

Good News for a Troubled World-Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **Isaiah 7:1-8:10** (#482)

Introduction: Understanding biblical prophecy, as we have begun to discover, isn't always easy. But that also doesn't mean that we can't get a good grasp on it. This is one of the lessons that you and I need to take away from this series in Isaiah: if we need to learn how to look closer, read slower, and work harder to understand the prophets, then we also need to apply those skills to the parts of the Bible that we find easier to read and understand. There is a real danger when we get to our favorite passages and books and *don't* slow down! The irony being that we are tempted to rush through the "easier" parts of the Bible because we think we know them when we really haven't put in the time they deserve. Let's see how all that works this morning, as we open in our Bibles to a passage that will seem familiar at parts, but might be confusing overall...

7:1-9 There's a lot going on here, and all the unfamiliar names don't help. In fact, what might be encouraging is that if you can keep the names and places straight, suddenly this passage will make a lot more sense – so let's start there. Ahaz is, ultimately, the son of Uzziah, who was the king of Judah. If you were with us last week, then you'll know that Uzziah has died by this point, and that Isaiah has come on the scene with a mission direct from God: to preach His judgment upon His wicked and wayward people.

Historically, you need to remember that the Kingdom of Israel is actually two kingdoms at this point – it split with "Israel" in the north generally taking a wicked path alongside the surrounding nations and "Judah" in the south being somewhat more faithful to the Lord off and on.

So it is that we read of Rezin, who is the king of Syria and also Pekah, the son of the king of Israel, who is now (tragically) Judah's rival and enemy. These two join forces in an effort to overthrow Judah because they are refusing to join them in a defense pact against Assyria. Ultimately, their first attack is unsuccessful, but that doesn't somehow leave Judah rejoicing. Instead, as we read in **verse 2**, Judah is living in fear: their enemies have joined forces against them and it would seem

only a matter of time before they are defeated. The people are fearful, the king is wavering about, surely thinking that his own destruction is coming soon.

It is into this scene that the Lord speaks to Isaiah, giving him a message that is part comfort and part judgment. That is an odd combination in our minds, to be sure, but remember that Judah aren't exactly the good guys here. Their ultimate problem isn't just the human armies opposing them, but rather that they, too, have turned from the Lord and not been faithful. So, God will keep His promise by preserving His people, yes; but He will also judge them as well – which is what He has always said would happen if they did not turn from their wicked ways. Just what does that look like?

Verse 4 is a call to Ahaz to not fear. He is to have confidence in the Lord rather than fear at what the kings of this earth can do to him. Though he and his kingdom are opposed by an unholy alliance of enemies, though these nations have a pact against Judah, their plans will not ultimately succeed. **Verse 7** introduces what the Lord will do: the plans of these two kings will not come to pass. Rezin will not win. Ephraim – another name for Israel at this point – will end up, themselves, being shattered as a nation and no threat to anybody. Said another way: the Lord will take care of these opponents. All Ahaz has to do is trust God. A scene not too different from what Moses and the Hebrews faced in **Exodus 14**. Pharaoh and his armies were pursuing them and it sure seemed as if the Hebrews were doomed. But Moses trusted what the Lord was doing: “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent.”

Now, if Ahaz would have responded somewhat like Moses did, we'd be reading a very different story. Instead, he won't, and we'll come to that next, but first: where do we fit in this story?

I want to suggest that you and I aren't too unlike Ahaz here. None of us are perfect. Frankly, even on our best days, perfection isn't something we are close

to. Instead, we are sinful beings, even our best actions being tainted with that wickedness. We live in a broken world and have been called to faithfulness, yet we are constantly challenged, repeatedly attacked. The temptation is just to throw in the towel. Power, sex, money – these are the chosen tools of our world to break us down and defeat any inkling of faithfulness that we may have. And, frankly, these attacks are relentless. Yes, we are surrounded much like Ahaz was.

At the same time, we are also cared for and supported by God – the very God who made promises to His people through Abraham long ago is the same God who tells us to look to Him when we are tempted. Paul puts it this way in **1 Corinthians 10**: “Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.” Our God watches over us even when we are faltering. Yet – like Ahaz – the question is: will we turn to Him? Will we look to Him? Will we trust in Him? Friend: how are you answering those questions? Enemies all around, temptations galore. Where do you turn? Do you have genuine faith? A faith that proves sound when the pressure is on? If not, you can have it by turning to Jesus. He knows your sins, yet He calls you to trust Him anyways. Don’t reject His invitation. Don’t miss His help.

