lord decides he wants to reveal a sign to the house of David. Would someone read v.13-16.

V.13:

- Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also?”

V.14:

- Therefore, the Lord himself will give you (Hebrew is plural) a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and (they) will call him Immanuel.

V.15:

- He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right.

V.16:

- But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: Why was Isaiah exasperated? [Ahaz and his people were trying God’s patience.]

Q: It makes me wonder if we’ve tried God’s patience! We’re in a pickle, God gives us plenty of His promises, but instead we decide to trust anything or anyone but God. How do you know when you’ve tried His patience?! [Let people engage]

Q V.14: What sign did the Lord give to Ahaz anyway? [The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and (they) will call him Immanuel (“God with us.”)]

Q: How does this sign fit this context? [Let people engage - Reminder of context: These were perilous days for the nation of Judah who were facing an impending attack by Israel and Syria. Assyria was growing stronger and threatening the smaller nations whose security depended on a very delicate political balance. Judah is looking for deliverance, for salvation. So this sign was a wonderful way to show that Immanuel would be a living proof of God’s providential presence with His people.]

Observation: Most Bible scholars believe that this sign has both a short-term and long-term meaning. The cliff note version is:

Long-term: **The *ultimate* fulfillment of this prophecy is in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “God with us” (Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:31–35).** The virgin birth of Christ is a key doctrine; for if Jesus Christ is not God come in sinless human flesh, then we have no Savior. Jesus had to be born of a

virgin, apart from human generation, because He existed before His mother. He was not just born *in* this world; He came down from heaven *into* the world (John 3:13; 6:33, 38, 41–42, 50–51, 58). Jesus was *sent by the Father* and therefore came into the world having a human mother but not a human father (4:34; 5:23–24, 30; 9:4).

Short-term: **This “sign” had an *immediate* significance to Ahaz and the people of Judah. A woman who was then a virgin would get married, conceive, and bear a son whose name would be “Immanuel.” This son would be a reminder that God was with His people and would care for them.** It is likely that this virgin was Isaiah’s second wife, his first wife having died after Shear-jashub was born; and that Isaiah’s second son was named both “Immanuel” and “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (8:1–4; note vv. 8 and 10).

There are (3) views on the virgin in Isaiah. It starts with a proper interpretation of the Hebrew word for “virgin.” The word is ‘*almah*,’ which is used of an unmarried woman of marriageable age.

View #1: The boy of whom Isaiah wrote was conceived shortly after Isaiah spoke this message.

A young woman, a virgin, married and then had a baby. Before he would be old enough to tell the difference between good and evil the northern Aram-Israel alliance would be destroyed. According to this view the woman was a virgin when Isaiah spoke his prophecy but was not when the boy was born because he was conceived by sexual relations with her husband. Some say this child was born to Isaiah (8:3–4). They point out that 8:1–4 corresponds in a number of ways to 7:14–17. But this view must be rejected because (a) Isaiah’s wife already had a child (Shear-Jashub, v. 3) and so was not a virgin, and (b) the second child born to Isaiah’s wife was not named Immanuel (8:3). In this view Ahaz would have known this woman, and hearing of the child’s birth and his name Immanuel he would understand that Isaiah’s prophecies were correct.

View #2: A second view sees the predicted birth as exclusively messianic and the virgin as Mary, Jesus’ mother. It is argued that in Isaiah 7:14 the virgin is said to **be with child** (lit., “the virgin is or will be pregnant”). It is also argued that Matthew, stressing the fact that Joseph and Mary’s marriage was not consummated till after Jesus’ birth (Matt. 1:18, 25), affirmed that Jesus’ birth fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy (Matt. 1:21–23).

Proponents of this view point out that since Isaiah spoke this prophecy to the house of David (Isa. 7:13) and not just to Ahaz himself, the sign was given not just to the king but to the entire kingly line and the entire nation. However, if the fulfillment did not occur until Joseph and Mary’s day, how does the prophecy relate to Isaiah’s point that the Aram-Israel confederacy would soon be defeated? And how does the birth of the Lord Jesus relate to the eating of curds and honey (v. 15) and to the breaking of the alliance before the boy was old enough to know good and evil? (v. 16) Proponents of this view answer that the time is similar: the two years of Jesus’ babyhood (before He would know between right and wrong) point to the same time segment, two years, within which the Aram-Israel threat would be gone.

