

Immanuel
Isaiah 7:1-25

Our text today is Isaiah chapter 7. We're looking at the whole chapter. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer. Father in heaven, we pray that you would indeed speak to us from your word by your Spirit. We seek not the wisdom of men, for we realize that the wisdom of men is foolishness. We seek a word from God—the living God. Please. Your servants are here. We are listening. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So the book of Isaiah, chapter 7.

“¹In 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. ²When 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.

“³And 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. ⁴And 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. ⁵Because 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,’ ⁷thus says the Lord GOD:

““‘It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. ⁸For 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. ⁹And 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.’”

“¹⁰Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz: ¹¹‘Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.’ ¹²But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.’ ¹³And he said, ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!’

“¹⁸In that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures.

“²⁰In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also.

“²¹ In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep, ²² and because of the abundance of milk that they give, he will eat curds, for everyone who is left in the land will eat curds and honey.

“²³ In that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briers and thorns. ²⁴ With bow and arrows a man will come there, for all the land will be briers and thorns. ²⁵ And as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not come there for fear of briers and thorns, but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread.” Amen.

So, troubled times in the kingdom of Judah. Things aren't going well. Remember last week that Isaiah was given a commission to go out and preach, and he was to preach to a people who, though they hear, they would not understand; though they see, they would not perceive; their heart would be dull. They just simply would not receive the Lord.

And at the start of chapter 7, we're given a prime example—example number 1—of the stubborn heart, and it's the king, Ahaz. The political situation at this time for Judah was not good. The political situation at this time was troubled. You might have already gotten that picture, especially from our reading from Second Kings.

If you've got in your mind, or in your mind's eye, a picture or a map of Israel in the Middle East, imagine to the north, you've got Judah—a little kingdom centered around Jerusalem. To the south of Judah, you've got the kingdom of Egypt. Just north of Judah, you've got what is called the Kingdom of Israel, the Northern Kingdom, or in the prophecy we've read this morning, called Ephraim. Just to the north of Ephraim, or Israel, and just a little bit on the east side, you've got Syria. And then in an arc around all of that, you've got this rising kingdom called Assyria. Now Assyria won't last very long. It'll be taken over by Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar.

That's the picture. And this little kingdom, or nation, or city-state nation of Judah, is this small place between greater forces and powers. And Assyria, that sort of arcing kingdom to the north, in your mind's eye, at the top of that map, is rapacious. It's aggressive. They want territory. They're brutal. They kill. They want an empire. Tiglath-Pileser, the king of that nation, is very much an old-fashioned antichrist type of figure—an invader, a swallower of lands, a taker of slaves and peoples. He's that kind of figure. So you've got, as I said, the smaller nation of Syria, the smaller nation of Israel, and below those, the nation of Judah.

Syria and Israel put their heads together and said, “Assyria to the north is very powerful and very dangerous. What we need to do is to form a three-way alliance: Syria, Israel, Judah. If we can form a three-way alliance, the three of us might just about be able to put an army in the field that will stand up to Assyria.

And to this point, the nation of Judah has refused to form that alliance—Judah and the Northern Kingdom of Ephraim, always at each other throats; always arguing, fighting, squabbling, disagreeing. Judah had Jerusalem, it had the temple, it had the word of the Lord—the Levites. The Northern Kingdom had the calves—Samaria and further north in Dan, the golden calves. And that alliance just never quite came off.

There was a war. Judah refused to form an alliance, and Ahaz went out. He probably hoped that he would conquer those two nations and that he would stand on his own. But he lost his battle terribly. He lost that war terribly. God was not with him. And he was humbled and shamed. It tells us in Scripture that he lost over 100,000 soldiers in war with the Northern Kingdom and Syria. He lost over 100,000 soldiers; prisoners were taken; Judah was going to be, basically, stripped and destroyed by those two kingdoms.

But a prophet intervened in the Northern Kingdom. He came to the Jews of the Northern Kingdom, and he said to them, “The Lord is angry enough with you already. Do you want to increase His anger by enslaving the people of Judah? Send them home.” And on this occasion, according to the providence of God, they heard that prophecy and they sent them home. So you have Ahaz back in Judah, back in Jerusalem, greatly humbled and shamed. He’s lost that battle. And he still has the pressure of those two smaller kingdoms to the north.

