

God is with us

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Date: 31 July 2016

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- [0 : 0 0] We're going to turn to our Bible reading this morning, which you'll find in the prophecy of Isaiah in the Old Testament. If you have one of our blue church Bibles, that should be page 571.
- And we've been a few weeks now in this great prophet, and Bob is going to be preaching this morning on chapter 7 into chapter 8.
- And we're going to read from chapter 7, verse 1. Page 571. In the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Razin, 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.
- When 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.
- And the Lord said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Sherjashub, your son, at the end of the conjure to the upper pool on the highway to the washer's field.
- [1 : 1 9] And say to him, Be careful. Be quiet. Do not fear. And don't let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Razin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.
- Because Syria with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah has devised evil against you, saying, Let's go up against Judah and terrify it, and let's conquer it for ourselves and set up the son of Tabil as king in the midst of it.
- Thus says the Lord your God, It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin.
- Within 65 years, Ephraim will be broken to pieces so that it will no longer be a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.
- If you're not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all. Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz, Ask a sign of the Lord your God.
- [2 : 2 9] Let it be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test. He said, Hear then, O house of David, Is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also?
- Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and he shall call his name Emmanuel.
- He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.
- 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 will come upon you. In that day the Lord will whistle for the fly that is the end of the streams of Egypt and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

[3 : 40] And they will all come and settle in the steep ravines and in the clefts of the rocks and on the thorn bushes and on all the pastures. 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 and the feet and it will sweep away the beard also. In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep.

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. In that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines worth a thousand shekels of silver will become briars and thorns.

With bow and arrows a man will come here. For all the land will be briars and thorns. As for all the hills that used to be hoed with a hoe.

You will not come there for fear of briars and thorns. But they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where sheep tread. Then the Lord said to me.

[4 : 48] Take a large tablet. And write on it. Common characters. Belonging to Malar Shalal Hazbaz. I will get reliable witnesses.

Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeroboam. To attest for me. And I went to the prophetess. And she conceived and bore a son.

Then the Lord said to me. Call his name. Maher Shalal Hazbaz. For before the boy knows how to cry. My father or my mother.

The wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria. Will be carried away before the king of Assyria. The Lord spoke to me again. Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that flowed gently.

And rejoice over Raisin and the son of Remaliah. Therefore. Behold the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the river.

[5 : 49] Mighty and many. The king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels. And go over all its banks.

And it will sweep on into Judah. It will overflow and pass on. Reaching even to the neck. And its outspread wings will fill the breath of your land.

Oh Emmanuel. Be broken you peoples. And be shattered. Give ear. All you far countries. Strap on your armor and be shattered.

Strap on your armor and be shattered. Take counsel together. But it will come to nothing. Speak a word.

But it will not stand. For God is with us. Amen. May God bless to us his word.

[6 : 46] Now if I could ask you please to have your Bibles open at page 571. And let's have a moment of prayer.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. And God our Father as we draw near to you. We pray that you will most graciously draw near to us.

That you will open your word to our hearts and minds. And that you will open our hearts and minds to your word. In the name of the living word Christ Jesus we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Why is it all so complicated?

Why couldn't the prophet Isaiah and other prophets simply have said something like this? One day a couple called Joseph and Mary will come to Bethlehem.

[7 : 45] When they arrive there Mary will give birth to a child called Jesus who would be the heir of David, the king of Israel, and the savior of the world. It wouldn't have been far easier.

But think about it for a minute. I suppose that's what Isaiah had said. Can you imagine in the centuries following how many Marys and Josephs would have arrived at Bethlehem, making sure the girl was just ready to give birth?

And of course there was no need to choose the name. The name of the baby would be Jesus. You see, there had to be a long, long preparation for this.

Letters of Galatians says, When the time had fully come, God sent his son. When the time of preparation was over, God sent his son. And that preparation, of course, began long, long before Isaiah's time.