View #3: A third view, a combination of the first two, sees the prophecy as directed primarily to Ahaz regarding the breaking of the alliance. The ‘*almâh*’ was a virgin when Isaiah spoke his message, but then she would marry and have a baby. When the Aram-Israel alliance was broken

the boy would still be young. Centuries later the Holy Spirit led Matthew to quote Isaiah 7:14 as a statement that was also true of a virgin birth (i.e., a birth to a woman who was still a virgin). This is the first of many prophecies about the Messiah given by Isaiah. (See the chart “Messianic Prophecies in the Book of Isaiah.”)

The sign must have had some significance for the historical situation in which it was given. The sign involved not only the birth and the boy’s name (Immanuel, “God [is] with us,” would assure the people of God’s presence), but also a designated length of time: **before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings ... will be laid waste.**

Q V.15: What do you think is the significance of the “curds and honey” imagery? [The boy born of a virgin would be raised in a time of national calamity. See v.22]

Q V.16: What is Isaiah really saying to Ahaz? [While he was still a youth, the two-king alliance would be broken. He’s giving Ahaz an estimated timeline of when the Israel/Syria alliance will be no more.]

Q: What can we learn about God given that King Ahaz was a bad king all along? [In spite of our sin, He still wants to reveal Himself and be the source of our deliverance. He still wants to give us a sign of His mercy.]

Transition: Let’s wrap up this chapter by reading Isaiah’s warning to Judah. Someone read v.17-25 to paint the picture.

V.17:

- The LORD will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.”

V.18:

- In that day the LORD will whistle for flies from the distant streams of Egypt and for bees from the land of Assyria.

V.19:

- They will all come and settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks, on all the thorn bushes and at all the water holes.

V.20:

- In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the River (Euphrates)—the king of Assyria—to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also.

V.21:

- In that day, a man will keep alive a young cow and two goats.

V.22:

- And because of the abundance of the milk they give, he will have curds to eat. All who remain in the land will eat curds and honey.

V.23:

- In that day, in every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels (about 25 lbs.), there will be only briars and thorns.

V.24:

- Men will go there with bow and arrow, for the land will be covered with briars and thorns.

V.25:

- As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briars and thorns; they will become places where cattle are turned loose and where sheep run.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: Can someone summarize the warning to Judah? [The Assyrians would invade Judah and so ravage the land that agriculture would cease and the people would have only dairy products to eat. The rich farmland would become a wasteland, and the people would be forced to hunt wild beasts in order to get food. It would be a time of great humiliation and suffering that could have been avoided had the leaders trusted in the Lord.]

LOOK:

The Lord will keep us in His perfect peace for those whose mind is stayed on Him, because we trust in Him.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Comforted* (pp. 28–30). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ISAIAH 7–12

God Is with Us!

Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts” (8:18).

This statement by the Prophet Isaiah is a key to understanding the meaning of the events and prophecies in this section. In his previous messages, Isaiah focused on the *spiritual* needs of his people, but in this section he deals with the *political* situation and the failure of the leaders to trust the Lord. Four symbolic names are involved in Isaiah's messages, each of them with a very special meaning: Immanuel, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Shear-jashub, and Isaiah.

1. Immanuel: A message of hope (Isa. 7:1–25)

A promise to King Ahaz (Isa. 7:1–9). These were perilous days for the nation of Judah. Assyria was growing stronger and threatening the smaller nations whose security depended on a very delicate political balance. Syria and Ephraim (the Northern Kingdom) tried to pressure Judah into an alliance against Assyria, but Ahaz refused to join them. Why? Because he had secretly made a treaty with Assyria! (2 Kings 16:5–9) The king was playing “power politics” instead of trusting in the power of God. Syria and Ephraim planned to overthrow Ahaz and put “the son of Tabeel” on the throne, and Ahaz was a frightened man.

The Lord commanded Isaiah to take his son Shear-jashub (“A remnant shall return”) and meet Ahaz as the king was inspecting the city's water system. Ahaz's heart had been wavering, and the hearts of his people had been shaking for fear (Isa. 7:2); but Isaiah came with a message of assurance: “Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted” (v. 4). How would Ahaz find this inner peace? By believing God's promise that Judah's enemies would be defeated. “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established” (v. 9, NKJV). Faith in God's promises is the only way to find peace in the midst of trouble. “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (26:3, NKJV).