And look at what Isaiah tells us is their plan. Their plan is to come and to put a puppet king on the throne in Jerusalem so that they can then tell that king to form that alliance. Verse 6 of chapter 7: “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.” So the plan of those two smaller northern kingdoms is to conquer Judah, put a puppet king on the throne in Judah—they’ve called his name “Tabeel.” He’s supposedly going to be their puppet king, and then they’ll form that three-nation alliance, and they hope, they imagine, that they’re going to be able to stand up against Assyria.

Now Ahaz is in this situation: Will he humble himself and repent and trust God? He’s tried his own ideas. He’s tried his own little schemes and plans. He thought that he was going to be a mighty king himself, and he was going to go out and wage war against the Northern Kingdom and Syria, take all that territory for himself, take the men for himself, and form a mighty army to stand up against Assyria. Well, that’s been crushed. Will he now humble himself and repent? Or, is he going to play politics; is he going to pretend that he’s a great world statesman and form a different alliance? That’s the challenge that Isaiah brings to him.

Ahaz is planning to form an alliance with the king of Assyria. He’s going to form an alliance with that mighty empire that’s further to the north, and that is rapacious and hungry. He’s going to form an alliance with that king, and have that king deal with his enemies. He thinks that’s the best way out. And that’s what you’ve got to understand when Isaiah is sent to Ahaz with a message. So, I hope we’ve got all that relatively clear in our minds. Let’s read.

There’s really three sections to this chapter. You’ve got the first section, which deals directly with Ahaz. He’s the prime example of the stubborn and hardened heart. He’s the prime example of the failure of the line of David. That section runs from verses 1 to 9.

In the second section, you’ve got the prophecy of the coming king. What we need to understand, and what many of us often forget, is that this prediction of the coming of the son of the virgin, the child born of a virgin, his name called Emmanuel—it’s a prophecy of judgment. It’s salvation and it’s judgment. It’s God’s judgment upon the house of David. This one who will be

born will be the fulfillment of God's covenant with David, and also God's judgment upon the house of David.

God is saying, I reject the kings that are born of the line of David. I am going to send my own king. Now he will come from the house of David, but when he comes, the theocracy is finished. It's actually a prediction of judgment, though in the New Testament, as we read, Matthew immediately picks up on that, and to us, it's the word of hope. Isaiah so often is prophesying judgment against or upon Judah, and salvation to the peoples.

It's a message of judgment and salvation. And that's what we're going to try and pick up. It's a complicated passage, in many ways. I can tell you, it's not all that easy to understand. You end up having to hang your hat on a few hooks that the New Testament gives us, and then you have to try and understand it in the light of those New Testament references.

Anyway, the first part is the easiest part to deal with. It's verses 1 to 9. The testing of King Ahaz, who is the prime example of a stubborn heart. Isaiah comes to King Ahaz, and he's told to take with him his son. Let's read it:

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. ²When 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. ³And 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.’”

So what's happening here? It would appear that King Ahaz is preparing for a siege. He's outside the city walls, trying to secure Jerusalem's water supply. He's preparing for trouble. And it says that he's not confident; that his heart is shaking like a tree in the wind. And God says to Isaiah, “Go to Ahaz with your son, Shear-jashub.” Now there's an important thing to understand. “Isaiah” means “God saves.” And “Shear-jashub”—or, “jashub”—means, “and a remnant will return.” God saves; a remnant will return.

So just in the names of the people being sent to the king, you've got the promise of salvation. But salvation comes to a remnant—salvation and a reducing; salvation and a judging. Remember how chapter 6 finished. When God spoke of the people, verse 13 of chapter 6, though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again. God said that that nation is going to be reduced by 90%, down to just one-tenth. And then that one-tenth is going to be gone over, all over again. So you see the significance of Isaiah being told to take his son, Shear-jashub: God saves; a remnant will return. Go and speak to Ahaz. Now this is a testing. Ahaz is here being tested. And in his testing, Ahaz is being tested as a representative of the house of David.

Verse 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. ⁵Because 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.””” He says that if this attack comes, if these men actually raise their armies and come and directly attack Jerusalem itself, his very own kingship is under threat. His very own household is under threat. It’s going to collapse, because he doesn’t feel he has the strength to protect his nation, the strength to protect his kingdom. He feels certain that he’s going to lose that which he clings to. No confidence.

