



THE KING OF THE KINGDOM

Advent Series

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 7: THE VIRGIN BORN KING

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My wife was shopping for Christmas gifts the other day and she noticed that several cards said, “So long 2020.” I’ve seen this attitude reflected in more than just cards. There were many difficult things this year, and now that we are coming to the end of it, many are placing their hopes in 2021. It is good for us to hope that one or more vaccines are successful at stopping this pandemic in 2021. It is good for us to long for online education for kids to be over. It is good that we hope that next year’s holidays and birthdays will be celebrated with parties and without fear of spreading a deadly virus. Although these are good things, our hope ultimately is not in any of these things. Our hope is in Jesus. So, let’s not be like our society that is placing their hope in the new year. Rather, let’s end 2020 by spending time reflecting on Jesus who is our hope. Over the next five weeks, we will study Isaiah 7-12. As we study these chapters, we will learn more deeply that amid trouble, Jesus is our hope.

Today's main idea is that God provides hope amid the gravest of trouble. My hope, then, is that we would leave today committed to wait on God even amid scary circumstances. We will see as we compare Isaiah 7 and 36 that waiting on God means we pray with boldness and share the gospel.

INTRODUCTION (7:1-9)

Ahaz was king of Judah roughly between 744-728 BC. Ahaz reigned roughly 250 years after David and 200 years after Solomon. After Solomon's reign, God's people divided into two nations: 10 tribes broke away and formed the northern nation of Israel while Judah along with a few others remained dedicated to the household of David. During Ahaz's reign – a descendant of David – Assyria, a nation to the east in modern day Iraq was becoming very powerful again. This reality caused Ahaz to experience some very difficult political pressure. For example, Ahaz's neighbors to the north, Israel – the other 10 tribes of God's people – and Syria, formed an alliance because they did not want to submit to Assyrian rule. They pressured Ahaz to join them, but when he didn't, they invaded Judah. In one day, Israel killed 120,000 Judaeans troops (2 Chronicles 28:6) and took captive another 200,000 (2 Chronicles 28:8). Meanwhile, Edom and the Philistines attacked Judah (2 Chronicles 28:16-18). According to 2 Chronicles 28, God was humbling Judah because of Ahaz's awful sins. Ahaz was leading Judah to worship other gods.

The historical context of Isaiah 7-12 is this increasing political pressure coupled with these significant military defeats all resulting from Ahaz's faithlessness to the Lord.

In Isaiah 7:1-3, Ahaz learns that Israel and Syria have made their alliance against him, and he is justifiably afraid, very afraid. Isaiah describes his heart and the heart of the people as shaking as the trees of the forest (2). Like usual, I want us to notice how kind our God is. Ahaz is experiencing this trouble because according to 2 Chronicles 28:19 "the LORD humbled Judah because of Ahaz king of Israel, for he had made Judah act sinfully and had been very unfaithful to the LORD." Yet, God sends Isaiah to minister to him (3). He does not ignore him in his time of need, nor does he send Isaiah to taunt him; rather, he sends Isaiah to minister to him. Our God is kind.

Now, our God is incredibly kind. Ahaz was truly awful. He was a descendent of David who ruled God's people. The people Ahaz reigned over were not just any people; they were God's people, and God's people are called his bride in Scripture. So, here is the image: Ahaz is taking God's bride and leading her to prostitute herself out to other gods. This awful reality is how Ahaz is relating to God. He relates to him as one who is leading God's wife to be with other gods; and yet, God seeks to do kindness to Ahaz. Listen, the devil's lie that you are too sinful for God to forgive is a black lie. Look at Ahaz and rejoice in the amazing truth that God seeks after the worst of us sinners.

Now, the incredibleness – and that is a word – of our God is further highlighted by what Isaiah says to Ahaz in verses 4-9. God calls Ahaz to be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint (4). God is calling Ahaz to be brave. What is the source of this bravery? The source is not his circumstances. Notice in verses 5-6. God takes seriously the danger Ahaz is experiencing. Syria and Israel are very angry at Ahaz so much that they want to terrify Ahaz, conquer him, and set up another king, Tabeel, in his place (7:6). Ahaz's bravery cannot be rooted in his circumstances. The source of this bravery rather is found in God's word since God tells him that Israel and Syria's plan will not stand (7). God will fight against Ahaz's enemies despite his wickedness. Truly, Ahaz does not earn or deserve God to do this for him. The fact is simple: our God is kind to sinners. Ahaz must simply be firm in faith.

PROPHESY OF IMMANUEL (7:10-25)

Tragically, Ahaz proves very quickly that he is not firm in faith. In verse 11, Isaiah invites Ahaz to ask for a sign to validate God's promise that the plan of Syria and Israel will not stand. Ahaz can ask for any incredible sign. God is ready to do something amazing for he tells Ahaz to ask for a sign "as deep as Sheol" or "as high as the heights above" (11). Do you see again how kind our God is? He wants Ahaz to know, really know, that he can trust the Lord.