In God's eyes, the two threatening kings were nothing but “two smoldering stubs of firewood” (7:4, NIV), who would be off the scene very soon; and they both died two years later. Furthermore, within sixty-five years, Ephraim (Israel, the Northern Kingdom) would be gone forever. Isaiah spoke this prophecy in the year 734 B.C. Assyria defeated Syria in 732 B.C. and invaded Israel in 722 B.C. They deported many of the Jews and assimilated the rest by introducing Gentiles into the land; and by 669 B.C. (sixty-five years later), the nation no longer existed.

A sign to the house of David (Isa. 7:10–16). If Ahaz had believed God's promise, he would have broken his alliance and called the nation to prayer and praise; but the king continued in his unbelief. Realizing the weakness of the king's faith, Isaiah offered to give a sign to encourage him; but Ahaz put on a “pious front” and refused his offer. Knowing that he was secretly allied with Assyria, how could Ahaz honestly ask the Lord for a special sign? So, instead of speaking only to the king, Isaiah addressed the whole “house of David” and gave the prophecy concerning “Immanuel.”

Of course, the *ultimate* fulfillment of this prophecy is in our Lord Jesus Christ, who is “God with us” (Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:31–35). The virgin birth of Christ is a key doctrine; for if Jesus Christ is not God come in sinless human flesh, then we have no Savior. Jesus had to be born of a virgin, apart from human generation, because He existed before His mother. He was not just born *in* this world; He came down from heaven *into* the world (John 3:13; 6:33, 38, 41–42, 50–51, 58). Jesus was *sent by the Father* and therefore came into the world having a human mother but not a human father (4:34; 5:23–24, 30; 9:4).

However, this “sign” had an *immediate* significance to Ahaz and the people of Judah. A woman who was then a virgin would get married, conceive, and bear a son whose name would be “Immanuel.” This son would be a reminder that God was with His people and would care for them. It is likely that this virgin was Isaiah’s second wife, his first wife having died after Shear-jashub was born; and that Isaiah’s second son was named both “Immanuel” and “Maher-shalal-hash-baz” (8:1–4; note vv. 8 and 10).

Orthodox Jewish boys become “sons of the Law” at the age of twelve. This special son was a reminder that Syria and Ephraim would be out of the picture within the next twelve years. Isaiah delivered this prophecy in 734 B.C. In 732 B.C., Assyria defeated Syria; and in 722 B.C., Assyria invaded the Northern Kingdom. The prophecy was fulfilled.

A warning to Judah (Isa. 7:17–25). Instead of trusting the Lord, Ahaz continued to trust Assyria for help; and Isaiah warned him that Assyria would become Judah’s enemy. The Assyrians would invade Judah and so ravage the land that agriculture would cease and the people would have only dairy products to eat (vv. 15, 21–23). The rich farmland would become wasteland, and the people would be forced to hunt wild beasts in order to get food. It would be a time of great humiliation (v. 20; 2 Sam. 10:4–5) and suffering that could have been avoided had the leaders trusted in the Lord.

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (Is 7–12).
Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

ISAIAH 7–12

There are two important principles to keep in mind as you study OT prophecy: (1) the prophets saw Christ’s coming in humiliation and in glory, but did not see the period of time between these events—the church age (1 Peter 1:10–12); and (2) each prophecy grew out of a definite historical situation but looked beyond that present day to the future. We shall see these principles in the chapters before us now. The prophet is dealing with a definite crisis in Judah’s history—the impending attack by Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Syria—and he tells the nation exactly what will happen. Within these prophecies, Isaiah also announces the coming of the Messiah. Note the prophecies he gives.

I. Judah Will Be Delivered from Her Enemies (7:1–16)

A. The situation (vv. 1–2).

Assyria was growing stronger and threatening the other nations, so Israel and Syria joined forces to protect themselves. They wanted Judah to line up with them, but she would not. Actually, Ahaz

was secretly bargaining with Assyria to protect him (2 Kings 16:1–9). The nation was frightened because Syria and Israel were about to attack and there seemed to be no way of escape.