Look at the words Isaiah says: “Be careful, be quiet,” verse 4, “do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint.” What does Isaiah say of these two northern kingdoms that Ahaz is now fearing? They’re smoldering stumps of firebrands. They’re basically burnt out pieces of wood. You know, your fire goes down and you’ve got the chunk of wood still sitting in the fireplace, and let’s say it’s a foot long, 30 centimeters long. And 25 centimeters is just black charcoal, but the end of it’s just got that little bit of red glow. God says that they’re not a raging fire—they’re burnt-out fuel. They’re just at the end. They’re just about finished. They’re going to be done for. God says it will not stand. Why won’t it stand? Because He’s not going to allow anyone to be king over His people, other than a son of David.

Now even though the house of David is failing, even though the house of David is sinning, God has ordained that a son of David will rule over His people. So no plot that plans to bring down the house of David will succeed. The house of David will be brought down by the son of David. Who finished the house of David? Who finished the theocracy? Jesus Christ, the son of David. He’s the one came, who fulfilled the prophecies, and thereafter Jerusalem was destroyed. He must be a son of David, because He is now the King of all. He’s King of kings, He’s Lord of lords. God had ordained that a son of David would rule over His household. That’s Jesus.

But the idea of an earthly kingdom now ruled over by the son of David, that’s finished. Judgment is coming. Judgment is falling. But until that time, the kings of Judah are types of the coming Messiah, because the kings of Judah are anointed messiahs, each and every one—not a capital “M” messiah; we call Jesus *the* Messiah, but they’re all messiahs—the kings, the prophets, and the priests were all anointed with oil and called messiahs, or mashiachs, in Hebrew. They’re all anointed. And so God’s anointed leaders will stand until God Himself brings them down. So Ahaz is told not to fear. God will support the house of David.

Now looking in verse 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””

What’s God saying? God’s saying, “No, it won’t happen. I’ll tell you why it won’t happen. Because I have ordained that the Northern Kingdom is finished. I have ordained that the nation that you call Ephraim, or Israel, I have ordained that they are finished. And not only are they finished, but Syria is finished. This is my will,” says God. “These people who have turned upon you will not survive. They won’t survive one generation.” Remember, Isaiah took a child with him. That child would see what was going to happen to those two kingdoms to the north of Judah. They will be destroyed. And look at that last bit of verse 9, verse 9b: “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.” The testing. There’s a testing going on.

What is God always seeking? What is God always requiring of His people? What are we told in the New Testament? “Without [something], it is impossible to please God.” You tell me—what’s the “something”? Faith. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

You know, we have this terrible habit in the New Testament church to go back, and when we read the Old Testament, the things that we find, the history that we find recorded, we sort of turn them into, “Try harder, do more, be better” stories. We turn them into moralistic stories. You know, we turn them into hero stories: You can be a David; you can be a Daniel; you can be an Isaiah; etc., etc., etc. God’s faithful people, or God’s righteous people, have always been righteous through faith—through faith.

When the apostle Paul, in the book of Romans, is arguing for the righteousness that comes by faith, where does he go? He goes to the Old Testament. He goes first of all to Abraham. “Abraham,” he says, “believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And then he goes to King David. “Blessed is the one whose sins are forgiven, and whose transgressions are not counted against him.”

He says Abraham was counted righteous because he believed God, and David’s sins were forgiven for the same reason—he believed God, as Abraham believed God. The righteous, in Scripture, are always the faithful. Everyone in Scripture who is counted as righteous, is counted as righteous by faith.

So here’s the question to Ahaz: “You’ve been humbled. You tried to go out and play the mighty king. Well, how did that go? How did that work out, young man? Didn’t go so well, did it? Well now do you want to turn and put your faith in the Lord God? Now do you want to turn and repent and put your faith in God? If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.”

And that’s what’s happening in our nation, and that’s what’s happened in all the nations of the West where we see societies seemingly collapsing and falling apart, and the people don’t seem to have the willpower to even resist the destruction. This flood of Islam into their nations, this flood of lies and propaganda and perversion. And there’s no willpower, no desire to stand against the flood. Why? No faith. No trust in God. No true righteousness. No true framework, or backbone, or foundation of righteousness coming from Christianity into the people.

And so there’s no true willpower. No desire to fight. Average Joe says, “Yeah, look, as long as they don’t live next door to me, and I can pick up my carton of beer on Friday night and go fishing on Saturday and waterskiing Sunday—I don’t care. Not interested. As long as I can pack my bong, I don’t care. I’m not interested. Or as long as the Internet’s coming in at broadband speed, I don’t care. I’m not interested. Who cares? There’s fun to be had. There’s fun to be had in this world. There’s lots of beautiful people out there. There’s fun to be had in this world,” they say. “I don’t care.” No character. No righteousness. The markets down in the park are filled with people. The church is not, because there’s no character, because there’s no faith, because there’s no righteousness, no desire to resist the stupidity.