Ahaz, however, responds faithlessly and masks it behind superficial piety. He responds that he will not test God (12). This response is utterly faithless since God has invited him to ask for a sign. Our God wants Ahaz to know for sure that he is trustworthy. He wants Ahaz to have a sign proving this point. Why doesn't Ahaz ask for a sign? Remember, the context is a season of political pressure and military defeat. At a time like this, Ahaz wants to keep his options open. He wants the ability to call on a military alliance from Assyria. Trusting God prohibits this.

This point is a tragic turning point in the story. God responds by saying that Ahaz, and the whole family of David, has wearied God (13). The entire Davidic dynasty, with few exceptions, has exhausted God with their faithlessness.

Church family, Ahaz's faithlessness has wearied God. In other words, his desire to depend on his own strength and wisdom exhausts God and it is his downfall. Ahaz soon appeals to Assyria for help. He paid the king of Assyria tribute that he stole from the temple, but Assyria oppressed him rather. This drove him to even greater faithlessness. 2 Chronicles tells us that he build an altar to the gods of Syria in Judah because Syria defeated him. He thought that their gods were stronger than the Lord. The problem escalated. He made more and more altars to other gods in Judah and shut up the temple of the Lord. Amid his troubles he tried to hedge his bets. If he

sacrificed to many gods, maybe one would help him. Ahaz's lack of faith in God's word in troubling times led to a tragic end. The people of Judah did not even bury him with the other kings.

Church family, our world has many hopes for 2021. We hope for a successful vaccine, more political and economic certainty, and the ability to celebrate birthdays and holidays without masks or anxiety of spreading a virus. Many of us are hoping that online school ends. We long to connect again with friends. Although we should long for all of these things, our ultimate hope must be in God and in his word. Our hope has led us to continue ministry, to continue to be generous, to continue to care for people, and to continue to share the gospel. All of these things are uncomfortable amid a pandemic; yet God's word drives us to do the uncomfortable.

Ahaz could not do the uncomfortable. As enemies surrounded him, he could not wait on God because he had no faith. We are not like Ahaz, church family. Therefore, let's continue to remember God's word to us amid trouble: God is with us!

This concept – of God being with us – is exactly the sign God gave to Ahaz. Now, at this point, in Isaiah 7, something significant happens. In verse 14, Isaiah stops addressing Ahaz alone and addresses the whole house of David. We know this since Isaiah speaks to you all (plural), not just you (singular). The sign, then, that God provides is not for Ahaz, but for the entire dynasty of David and for all humanity.

The sign is incredible. In Isaiah 7:14, we learn that the sign will be twofold: 1) a virgin will conceive a child and 2) the child will be called Immanuel. The name Immanuel, God with us, speaks of the identity of this child: he will be God with Israel. This child is the one for breaks the curse of sin and death. God with us is a reality tainted by sin since Genesis 3; and yet, the sign that God is faithful is he will once again be with us! How do we know that God is true to his word? He accomplishes his plan at creation and defeats death so that he can once again dwell with us!

This sign, then, is a sign of intense hope. God's people need this sign. This sign is the promise that God will provide for them a king who will orchestrate face to face communion between broken sinners and the one true God. The role of the king was to shepherd God's people into God's presence, but they all failed because of their sin. That will not be the case with this king. This king will shepherd us to the Lord unlike Ahaz. Ahaz has not brought about the goal of creation which is God's kingdom being established on earth; rather, he has made the problem of sin worst because of his faithlessness. God's people need another king, a king very unlike Ahaz. God promises in Isaiah 7:14 to give them the king they need: The King who will again unite God's people with God, a reality lost in the garden. This king will come being Immanuel.

The theme of hope amid trouble is repeating twice in verses 15-25. In verse 15-17, we learn about three concepts

- An abundance of good food (15, 16)
- Land being wilderness (16)
- Assyria will come to judge the land (17)

We see these same concepts in verses 18-25

- An abundance of good food (20-21)
- Land being wilderness (23-25)
- Assyria will come to judge the land (18-20)

The idea, then, of Isaiah 7 is that God promises hope amid trouble. The sign of Immanuel is the sign of hope. Yet, it's context is Assyria coming to judge God's people. The point is this: God requires God's people to depend on God's provision in times of trouble, not in their own provision. Ahaz was unable to do this.

The story is very different though with his son, Hezekiah. Assyria conquered all of Judah except for Jerusalem. The general of the Assyrian Army in Isaiah 36 was taunting Hezekiah and the people, and Hezekiah acted in faith. He went to God and prayed with boldness that God would rescue them for God's glory, and that is exactly what God did.

Church family, amid our own troubles, let's be a people who depend on God's provisions, not our own. As we do this, let's pray for God's provision and let's pray that God's reputation would spread as he provides for us.

Let's Pray

Oh Lord, help us to pray in our troubles and please answer remarkably. As you answer, let your reputation be enriched. We pray these things in Jesus name, amen.