B. The promise (vv. 3–9).

God sent Isaiah and his son Shear-jashub (“The remnant shall return”) to meet King Ahaz while the ruler was inspecting the Jerusalem water supply. Isaiah gave the king a message of hope and confidence: “Don’t be afraid of Syria and Israel, for within sixty-five years they will be broken.” This prophecy came true: Assyria defeated Syria (Damascus) in 732, and Israel (Ephraim, Samaria) in 721, within the allotted time given.

C. The sign (vv. 10–16).

Ahaz acted very pious by refusing to receive a sign from God. So, the Lord turned from Ahaz and gave a sign to the entire house of David (v. 13). This sign was fulfilled ultimately in the birth of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:23). He was born of the Virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31–35). To make the word “virgin” in v. 14 into the word “young woman” is to twist the Scriptures. His name was “Immanuel,” which means “God is with us” (see 8:8 and 10). Jesus Christ is God come in human flesh, yet without sin (John 1:14). He is not merely a “good man” or a “great teacher”; He is the very Son of God. To deny this is to deny the Word of God (1 John 4:1–6).

It is possible (but not necessary) that there was some kind of an immediate fulfillment of the prophecy as a sign to the king and the nation. This does not mean a miraculous virgin birth, since only Jesus Christ could be born in that manner. But it does suggest that a Jewish virgin was wed and within the next year gave birth to a child. Before this child could reach the legal Jewish age of accountability (12 years old), the enemy nations of Israel and Syria would be defeated. If this sign was given in 735 B.C., as it probably was, then by 721 the promise would be fulfilled. As we have seen, Syria fell in 732 and Samaria in 721. It is possible that the “sign child” was born to Isaiah’s wife; the record is given in 8:1–8. This would mean that the prophet’s first wife (the mother of Shear-jashub, 7:3) had died, and that the prophet married the second wife shortly after uttering this prophecy. In spite of King Ahaz’s unbelief and scheming (he robbed the temple to bribe Assyria—2 Chron. 28:21, 24–25), God graciously delivered Judah from her enemies. But Judah was left enslaved to Assyria, and only a divine intervention in Hezekiah’s day delivered the nation (see Isa. 36–37).

II. Israel Will Be Defeated by Assyria (7:17–10:34)

From 7:17 on, Isaiah is talking to apostate Israel and Pekah, her king. He warns the Northern Kingdom that Assyria will come upon them and completely ruin them, leaving the land in poverty and ruin instead of fullness of blessing.

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 1046–1056). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

1. THE BIRTH OF IMMANUEL (CHAP. 7)

Isaiah prophesied about a Child to be born who in some way would relate to the nation's deliverance. The birth of the Baby, to be named Immanuel, has great significance for the line of David.

7:7–9. In response to the **Aram-Israel** threat **the Sovereign LORD** had an answer: It (the attack) would **not take place; it would not happen**. The reason was that both of those nations were headed by mere (**only**, vv. 8–9) men. Ironically Isaiah referred to Pekah by name only once (v. 1). Four other times he called him “the son of Remaliah” or **Remaliah's son** (vv. 4–5, 9; 8:6). He and **Rezin** could not thwart God's plans.

In fact Isaiah made the startling prophecy that **within 65 years** Israel would no longer even be **a people** because they would be so **shattered** (7:8). Isaiah gave this prophecy in 734 B.C., so 65 years later was 669. When Assyria conquered Israel in 722, many Israelites were deported to other lands by Assyria and foreigners were brought into Samaria (2 Kings 17:24). However, in 669 many more foreigners were transferred to **Samaria** by Ashurbanipal (Ezra 4:10), king of Assyria (669–626). This “shattered” Israel, making it impossible for her to unite as a nation (“a people”).

The second sentence in Isaiah 7:9 has been translated in various ways. But it challenged Ahaz to believe what Isaiah was telling him. Obviously Ahaz was not alive 65 years later. But he could have **faith** that God would fulfill both predictions: that Israel would be shattered 65 years later and that in his day the northern confederacy (Aram and Israel) would not overpower Judah. If he did not believe those predictions he too would fall.

c. Ahaz's rejection of a sign (7:10–12)

7:10–12. As a means of strengthening his faith **Ahaz** was told to **ask the LORD ... for a sign**, an attesting miracle that would confirm God's word. The king could choose any miraculous work he wished, from **the deepest depths to the highest heights**. This was a figure of speech, a merism, that mentioned two extremes with the intention of including all the areas in between them. With a miracle performed simply for the asking, Ahaz would have visible confirmation that Isaiah's words (vv. 7–9) were truly from the Lord. Ahaz could count on the fact that the northern alliance would not defeat Judah.