Indeed, it began in the Garden of Eden when the prophecy was made that the descendant of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. As the centuries passed, the hope became a bit clearer.

[8 : 59] It came to be identified with the house of David. From this particular line would come a child. From this particular line would come someone through whom God's promises would be fulfilled.

But there's a huge problem, isn't there? If the nation that God has chosen to represent him in the world, if the nation God has called to be a light to the nations has itself become darkness, how are God's promises going to be fulfilled?

And that's where the idea of the remnant begins to develop. Saw this last week as well in Nehemiah. The idea of this group of people through whom and to whom the Messiah would come.

Indeed, in verse 2, verse 3, sorry, The Lord said to Isaiah, Go out to meet Ahab, you and Shearjashuv, your son. And that name means the remnant will return.

The holy seed mentioned in chapter 6, verse 13. The line which cannot die because it has the life of God in it. This holy seed will come in blessing.

[10 : 13] The remnant will return. But the holy seed will also come in judgment. The other name here, chapter 8, verse 3, Maher, Shalal, Hashbaz. Perhaps not the name you might choose if you're looking for names for your offspring.

A symbolic name meaning there will be plunder, there will be spoil, and it will be swift. So the seed of David will come in both blessing and judgment, and he'll come through the remnant.

Now just a quick word about the specific situation here. We're almost 20 years now from the great vision that we looked at last week in chapter 6, in the year that King Uzziah died.

Uzziah has been succeeded by Jotham. Jotham reigned for 16 years, a relatively good king. Nothing special about him, nothing distinguished, but he was relatively good.

And it was in his reign that Micah began to prophesy. Remember, Micah also talks about the Messiah coming from Bethlehem. Micah began his ministry in the reign of that king.

[11 : 19] Now the king on the throne is Ahaz, an able but godless man, shrewd politician, a big player on the international stage.

At least that's how he liked to see himself. And now they're faced with the threat of war. Syria and Ephraim, Israel, sometimes, by the way, the northern kingdom of Israel is called Ephraim.

They had joined together to attack Jerusalem and put, as they say, the son of Tabeel, verse 6. That simply means worthless. Let's put a puppet king on the throne.

And they had probably joined together initially because of the fear of Assyria. Assyria is essentially northern Iraq, from its capital Nineveh on the Tigris, which is really where the modern town of Mosul is.

And Ahaz, we read in Suu Khing 16, had decided to play the diplomat and actually call on support from Assyria. Take the tiger by the tail and hope he gobbles up our enemies and doesn't gobble up me.

[12 : 26] So that's the situation then. Situation of threatening war, first of all, from the immediate north, and then later from Assyria. But clearly, the key to the passage is Emmanuel, God with us.

And that's the title, obviously, God is with us, which is what Emmanuel means. Now, first of all, then, we have a moment of decision. Chapter 7, verses 1 to 13.

This is, in many ways, a pivot of the book. Some 30 years later, Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, is going to be faced with a similar, indeed, a much greater threat from Assyria.

And both are to be challenged to take the way of faith or the way of the world. And the question here is, do we trust in God or not? Is our trust in God simply words, simply concepts?

Or do we actually trust in Him? Now, let's look for a moment at the place of this in the big picture. Verse 2, when the house of David was told. It's interesting that phrase is used.

[13 : 35] It doesn't say when Ahaz was told. When the house of David was told. In other words, this is not just the individual king, but God's promises to all His coming kings.

Will politics prevail over faith? That's the question. Will Ahaz trust in the Lord, or will he trust in the nations? Now, you'll notice already, in a sense, the word has become flesh.

You and your son, Shear Yashuv. A kind of visual aid of the remnant. And the symbolic name, the remnant, will return.

And he goes to the upper pool, highway to the washer's field, Jerusalem's water supply, where the water came into the city. Sensible thing to do. Not quite as sensible as his son Hezekiah was to do 30 years later and bring the water into the city itself.

Some of you may have visited Jerusalem and been in Hezekiah's tunnel, which was dug to keep the Assyrians from capturing the water supply, and thus being able to starve the city out.