Let’s see how Ahaz responds, which will teach us many things...

7:10-25 So committed is the Lord to His people that He tells Ahaz to ask for a sign from Him. In a book of odd things, this might seem strange: aren’t we *not* supposed to test God? Isn’t that something that Jesus spoke against during His temptations by the devil? But when God Himself tells you that you can ask Him for something in a very specific situation, it’s best not to second-guess Him!

Ahaz, however, refuses to ask of the Lord. This seems pious, but likely it is because he has already chosen to pay off Assyria to attack his enemies according to **2 Kings 16:7**. The issue, then, is that Ahaz trusts a foreign pagan king to save him more than he trusts in the promises of God. So what will happen? Ironically,

he will get a sign whether he wants it or not! And this, starting in **verse 14**, is the part of the chapter that you have likely heard before. It's a bit of a different twist, isn't it, to read this prophecy now knowing the background? The Lord will give a sign – a sign of what? That His people shall be saved, rescued, preserved. But not now! And that is the part of it that is a judgment. Immanuel is coming, but not yet. Thus, when Ahaz rejected what God intended as hopeful, it turned into a judgment. This sign, by the way, is fulfilled in Christ. That's not simply my own interpretation or understanding, but instead is exactly what we read of in **Matthew 1:22-23**: "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel."

Yet, notice that just as Isaiah's words don't begin with **verse 14**, so they also don't end there, either. Instead, the Lord's words to Ahaz continue – the king of Assyria will be brought in – but he won't simply fight against Judah's enemies; no, instead he will end up fighting against Judah as well. What will be left is a land that is no longer fertile and profitable, but instead war-torn and devastated.

Dear church, this is a frightening picture, isn't it? If our Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever, then we can't help but wonder if the Lord might judge us in the same way. I don't think it is appropriate to speculate – after all, the Lord hasn't spoken to us in the same way that He has to Ahaz here, but make no mistake: God does judge His people, and sometimes He does it by loosening the leash on the powers of this world. Why does He do this? Doesn't He love us? Of course He does. But love – unlike how Hallmark and the rest of our world defines it – isn't actually love unless there is a weight to it. The Lord's care for us doesn't come cheaply – it cost His Son, after all. And what father or mother who loves their children doesn't discipline them? I think any of us would answer that to *not* train up a child well is an act of hatred, not love. So it is here. We should be thankful: far better to fall into the hands of our God – even in judgment – than to have a smooth and easy life only to find ourselves separated from God forever in eternity because there was no correction.

Let's conclude our time with one more snapshot of this prophecy...

8:1-10 This very curious name is almost a proverb in English: "The spoil speeds, the prey hastens," or, as the NIV puts it: "Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil," ends up being a key point in these verses. The picture here is another part of the prophecy: a young boy will be the marker of how quickly all these events will take place. Before he can call for his mother or father, the power of Samaria will fail under the attack of Assyria. Yet, that same Assyria will bring about the judgment that Judah shall also undergo. Thus, we end much like we began: with both rescue and judgment, hope and correction. The armies of the earth gather, but the people of God shall be defended, even as they are judged.

Friends, what are we to make of this prophecy? Ultimately, our application ought to come from its fulfillment in **Matthew 1**. Jesus is the Immanuel, He is, literally, God with us. There is no way to come out of **Isaiah 7 and 8** and somehow say that God doesn't love His people – you simply can't, when He both defends them and promises to be with them. Yet there is also no way to come out of these chapters without realizing that God is just, He is righteous – and we are not.

Isn't this exactly what we will see in Christ's life? Though there is no sin in Him, this Jesus will die as if He were the worst of sinners. Though He will be judged and tried as a wicked man, He lived perfectly. Though the religious leaders will mock Him and try to trip Him up, we'll instead find that Christ's teachings are perfectly wise and true. Unlike the kings of the earth, Jesus is a different kind of king, which should make us expect a different kind of kingdom. To be a part of it means that you and I need to have a different set of desires and we'll need to live a different kind of life. How have you been changed by Jesus? When you take stock of your life, are your actions any different from your unbelieving friends and coworkers? If they are, have you thanked Christ lately? And if they aren't, have you cried out to Him to change you? He loves to help sinful people, after all. Brothers and sisters: we belong to Jesus. And we must trust Him for all that He brings into our lives, knowing that He works in love to redeem for Himself a people who will enjoy Him and His kingdom forever. So, let our prayer be: come, Lord Jesus!