Now let me just sort of venture off and express a little bit of an opinion. I honestly think, as I look at the world, I honestly think that bloodshed is coming. I think in Europe, bloodshed is coming. I pray, I hope and I pray, that the people of Europe will return to the God of their fathers, that they will return to Christianity. Because otherwise, all that bloodshed is going to do is bring in another evil ruler. They'll take one kind of evil and replace it with another kind of evil. If there is not a revival of Christianity in our nations, all we will be able to do is exchange one corrupt leader for another, and another, and another. And no good will come of it. If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.

Let's keep reading. This section, the sign of Immanuel, starts verse 10, or the last half of verse 9, and runs through to verse 17. Now as I said, this is a sign of judgment upon Ahaz. It's a sign of judgment upon the house of David, which will be fulfilled by the son of David. Let's read it. Verse 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.'"

When God offers you the asking of a sign, ask for the sign. When God offers you something like the asking of a sign, ask for the sign. And when God says, "Challenge me; try and challenge me," He's saying, "I'm serious about this." He could've asked to see a burning bush. He could've asked to see water flow from a rock. He could've asked to see the sundial go backwards 10 degrees. He could've asked to see any sign in Scripture that you like.

God's saying, "You want to know that what Isaiah is telling you is true? Ask for any sign that you like, and you'll see it. I will back up my prophet's words. Whatever he has said is my word. My prophet is speaking my word. You ask for a sign to confirm my word, I'll give it to you. Ask for whatever you want." And what does Ahaz say? Religious talk. You've got to love religious talk.

"¹² But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.'" Why? He didn't want to see the Lord's words be true. You see, if the Lord's word was true, he would have no excuse not to repent. This is Ahaz, who, as we read, sacrificed one of his sons in the fire. This is Ahaz, who's brought a heathen altar into the temple and pushed the Lord's altar back, and turned the Lord's altar into nothing other than a superstitious touchstone, though it was made of bronze. But "I will inquire by the bronze altar," as though because he's touching something on the face of this earth, God must speak to him.

This is Ahaz, who—if he wishes, if he's going to acknowledge the living God, the God of Judah—must repent. So he doesn't want to see a sign. He doesn't want it to be true. What does Scripture tell us? "They suppress the truth in unrighteousness." He doesn't want to know the truth, he doesn't want to hear the truth—he's already made a decision. He's already set his heart on something—"I'm going to form an alliance with Assyria," that far northern kingdom. "I'm going to form an alliance with Tiglath-Pileser. That's the solution to my problems—I just need a mighty king on my side." He doesn't want the King of heaven. Remember, Isaiah has seen the Lord, high and lifted up. Isaiah knows who the King is, but Ahaz can see nothing—blinded by his own desires and stubbornness and sin. He wants to see a mighty earthly king with armies behind him, and so he'd rather have the king of Assyria as his ally than repent before the Lord God.

“I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” He quotes Deuteronomy chapter 6, verse 16, as though he’s in some way holy. The Devil knows how to use Scripture, remember? The three times that Jesus was tested, the Devil used Scripture. He used the word of God. He misquoted, misapplied, he misused the word of God. He used, for example, Psalm 91: “He will give his angels charge over you, to keep you in all they ways, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Remember? So Ahaz uses Scripture: “I won’t ask.”

Now we have Isaiah’s prophecy. And you understand, this is a prophecy of judgment. Verse 13: “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?’” What does he mean by that? You’re tiring out men, or rubbing down men, grinding down men, and now you think you’re going to grind down God. You think you’re going to wear God out. No. No, that’s not going to happen.

“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.”—“God with us.” Now you’ve probably heard over the years, you know, the unbelievers like to attack that word that is there translated virgin, and they want to tell us that the word that in our English Bibles has been translated virgin doesn’t necessarily mean virgin, it may simply mean “young woman.” Well, in Scripture, the word behind it always means a young unmarried woman, and in the Hebrew culture, according to the law of God, a young unmarried woman is, and can only be, a virgin.

In the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation, which was put together probably a couple hundred years after Isaiah spoke, they used “parthénos.” They literally used the word virgin. When the Hebrew scholars of the day translated Isaiah from Hebrew to ancient Greek, they literally used the word virgin. That was 250, maybe 300 years before the birth of Christ. The Jews all understood Isaiah’s prophecy to mean that the girl who was going to conceive was going to be a virgin, and it was going to be a miraculous conception. That’s what a sign is.

