

December 13, 2009/Isaiah 7:1-17, Luke 1:30-38 (ESV¹)

we'll look this morning at much of Isaiah 7 and then some verses from Luke 1 ... as we pick up the situation in Isaiah 7, the year is 735 BC ... it's 13 years before the destruction of the northern kingdom by Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria ... Isaiah is speaking to Ahaz, king of Judah ... Ahaz's grandfather was Uzziah (Azariah) and his father was Jotham, both good kings ... he was an evil/awful king ... you can read about him in 2Kings 16 and 2Chronicles 28 ... he sacrificed his own son to a pagan deity, and generally led Judah into all kinds of evil and false religion ... even his name was indicative of his apostasy ... he purposely shortened his name from Jehoahaz to Ahaz, dropping the part that referred to Yahweh, purposely rejecting God ...

at this time the Assyrians were really rolling under Tiglath-Pileser, crushing all opposition ... they were the cruelest and most feared of the powers of the time ... physically/territorially Syria(Aram) and Israel stand between Judah and the Assyrians ... Israel and Syria want Judah to join them in opposing Tiglath-Pileser ... Ahaz refuses, apparently preferring to become a vassal to the Assyrians ... Syria and Israel then decide to attack Judah, planning to depose Ahaz and install their puppet on his throne ...

Isa 7:1 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.

Isa 7:2 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.

the house of David was told ... despite his apostasy, Ahaz at this point sits on the earthly throne of David ... Ahaz and the people were terrified that Syria and Israel were coming ... in 2 Chronicles 28:6 we read that Pekah killed 120,000 men of Judah in a single day ...

2Ch 28:6 For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed 120,000 from Judah in one day, all of them men of valor, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers.

Ahaz is scared, but his answer is a political answer ... make an alliance with the big dog on the block, Assyria ... rather than turn to God, trust in politics ... but God in His amazing patience yet offers grace and mercy to Ahaz ...

Isa 7:3 And 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.

Isaiah's to go, and take with him his son, whose name means "a remnant will return" or "a remnant shall repent" ... Isaiah is to meet Ahaz at a place where some years later (see Isaiah 36:2) after Ahaz's complete rejection of the Word of God, an attacking Assyrian army commander will taunt king Hezekiah ...

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Isa 7:4 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.

be careful, be quiet, do not fear ... Isaiah's constant message was "trust God" ... the constant reaction of Ahaz and others with no real knowledge of God is to devise schemes and plot political alliances as if security was in and from man, not God ... Isaiah is to say to Ahaz that these guys you are afraid of are just burnt out stubs ... why would anyone be afraid of them in light of reality? ...

Isa 7:5 Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying,

Isa 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,"

Isa 7:7 thus says the Lord GOD: "'It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.

look, Ahaz, it simply won't happen ...

Isa 7:8 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.

Isa 7:9 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."

who are these guys anyway? ... Remaliah is no descendant of anyone of importance, neither is Rezin ... in contrast, Ahaz sits on the throne of David, established by the LORD ... how do kings get to be kings in the first place??? ... they get there because one of their ancestors was strong enough to simply declare himself king ... that's a far cry from situation in Judah where God chose and established and promised an eternal reign for one of David's descendants ... besides, Isaiah is told that Israel's about to run out of time ... in fact, Assyria conquered Syria in 732 BC (3 years later) ... he conquered Israel 10 years after in 722 BC ... the Israelites were deported, foreign colonists were settled in Israel in waves extending to 670 BC ... this is the origin of the Samaritans ... see 2Kings 17:24-40 for example ...

if you falter, if you are not firm in faith, you are doomed ... trust or bust ... this is the point of no return ... Ahaz is about to falter by choosing faith in Tiglath-Pileser (who, by the way, called himself "the king of kings"!!!) over faith in God ... Isaiah offers him a radical possibility ... don't give in to the threats of neighbors and don't turn to Assyria, trust God! ... God in His infinite mercy offers Ahaz a paved road ...

Isa 7:10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz,

Isa 7:11 "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven."

God offers unusual confirmation, any sign the king desires ... God is willing to go to any length if Ahaz will choose to pull back from destruction ...

Isa 7:12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test."

now isn't this pious? ... Ahaz quotes Scripture like the devil quotes Scripture! ... not out of a heart of submission to God, but in actual defiance of God's express will ... the invitation is "ask that you might believe" ... the reply is "I will not ask," effectively "I will not believe" ... a genuinely pious answer would be "far be it from me to demand any further proof from God, I'll obey as I already know Him to be faithful" ... this is rather "I will not, I've already made up my mind to appeal to Assyria" ... the call to faith was and always is a call to the will ...

