

Ahaz and the Sign He Did Not Want – Isaiah 7

Introduction – While many years pass between the events of Isaiah 6 and 7 (Jotham reigned as king between Uzziah and Ahaz), it is clear that the promise of the prophet's words of hardening (6:10) have taken place. Ahaz was a wicked king in faith and practice (2 Chron 28:1-4). He is afraid of Syria and Israel, but even more afraid of joining forces with them against Assyria. In a state of panic (possibly preparing his aqueducts for an impending siege), turning to the LORD first is not even a possibility in his mind. When a man (or a nation) will not trust God, it will soon make sense to trust his worst enemy. John Wesley said, "*if a man will not believe God, he will believe anything.*" Romans 1 makes clear that if a man will not worship God, he will worship anything; thinking to be wise, he will play the fool.

Overview – Ahaz had been defeated with great losses to both Syria and Israel (2 Chron 28:5-8) and now those kings had joined forces to war all the way to Jerusalem (v1). When Ahaz heard the news, he and the whole "*house of David*" shook with fear (v2). Isaiah, with his son (whose name means "*a remnant shall repent*") is sent by the LORD to meet Ahaz at the end of an aqueduct (v3). Isaiah's message is to remain calm and not fear these kings, they are only smoldering stubs in the LORD's hands and their plans "*will not come to pass*" (vv4-8). But Isaiah's message is also a threat: if Ahaz does not stand in faith, his house will not stand either (v9). In 2 Kings 16:5-9 we find that Ahaz did not trust in the LORD but sought help from Assyria. In his apostasy, he found Assyria more trustworthy than the LORD. The LORD tests Ahaz by inviting him to test the LORD for a sign of His trustworthiness, and offers to him to ask for anything he can imagine (vv10-11). But Ahaz, very diplomatically, declines, failing the test (v12). Wearied by Ahaz's unbelieving heart and unfaithful practices, the LORD declares a sign, a young woman will conceive and will bear a son named Immanuel, meaning "*God with us*" (vv13-14). Before he is grown, he will eat the food of a decimated remnant (v15) and yet those nations Ahaz feared will have been forsaken and put down (v16). Ahaz trusted in king Assyria instead of King Yahweh and yet the king of Assyria will bring devastation upon Judah (v17) for King Yahweh will whistle him and Egypt up like swarms of insects (vv18-19). The Judeans would be disgraced as Assyria, like a razor, shaves away all the glory of the land and its people (v20). What had been a glorious, fruitful land will become a nearly uninhabited wasteland of briers and thorns (vv21-25).

What Makes You Shake with Fear? – In the worship of God, the foundations of the Temple shook (Isaiah 6:4) and all of creation shakes (Heb 12:26ff) except that which is being established forever (Heb 12:28). But when there is not that God-given faith, when there is not that fear-shaking and promise-renewing worship, the threat of nations causes Ahaz to shake with fear (Isaiah 7:2) even when God spoke and told him to be at peace (v4). God was with him (Immanuel) but Ahaz would not trust. Jesus (Immanuel) tells us as His disciples that we are to never worry about our lives as though God was not there (Matt 6:25-31). The Gentiles (unbelievers) seek to solve their problems outside of trusting in God (Matt 6:32). But we are offered a different solution: "*Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (v33). When we are not trusting God, we are acting like Ahaz even when the "Immanuel-sign" has been given.

When Things Look Impossible, Nothing Is – It is never easy to gain this divine perspective, but this is the gift of faith which overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5). It is this faith that allowed Joshua to hear God's promises and lead the people into Canaan (Josh 1:6-9). It is this faith that allowed Paul to be content in any situation he found himself in (Phil 4:12-13). When faith is granted, trusting God in the moment makes perfect sense. Without faith, trusting God in the moment seems foolish and impractical.

Immanuel the Sign; Immanuel the Son – The birth of the child in Isaiah's day was a typological prophecy, a prophecy in action. That prophesy in action was the birth of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Isaiah 8:3-4). But this son of Isaiah is only a type and as this section of Isaiah continues, Immanuel merges into the figure of the future Davidic King Who would be Mighty God and Prince of Peace (9:6) and Who's Spirit-empowered reign would bring forth everlasting righteousness and peace (11:1-10).

Immanuel the God-Man (Matt 1:18-25) – Mary and Joseph were also given this sign and once Joseph receives the dream, he trusts the LORD. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14 and so we know this is ultimately fulfilled in an actual virgin giving birth to a son in a miraculous way. While God had always been with Israel, He was now physically present in a way He had never been before. The sign is the same, only more so: God is going to deliver a remnant but destruction will come upon the unbelieving. Those who saw that God had been preparing for this time were able to meditate upon these scriptures and see what God was planning. Mary, contemplating her pregnancy in the light of OT prophesies would sing of this (Luke 1:51b-52). Simeon would also prophesy that Jesus was "*destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel*" (Luke 2:34). The sign is given: Immanuel, God with us.