Many young girls in this town get pregnant. Is any of those pregnancies a sign? No. Why? Well, we know how they got pregnant. They had a man involved in their life, in one way or another, and that’s how they got pregnant. It’s called natural generation, and that’s not a sign. Who would ask for that for a sign? But a virgin conceiving? That’s a sign. You see my point.

“A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel”—God with us. Immanuel. God with us. Just flick forward in the book of Isaiah to chapter 9. Move down to verse 6, and we see another prediction concerning a son. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

This coming child is special. This coming child is no normal child. This child, miraculously conceived in the womb of a virgin, is going to be God with us, and is going to be called, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. There’s something special about this child. As I said, it’s a sign of judgment and of salvation. As we work our way through the book of Isaiah, we see that increasingly, Isaiah talks more and more and more about the fact that God is going to draw all the nations into His kingdom. He’s going to draw from all the nations.

You'll find later on in these (Isaiah's) prophecies, it says that from these nations that were Judah's sworn bloodthirsty enemies—Egypt, Assyria, and others—God says there's going to be a highway of salvation that runs through those nations, and people are going to come into the presence of the Lord, along that highway. In other words, He's going to be drawing people from all over the world. People who were His enemies will be made His allies, or His children, or His servants.

This sign is the sign of judgment and salvation. The theocracy is finishing. The exclusivity of the worship of the living God being limited to the biological offspring of Abraham—that exclusivity is coming to a finish. Remember that we, in Galatians, are called the children of Abraham, and on that basis, Paul argues that all who have faith become sons of Abraham. We're the living sons of God; we're the kingdom of God; we're the nation of Jacob.

I'm not saying that the Jews are being replaced; I'm saying that the nation of God, the people of God, who were once a biological people, have been folded into the church. And I'm not saying that we've become biological Jews; I'm saying we've become children of Abraham by adoption, and we've been folded into the nation of Judah, or the nation of Israel. All become one great living church, as we learned in Ephesians chapter 2—one great living church, worshiping the living God. Peoples that were separated are drawn together.

Let's keep reading. ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. ¹⁷The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!”

Now it becomes hard. Just that little passage becomes hard to understand and interpret. Because Isaiah is speaking to a king called Ahaz, telling him that a virgin shall conceive, and his name shall be called Immanuel, and that's happening 600 years later. You see what I mean—how it becomes a difficult one to interpret.

We know, from the way that the Holy Spirit has given us the gospel of Matthew, we've got a hook that you can hang your coat on. We know that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy. But this meant something to Ahaz at that moment. How do we explain that? Well I'll tell you, in a way, I can't confidently say that I know exactly how to explain it. It's very difficult, I can assure you. Go read your commentaries, if you want to. Every commentator comes up with a different solution. So as I've said, I'm just going to give you my best shot at it.

I think what is being said here is being said not to just to Ahaz, but to the house of David. It's being said to the line of David. Ahaz is a representative. Ahaz's failure is not so much the straw that broke the camel's back, or the donkey's back—Ahaz's failure is the failure of the Davidic kings to fulfill their covenantal obligations. Ahaz becomes, in a way, an intermediary, and it's an intermediary of failure.

So though the prophet is speaking to Ahaz, he's speaking to all of those who will come from Ahaz. The next king after Ahaz, if you don't know, is Hezekiah, who was one of the great kings of Judah—faithful man, did right. Then you have a few more generations of terrible men, who did evil. Then you have Josiah, the last great king of Judah. You know, I love Josiah. We did a series last year just on King Josiah alone.

But I think that Isaiah is speaking to Ahaz as the representative of those who come after him, and he's saying to Ahaz, "This sign, this one born of a virgin coming, he will be the end of your line. He will be the end of your line, and he will be the fulfillment of God's promises to your ancestor, David. He will also be the finish of God's promises to your ancestor David, in a way, because he will be the one who inherits the eternal throne. And you failures—you sinful sons of David, you failures—are coming under the judgment of God. Don't imagine you can hide behind the name of David. Don't imagine that you can hide behind the fact that David is your ancestor."

Now there's a reference here to curds and honey: "¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good." And I can tell you, this verse alone splits the commentators down the middle. Is this a reference to the promises that were made to the people of Israel when they came out in the exodus, heading to a land flowing with milk and honey? So, saying this one who is born of the virgin will be the one who receives the promises—receives the inheritance of the land that flows with milk and honey—makes sense, because Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's covenantal promises. So that kind of makes sense.