[14 : 44] So, Ahaz is here. He's at the water supply, and he gets the words from the prophet. And the prophet is showing the king reality.

Isaiah, as we've seen already, is a poet. He's an artist in words. And verse 4, In other words, Why is Isaiah not afraid of the kings of Syria and the kings of Israel?

Why later on is he not afraid of the great king, the king of Assyria? He's not afraid because his eyes have seen the king, the lord of hosts, surrounded by the seraphim.

And so he's saying to Ahaz, Ahaz, look at the whole picture. Ahaz, the reality you are seeing, the visible reality, is not the only reality.

And one of the signs of a true prophet is that his words come true. Moses has said this in Deuteronomy 18. And notice that Isaiah is very specific here.

[16 : 14] Within 65 years, Ephraim will be shattered from being a people. And so he calls Ahaz to the way of faith. Verse 9, If you are not firm in faith, Better if you do not stand in faith, You will not stand at all.

Ahaz, there is only one way to face this problem. And Ahaz gets two chances. Verse 10, again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz.

Ahaz. That doesn't mean I don't think the Lord spoke directly to Ahaz. Rather, the Lord gave the word to Isaiah, who then spoke to Ahaz.

Remember, the prophet's word is the Lord's word. And Ahaz then adopts the pious talk. Oh, I'm not going to ask the Lord for a sign. Interesting, actually, how unbelief often masks itself in pious talk.

Oh, you know, you hear people saying nowadays, Without making any effort to trust in the Lord, Or without in any way doing the kind of things that make it like, Oh, the Lord could bring revival.

[17 : 20] Of course he can. But that's so often, actually, rather than a sign of faith, It's a sign of unbelief. Saying, oh, well, we just carry merrily on, Ignoring God's word, And maybe the Lord will do something.

You see, Ahaz would not be putting the Lord to the test. Ahaz had not asked for a sign. The Lord had promised the sign. You see, Ahaz had made up his mind.

No evidence would make him change that mind. That's why he doesn't want to have a sign. The house of David is at stake. And is now in crisis.

Interesting, later on in the book, We have the so-called oracles against the nations, Which we'll come to eventually, hopefully. And one of the prophecies is, In the year that King Ahaz died.

Now, we're very familiar with the year that King Uzziah died. But in the year that King Ahaz died, There's a prophecy against the Philistines, Reminding us of David's great reign.

[18 : 25] Because it was David who dealt with the Philistines. So, the house of David now is at stake. An unworthy representative on the throne. So, what's going to happen? And it's in these circumstances, The promise of a rescuer comes.

Verse 14. Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. You're going to get a sign, Ahaz, Whether you want it or not. Behold, the virgin shall conceive, And bear a son, And call his name Emmanuel.

Emmanuel. Now, Emmanuel, of course, as you know, Means God with us. And the chapter 8, verse 10, Will not stand for God is with us. That's the English translation of Emmanuel.

Now, many people say, How on earth could Isaiah know this? 700 years before it happened. Well, there's two things that need to be said. First of all, Isaiah had no idea it would be 700 years.

Isaiah simply knew that this figure would come. He didn't know when. But the other thing is, Before then, there were going to be, If you like, other visual aids.

[19 : 35] Into this hopeless situation, Were going to come the two greatest kings since David. Hezekiah and Josiah, The worthiest of David's sons, To sit on his throne.

Now, they were not the messianic king. And then we have Zerubbabel, In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, Once again, the representative of the royal line. Throughout history, The coming king of the seed of David, Is foreshadowed.

Even before God himself comes to be with us, He is giving object lessons. And when he finally comes himself to the house of David, He will set up his kingdom that will have no end.

And that, I think, helps to explain, The virgin shall conceive and bear a son. Now, that, of course, means Mary, Who gives birth to Jesus as a virgin.