But **Ahaz** refused to request a sign, saying he would **not ... test** God (cf. Deut. 6:16). This answer sounded pious but probably the way he said it showed he was not believing Isaiah. Perhaps he did not *want* to believe Isaiah, who had been prophesying about the eventual destruction of Judah if her people did not return to **the LORD**.

d. The Lord's response (7:13–25)

7:13. Ahaz, by rejecting the offer of a sign from God's messenger, was in effect rejecting the One who sent the prophet. The **house of David** (cf. v. 2) refers not to all David's descendants, but to Ahaz and those kings of Judah who would descend from him. Ahaz's answer was impious. He said he did not want to test the Lord, but by refusing to follow God's directive to ask for a confirming miracle, he *was* testing the Lord's **patience** (as well as man's **patience**).

7:14–16. Though Ahaz refused to request **a sign** that would have confirmed the truth of Isaiah's message, the prophet said God would **give** him one anyway. The sign was to be a boy named **Immanuel**. Three elements pertain to the sign: (1) The boy would be born of a **virgin** (v. 14). (2)

He would be raised in a time of national calamity (v. 15; on the **curds and honey** see comments on v. 22). (3) While he was still a youth, the two-king alliance would be broken (v. 16).

“Virgin” translates *‘almâh*, a word used of an unmarried woman of marriageable age. The word refers to one who is sexually mature. It occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament only in Genesis 24:43 (“maiden”); Exodus 2:8 (“girl”); Psalm 68:25 (“maidens”); Proverbs 30:19 (“maiden”); Song of Songs 1:3 (“maidens”); 6:8 (“virgins”). It also occurs in 1 Chronicles 15:20 (*alamoth*) and in the title of Psalm 46 (*alamoth* may be a musical term). The child’s name Immanuel means “God (is) with us.”

Most Bible scholars hold one of three views on the virgin in Isaiah 7:14–16: (1) The boy of whom Isaiah wrote was conceived shortly after Isaiah spoke this message. A young woman, a virgin, married and then had a baby. Before he would be old enough to tell the difference between good and evil the northern Aram-Israel alliance would be destroyed. According to this view the woman was a virgin when Isaiah spoke his prophecy but was not when the boy was born because he was conceived by sexual relations with her husband. Some say this child was born to Isaiah (8:3–4). They point out that 8:1–4 corresponds in a number of ways to 7:14–17. But this view must be rejected because (a) Isaiah’s wife already had a child (Shear-Jashub, v. 3) and so was not a virgin, and (b) the second child born to Isaiah’s wife was not named Immanuel (8:3). In this view Ahaz would have known this woman, and hearing of the child’s birth and his name Immanuel he would understand that Isaiah’s prophecies were correct.

(2) A second view sees the predicted birth as exclusively messianic and the virgin as Mary, Jesus’ mother. It is argued that in Isaiah 7:14 the virgin is said to **be with child** (lit., “the virgin is or will be pregnant”). It is also argued that Matthew, stressing the fact that Joseph and Mary’s marriage was not consummated till after Jesus’ birth (Matt. 1:18, 25), affirmed that Jesus’ birth fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy (Matt. 1:21–23).

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(3) A third view, a combination of the first two, sees the prophecy as directed primarily to Ahaz regarding the breaking of the alliance. The *‘almâh* was a virgin when Isaiah spoke his message, but then she would marry and have a baby. When the Aram-Israel alliance was broken the boy would still be young. Centuries later the Holy Spirit led Matthew to quote Isaiah 7:14 as a statement that was also true of a virgin birth (i.e., a birth to a woman who was still a virgin). This is the first of many prophecies about the Messiah given by Isaiah. (See the chart “Messianic Prophecies in the Book of Isaiah.”)