But a little bit further down in the passage, we have a reference to the same thing again. Look down to verse 21: "In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep,²² and because of the abundance of milk that they give, he will eat curds, for everyone who is left in the land will eat curds and honey." Now that doesn't seem to be saying something good, because what it seems to be saying is that they'll be no farming going on. There won't be any cultivation. If you wanted to cultivate in those days—if you wanted to have an agrarian economy based upon the production of wheat, grain, all of those kind of things—you needed a big population. Every farm wasn't run by just one, what we'd call nuclear family—mum, dad, and four children, or something like that. You had families of families. You know, you needed six, seven, eight households.

Our old measurement of ground, we call an acre. You know what an acre is supposed to be? It's supposed to be the amount of land that a man with one ox can cultivate. One man, one ox. In Europe, one man, one ox, should be able to cultivate and run an acre, and from an acre, he should be able to feed his own small household. So that should give you some idea. If you've got a 200-acre farm, you need more than one little family and a few sons. You need families of families to run your big property.

So what this seems to be suggesting is that the reason that they're eating curds and honey is that there's no cultivation, there's not wheat being grown. They're lucky they've managed to save a cow and a couple of goats. They've got a little bit of milk. The way you stored milk then was that you made something like yogurt—that's what curds is, something like natural yogurt. And the beehives—well, at least they can get some honey to sweeten the yogurt.

It seems to be implying that they're not wealthy at all. It seems to be implying that they're actually strugglers—battlers, as we call them in Australia. You know, they're battlers. They're lucky they've got a cow and two goats, or they'd be starving to death. That seems to be what it's saying.

So if we take the reference that the God-child, the Immanuel-child, where it says that he'll be eating on curds and honey, is a suggestion that he'll be receiving the benefit of all of God's covenant promises, that leaves us in a situation a little bit further down, in verses 21 and 22, where we have to be inconsistent, because it seems to suggest there that the reason they're going to be eating curds and honey is that they're poor and struggling, and can't grow enough food. You see how it's a problem—how it becomes a difficult thing for interpreters to understand.

I'm going to take it as meaning that this Immanuel-child, this God-with-us child, is going to be born in a time of poverty. He's going to be born in a time of struggle, where Judah was not a rich agrarian society, but is going to be born in a time where people are lucky to have the food that's produced by a few animals and a beehive. That's the way I'm taking it.

“¹⁶For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.” So what's God saying to Ahaz? Before all this happens, before the Immanuel child comes into a land that is struck by poverty, the two kingdoms that you're afraid of are going to be destroyed—carried off into captivity. And that happened. The Northern Kingdom was carried off into captivity by Assyria. Syria was conquered by Assyria. They will be deserted.

“¹⁷The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah” —Pause, think about this, understand this—“the king of Assyria!” is coming. You know, you need the sort of “Jaws” music there—“dun-dun; dun-dun; dun-dun”. Who's coming? The king of Assyria, the bad guy. He's the one. He's going to spill some blood! The hunter! The predator! He's coming.

Notice that the judgment is falling upon your father's house. “The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria!” And so, I'm saying that the prophecy of the child being born—I've already said it, but let's just finish off this little section of the text—it's a prophecy of judgment upon the house of Judah; judgment upon the line of David. It will be fulfilled by that child. When Jesus comes, the line of David is finished. He's the fulfillment, and after that, no more kings of Judah.

Now we know that Josiah was the last godly king of Judah. There were a couple of kings after Josiah who never achieved much, and never amounted to much, and then the theocracy was finished. But still the house of David was known. When you read your genealogies in the New Testament, of what house was Joseph? He was of the line of David. And what does it tell us about Mary? She was of the line of David. So Joseph, let's say Jesus' adoptive father, and Mary were both of the house of David. So Jesus Himself is called “son of David.” And He's the finish of that Davidic kingship, because He's the fulfillment. If only one son of David sits as king, well there's no more sons of David to come. Jesus sits as king.

Final section. It's an "in that day" section, verses 18 to 25. "In that day," "in that day," "in that day," "in that day," is repeated. Now we've already seen enough of the "in that day" theme in earlier places in the book of Isaiah to know that this means there is both judgment and salvation being predicted here—both judgment and salvation.

Turn back, for example, to Isaiah chapter 2 verse 12. We'll just read the one verse. "For the LORD of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low." "In that day"—it's a day of judgment.