The virgin will conceive and bear a son. But it's more than that. The virgin is also Israel, Daughter of Zion, Who throughout the centuries, Produces people like Hezekiah, Like Josiah, And Zerubbabel, And so on.

[20 : 47] People who are going to foreshadow, The king that is to come. And that king is going to come into poverty. He will eat curds and honey.

That's the food of the poor. Because Jesus, we know, Grows up in poverty. In Luke chapter 2, When he's taken to the temple, Mary and Joseph take two doves as an offering.

And that was a sign of a poor family. A wealthier family would have taken a bullock or a sheep. And in Isaiah 53, The great passage, He describes a root growing up out of a dried ground.

Emmanuel will come and ransom captive Israel. But even before he comes, There are signs of his coming. There are promises of his coming.

And that promise is from the Lord of the nations, Who sits on the throne. Once again, vivid poetry here. Verse 18, In that day the Lord will whistle for the fly, That is in the streams of Egypt, And for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.

[21 : 51] Now these proud nations imagined They were more or less omnipotent. Sennacherib, king of Assyria. On his tomb actually it says, Sennacherib, king of the world, king of Assyria.

I don't know if being king of Assyria is a greater thing Than being king of the world. But anyway, that's what he had on his tomb. And in his records, And other Assyrian kings boast of the great king, The king of Assyria.

That comes much later in the book, In chapters 37 and 38. Notice how Isaiah cuts them down to size. These superpowers are simply swarming insects.

Flies and bees, Which are totally at the command of the Lord. He will whistle, And these great powerful nations will come, As if they were tiny swarming insects.

But it's a grim picture, The complete occupation of the land. In the verses 21 to 25, Causing poverty and complete destitution.

[22 : 53] It will be a terrible time. You see, sin is cruel. Sin is not liberating, As people say. As I was saying a moment or two ago, Break with your iron rod, The tyrannies of sin.

There's nothing liberating about driving a huge lorry, Into a crowd of holiday makers. There's nothing liberating about child abuse. There's nothing liberating about drug pushing.

It's all tyrannical. It all shows the need of a savior. And the need of a judge. Devastated land. An empty land.

And that will be the end of the way of Ahaz. The way of politics. The way of expediency. So we have the specific situation then. The situation of war and turmoil, In which a rescuer is promised.

And finally, in chapters 8, 1 to 10, We have divine judgment. This is a further outworking of the sign against Ahaz. Notice Emmanuel mentioned at the end of verse 8, And then translated to the end of verse 10, God is with us.

[24 : 03] Now another child is to come. Shear, Jehu, we saw already, The remnant will return. This child, quick to the plunder, Swift to the spoil.

And you'll notice that, Like the child in chapter 9, The wonderful counselor, mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. This child has four names, But these are names of judgment.

The relentless advance of the enemy. And if you glance ahead at the end of chapter 10, You'll find a powerful evocation of the enemy, As he comes ever nearer and nearer and nearer, Relentlessly coming.

And in chapter 10, verse 30, This very day, He will shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion, The hill of Jerusalem. The prophetess, presumably, Is Isaiah's wife.

I went into the prophetess, She conceived and bore a son. We see, once again, The word is becoming flesh. The line is continuing. Both the prophetic line and the kingly line, Until the one who is prophet, priest, and king is to come.

[25 : 16] And notice the consequences of the failure to trust. Verse 8, The Lord spoke to me again. Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloh, Shiloh or Shiloh sometimes, The Gihon Spring, Jerusalem's water supply, Which very often in the prophets, Is a symbol of the Davidic monarchy.

If they will not drink at the waters that I have provided, I'll bring on them the waters of judgment, The waters of the river, Mighty and many, The king of Assyria, In all his glory.

Terrifying flood, Overwhelming the land, Not stopping and overflowing into Judah. Ephraim, Israel, Is to be totally destroyed, And carried away to Assyria.

The Nechariah's armies are to reach, Within striking distance of Jerusalem, And only to be stopped, Because the Lord puts an end to them.