The sign must have had some significance for the historical situation in which it was given. The sign involved not only the birth and the boy’s name (Immanuel, “God [is] with us,” would assure the people of God’s presence), but also a designated length of time: **before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings ... will be laid waste.**

Within about three years (nine months for the pregnancy and two or three years until the boy would know the difference between good and evil) the alliance would be broken. It was broken in 732 B.C. when Tiglath-Pileser III destroyed Damascus. After Tiglath-Pileser had defeated Aram and put Rezin to death Ahaz went to Damascus to meet the Assyrian monarch (2 Kings 16:7–10). Ahaz liked an altar he saw in Damascus, and had a sketch of it drawn so a similar altar could be set up in Jerusalem. No wonder Isaiah and God were angry with Ahaz. Even after the alliance had been broken by Tiglath-Pileser Judah had no peace. Though Assyria did not defeat Judah, she had to pay Assyria a heavy tribute. Isaiah foretold the consequences of Ahaz's attitude (Isa. 7:17–25).

7:17–19. God said He would send **the king of Assyria** to **Judah**. These would be the worst enemy attacks **since** the 10 Northern tribes (here called **Ephraim**; see comments on v. 2) **broke ... from** the 2 Southern tribes in 931 B.C. From Ahaz's day on, Judah was troubled by the Assyrian Empire, to which it had to pay a large tribute. Ahaz called on Tiglath-Pileser to rescue him from Aram and Israel, which the Assyrian king gladly did. However, Tiglath-Pileser gave Ahaz trouble, not help (2 Chron. 28:20–21). Then in Hezekiah's reign Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Judah, who had asked for help from **Egypt** (Isa. 30:1–5), and was about to take it when, in 701 B.C., God miraculously delivered Jerusalem (chaps. 36–37). God's hand was in all this for He would **whistle for flies from Egypt** (i.e., Egyptian soldiers were as numerous and bothersome as flies) **and for bees from ... Assyria** (i.e., Assyrian soldiers who were vicious as bees).

7:20–25. Judah would experience deprivation and humiliation. **Assyria**, like **a razor**, would **shave** Judah's **hair**. In the ancient Near East shaving one's hair and beard was a sign of humiliation or deep distress (cf. Job 1:20; Isa. 15:2; Jer. 47:5; 48:37; Ezek. 7:18; Amos 8:10; Micah 1:16). **The abundance of ... milk** was a distressful factor, not a good one. With many animals dying, a farmer's **young cow and two goats** would have no young to nurse, and so the milk (and **curds** from it) would be plentiful for the people. **Honey** would also be abundant because wild flowers would grow in the desolate fields and bee swarms would be more plentiful. All this would fulfill the sign given Ahaz by Isaiah (Isa. 7:15): he **will eat curds and honey**. Also the farmers would have no crops because of the ruined farmland. The vineyards would be ruined along with the cultivated **land**, and only **briers and thorns** (mentioned three times in vv. 23–25) would grow. The land would be good only for grazing by **cattle and sheep**.

In that day (v. 21) denotes a time of judgment on the nation of Judah. Often this phrase (as in 4:2, e.g.) is used eschatologically to refer to the time of extreme judgment in the Great Tribulation just before the Messiah will return to establish the millennial kingdom. But sometimes as here (7:21) it refers to a judgment to come on the nation soon. The near judgment pictures the extreme judgment to come at the end of the age.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1002-1010). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

7:14 The Hebrew word *'almah* refers to a young woman before the age of marriage, and is sometimes translated “virgin.” Some interpreters claim that Matthew misappropriated this verse (Mt 1:23) in applying it to the birth of Jesus. They believe Isaiah was referring to a woman in the time of Ahaz—either a son born to an *'almah* in Ahaz's harem or a son to Isaiah's wife (8:1–4), and that this “Immanuel” was a sign of hope for the future when “God will be with us.” Others accept this immediate application, but also view the passage as prophetic of Christ (a “double fulfillment” approach). But Ahaz's good son Hezekiah was already born at this time; and Isaiah already had children, so his wife would not be called a “virgin” at this point in her life. Thus, many

believe this prophecy only referred to the future birth of the Messiah. If so, this messianic application was expanded and verified through progressive revelation in 9:6–7, which announced that “a child will be born for us ... He will reign on the throne of David.”

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