Move forward to Isaiah chapter 4, verse 1. We have another "in that day": "And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, 'We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach.'" Now that was indicating it's an "in that day," and it's indicating that there are no men in the country. They've died through warfare or enslavement. They've been carried off or killed. In that day, judgment!

But then look at Isaiah chapter 4, verse 2: "In that day the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and honor of the survivors of Israel. ³ And he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy, everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem, ⁴ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and cleansed the bloodstains of Jerusalem from its midst by a spirit of judgment and by a spirit of burning. ⁵ Then the LORD will create over the whole site of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a canopy. ⁶ There will be a booth for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and a shelter from the storm and rain."

In that day—salvation! In that day—glory! In that day, the branch, or the sprouting from the Lord will be revealed. And if you remember back when we looked at that, this is a prophecy of Jesus, who is, we know from Matthew chapter 1, the Immanuel child; the child born of the virgin; the God-with-us child.

So you see, these themes in Isaiah are starting to blend together. These streams, or these threads, are starting to be combined together into one great message. And what's the great message? Judgment—Salvation. God's judgment will fall upon His covenant people; God's Saviour will come. When the Saviour comes, the judgment comes with Him. He saves, and He judges. It's been that way all along, my friends.

So let's read verses 18 to 25: "¹⁸ In that day the LORD will whistle for the fly that is at the end of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria." Imagine that—you can whistle for flies and bees. I can whistle for a dog. Well, God runs all of creation. He can call forth the flies and the bees—"In that day." "¹⁹ And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines, and in the clefts of the rocks, and on all the thornbushes, and on all the pastures." So he's saying that those who come and attack will be so numerous, they're like a plague of insects. There will be so many of them, they're like a plague. It's like one of the plagues that fell on Egypt, but now it's falling on God's people. "In that day."

Verse 20: “In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also.” Now what’s that saying? He will shave with a razor. Well in the book of Leviticus, there was allowance made when a man was cleansed of leprosy, he had to go through some cleansing rituals before he was allowed back into the congregation, and one of them was that the man had to be shaved from head to foot. All the hair of the body, taken off—hair, beard, everything gone. He had to be cleansed from head to foot.

So Isaiah’s picking up this picture of a judgment falling upon a land that’s leprosy. God’s going to take a razor, and He’s going to shave the land. He’s going to cleanse the land. And that razor God’s going to use is called the King of Assyria. “The head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also.”

“In that day,” verse 21, “a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep,” and will think he’s lucky to have them. ²² and because of the abundance of milk that they give, he will eat curds, for everyone who is left in the land will eat curds and honey.” It’s another indicator of a lack of people. A cow and two sheep is not really an abundance of milk, but if you’ve got a small household—one man, perhaps one wife, and a couple of children—that’s a lot of milk. It’s more than you need. You’ve got an abundance. You have to culture it and turn it into yogurt. He’s saying the land will be practically deserted. When this judgment falls upon Judah, the land will be empty.

Verse 23: “In that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines, worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briers and thorns.” Now that’s picking up on the idea that having fertile and abundant vineyards means that you’ve got a wealthy nation that’s swimming in the blessings of God, but now—the vineyards are just going to become places of thorns and weeds.

²⁴ With bow and arrows a man will come there, for all the land will be briers and thorns.” What’s the point? It’s going to be empty. You see, if you had a vineyard, if you had a rich and fertile and productive vineyard—remember back earlier in the book of Isaiah—you built a tower in it. Why? So that someone could stay there constantly when the grapes were on the vine, to keep the birds and the animals and the raiders away from your grapes. But these places that once were vineyards are now going to be empty and filled with thorns. And you can go there with a bow and arrow to hunt animals, hunt rabbits, whatever you want to hunt, because there’s going to be no one there—no towers. It’s going to be empty, scraped clean, deserted. That which once used to be a land producing an abundance of good things is now just cursed with thorns.

Verse 25: “And as for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe, you will not come there for fear of briers and thorns, but they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread.” So you see the idea. The man’s got a cow and two sheep, and the places that used to be wheat fields, where, you know, you had hundreds of men to work the soil and bring in the harvest—you had to have families of families to run your farm—now no one’s there to run the farm. They’re just hillsides of weeds, and all you can do—you’ve got your cow and your two sheep or goats—well, there’s enough food there to feed your tiny, little, struggling, battling family. You can let them wander amongst what used to be fertile, productive land. And they’ll get enough pasture to keep you alive, to keep you and your family running on curds and honey.