Emmanuel's land is threatened. Verse 8, It will sweep on into Judah, It will overflow and pass on, Reaching even to the Neck, And its outspread wings. The metaphor changes there, From the flowing river to the bird of prey, Its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Emmanuel.

[26 : 35] But as so often in the Old Testament, The river, The waters, Are not just a symbol of earthly powers, They're a symbol of satanic and evil powers. Because behind all this, Is the devil himself, Working to prevent the coming of the child.

The child who is to destroy him. The child who is the son of Mary, And the descendant of David. So divine judgment will happen. It's so important to realize this.

Later on, Isaiah is going to develop this. These nations, Of course, Are acting On their own, Of their own responsibility. They are planning, And yet, Isaiah is going to say, When the Assyrian armies are threatening Jerusalem, Isaiah is to say to the king of Assyria, You think, You planned this.

But the Lord planned this long ago. That's why the cities have fallen. That's why you've won. Because it's the Lord of hosts who did this. Everything that happens is under his control.

Everything that happens is subject to his will. That does not mean, As we've often enough said, That God approves of war, And bloodshed, And so on.

[27 : 53] But in his perfect will, He works it out, In these situations. And we have, Therefore, The security, That God is with us. Verses 9 and 10.

Be broken, You peoples, And be shattered. Very probably, Psalms 46 and 48, Come from this period, Or perhaps the later Assyrian invasion.

God is our refuge and strength, Therefore we will not be afraid, Although the earth dissolve. And Psalm 46 talks about the armies collecting, And the Lord of hosts destroying them.

Strap on your armor, And be shattered. I'm not going to help you very much, When the Lord is against you. Their military strength won't help, Nor will their diplomacy, Take counsel together, But it will come to nothing.

Speak a word, But it will not stand. Probably in the immediate context, That's referring to Ahaz. Ahaz, With his intrigues, Trying to get the king of Assyria on his side.

[28 : 57] You can read the story in 2 Kings 16, Where Ahaz goes to visit the king of Assyria, Damascus, And brings back with him Assyrian religion.

The very thing that's, And like the kind of thing that Amos had said somewhat earlier, If you want Assyrian religion, You can have it. Because you're going off to Assyria.

And similar later on, If you want Babylonian religion, You can have plenty of it, It will take you to Babylon. So neither military strength, Nor diplomacy can help. Proverbs says, There is no counsel, There is no effort, There is no idea, That can stand against the Lord.

Isn't that what Paul says in Romans 8? If God is for us, Who can be against us? Paul isn't saying, If God is for us, We can simply smile, And forget it all, And let it sweep over.

But after all, Paul means a formidable list of things That are against us. Tribulation, Persecution, Famine, Peril, Sword, Death itself. What Paul means is, If God is for us, Who matters?

[30 : 08] Who can be effective against us? There's a dark side to that as well, Isn't there? Or, Which Ahaz fails to realize, If God is against us, Who can be for us?

Doesn't matter if we have the big battalions on our side, Doesn't matter if we call on the king of Assyria, Or his modern equivalents, If God is against us, It's not going to happen. Whereas if God is for us, Who can be effective against us?

Isaiah has said, If you do not stand firm in faith, You will not stand firm at all. That's not just a message for the 8th century BC, And for King Ahaz, And his kingdom.

That's a message for us. The way of faith, Is not only, Is not only the way of faith, The way of faith is the way of realism, The way that leads, As the book of Proverbs says, Like a shining light, Which shines more and more, Unto the perfect day.

If God is for us, Who can be against us? Amen. Let's pray. Father, We are so tempted to trust in other things, In our intelligence, In our organization, In how good we are at coping with everything that life throws at us.

[31 : 38] Help us, Lord, To trust in you, To stand firm in faith, And so to be able to, To stand when the, The world is tumbling about our ears.

And we thank you, Lord, For this great word, That Emmanuel, God with us. The message for today, And a message for every day. And we thank you for this.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.