That's the picture of judgment. Why? Why? Because Ahaz was not firm in faith, and therefore, he was not firm at all; because God's people have turned their back upon God. The idea of judgment and salvation walk together. Judgment and salvation walk together in the book of Isaiah.

Turn back to chapter 2. We'll just read from verses 1 to 3: "¹The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ²It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, ³and many peoples shall come, and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

And I pointed out when we looked at that passage, Isaiah saw a word. "The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw"—that "word" in the Septuagint is translated logos. "In the beginning was," we know from the gospel of John, "In the beginning was the word." In the beginning was the logos—the word that Isaiah saw.

And looking down there near the end of verse 3 of chapter 2: "For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the logos of the Lord from Jerusalem." The gospel and the law, going out. The logos—the word of God; the saving word of God. In that day. But the rest of the passage is actually about judgment. Move to verse 6. "For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of things from the east and of fortune-tellers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of foreigners."

Salvation—the law and the word going out from the mountain "in that day." And yet, in that day, judgment—the people being rejected because they're practicing occult practices that they learnt from the East. In chapter 4 of Isaiah, which we've already looked at it, you've got that prediction of the coming branch, the sprout. In chapter 11, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse." A sprouting, a branching—it will come forth from the stump of Jesse.

We've got the promise that we've just looked at in chapter 7—the Immanuel child, God with us. Salvation is coming, judgment is coming; salvation is coming, judgment is coming; salvation is coming, judgment is coming. What's the theme of the book of Revelation? There's a lot of themes in the book of Revelation, I guess, but what do you get when you read the book of Revelation? You've got people being saved, worshiping God, in uncounted numbers; and you've got seals and trumpets and censors—people being judged in uncounted numbers.

Salvation. Judgment. God's promises being fulfilled through whom? The Immanuel child. The Son. The Son is born. The Son who was given. The God-with-us child. The one conceived of the virgin. Salvation. He's salvation. What does Scripture say? He's salvation for all who will believe. Salvation for all who will repent. But what does Jesus also say, about being a stumbling block? He'll grind those who will not believe. They'll be crushed and ground to powder under that stumbling stone.

There's salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. There's judgment in the Lord Jesus Christ. He's the Saviour; He's the judge. What did Jesus teach? He's the Saviour, He's the judge—that He will be judging. He judges now. He's the King. He's the one who's taken the scroll, who breaks the seals. He's the one who gives the orders. He's the one who runs God's creation. He's the one who rules over His church, rules over this nation, rules over all the nations.

Psalm 2 says, "Ask of me and I'll give the nations of the earth for your inheritance." I'm pretty sure He asked. You know, when He went and He ascended and He was enthroned, do you think He said to God, said to the Father, "Well, you know, I've gone down and I've lived that perfect righteous life, and I've died that suffering righteous death—and it doesn't really matter now." No! The world is His, and all that is in it. That's the point of His being enthroned. That's the point of His being God's Messiah.

And what's the threat in Psalm 2? "Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled." Judgment. But then, "Blessed are all who take refuge in him." Salvation. Judgment and Salvation. The work of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—being wielded through the one person of the Trinity. Christ Himself, the truly man, truly God, the divine representative of God, the human representative of all humanity, that one—the Lord Jesus Christ, enthroned in heaven—both judging and saving, according to the will of God.

And so, my friends, we've received the promise of the Immanuel—the child, God with us—and we rejoice. Good news! The Saviour has come! He's incarnate, He's taken upon Himself flesh. But how do, for example, the children of Abraham—the biological children of Abraham—receive that? It's a judgment. It's a judgment, because they will not accept and repent. They will not repent. They will not accept the word of God. Isaiah prophesies that sign as a direct response against the faithlessness of the house of David. The coming one will be a Saviour, and He will be the judgment of God upon all who refuse to submit. God with us, the Immanuel child. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do thank you once again that you do speak from your word. Father, we thank you that you have revealed such wonderful things to us—the coming of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings, and Lord of lords. Him we worship, Him we fear, Him we bend the knee to. He is our God, our King, and our Saviour. We praise you and we thank you for Him, and that you have made us a people in Him.

Father, we thank you that by your Holy Spirit, you have given us the Scripture, and by your Holy Spirit, you cast light upon your word and you cast light into our dark minds and hearts. Father, we pray that we would be conformed into the image and the likeness of Jesus Christ, in obedience to your word. In Jesus' name. Amen.