Isa 7:13 And he said, "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?"

the "you's" in verses 13 and 14 are plural ... the reference is to Ahaz and the whole royal family ... the kings and people of Judah have often refused to trust God ... now God is going to act unilaterally and give them all a sign that is it He and He alone that is to be trusted and relied upon ...

Isa 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

this is a sign for all time and all peoples ...

Mat 1:20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Mat 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Mat 1:22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

Mat 1:23 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

like many Old Testament prophecies, some parts of the meaning of the Isaiah prophecy were immediate ... some were fulfilled only later in Jesus ... was there some woman in Isaiah's time (perhaps even a second wife-to-be of widower Isaiah) who was to have a child she was going to name "Immanuel" and who was going to serve as a reminder to Ahaz of his refusal to trust God? ... probably ... but the most important significance is the Matthew significance ...

Isa 7:15 He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good.

when the kid is grown, he'll eat primitive but nutritious food ... likely after the land has been ravaged by war ...

Isa 7:16 For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

soon both Syria and Israel are going to be laid waste ... the land of the guys you (singular) Ahaz dread are is going to be deserted ... and by the way, Ahaz being allied with Assyria is going to be no walk in the park ... the Assyrians will do damage to Judah as well ...

Isa 7:17 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."

the hope here is not in politics or alliances, it's in the sign ... God with us, Emmanuel ... the sign looks like judgment to Ahaz, because he's chosen to rebel ... for those who are part of the remnant symbolized by Isaiah's son Shear-jashub (the remnant shall repent or return) there is hope ...

jump now to Luke 1 ... the angel has come to Mary to tell her that she's the virgin prophesied by Isaiah ...

Luk 1:30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

verse 29 says that Mary was greatly "troubled" ... this is a very strong and intensive word, used nowhere else in the NT ... afraid ... afraid of what? ... for one thing, this is a very powerful, awesome being that's speaking to her ... afraid, too, in the right kind of way, in respect/reverence of God ... it's God who's speaking to her here through Gabriel ... afraid perhaps as well that she's now standing out from the crowd ... she's not just a person in the community of Faith ... she's a person that's been singled out for God's attention ... she is a person of genuine humility, and those people never are comfortable with being singled out ... and the record is that those who are appointed to special tasks rarely find them to be without hardship ... God promises the strength necessary to do what He calls us to do, but He does not promise that doing His work will be easy or always pleasant ...

Luk 1:31 And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

Mary recognizes this as something more than a statement that she and Joseph will have children ... it may be that at this point the words of Isaiah 7 come rushing into her mind ...

give him the name Jesus ... the name of Joshua of the OT ... the name meaning "Yahweh saves" ...

Luk 1:32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David,

now these statements to Mary become unmistakably Messianic ... at this point she cannot help but understand that Gabriel is speaking to her about the long awaited Messiah ... there are OT passages like **Psalm 2** and **Psalm 89** ...

Psalm 2:6-7 "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." 7I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

Psalm 89:26-27 He shall cry to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.' 27And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.

Luk 1:33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

and there are OT passages like **2 Sam7, Psalm 45, Isaiah 9, Daniel 7 ...**

2 Samuel 7:13 He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

2 Samuel 7:16 And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.' "

Psalm 45:6 Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;

Isaiah 9:6-7 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. ⁷Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Daniel 7:13-14 I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

passages such as these must by now have been ringing in Mary's head ... after all these years and all the praying and waiting for Messiah, He's coming and she's to be the mother ... it's too much for her to take in without gasping for air ...

Luk 1:34 And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

this is not the voice of doubt, but rather the voice of overwhelming wonder ... Zechariah, when told that he and Elizabeth were to have a child in their old age, answered Gabriel in a doubting way, and was rebuked for the answer ... but this is something else ... Mary is just having a hard time taking it all in ... it's an honest inquiry about the details ...

Luk 1:35 And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.

if we have any sense, we look at any conception as a miracle ... but this is beyond the ordinary ... the child is going to have no natural father and in fact is going to be God incarnate ... the Son of God ... people have rightly said that this is the hinge on which all the rest of the NT miracles turn ... if this be true, there is no problem understanding the miracles of Jesus ... if it is God incarnate, of course He could feed the 5000 or calm the sea ... notice how delicately Gabriel speaks of this ... he offers no details of the biology or of mechanisms ... surely for good reason ... this is not for us to know or to figure we need to know ...

Luk 1:36 And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

it is God who makes the barren fertile and gives children as He chooses ... Mary hasn't asked for a confirmation of the promise to her, but she is nevertheless given one ... Gabriel lets her in on the news that by the grace of God, her aged relative Elizabeth is carrying John the Baptist ... is all of this possible? that the old and infertile Elizabeth is with child? ... that she Mary will, in a completely miraculous way carry in her own womb, the Son of God? ... of course it is ... God is God ...

Luk 1:37 For nothing will be impossible with God."

this reminds one of God's reply to Abraham when Sarah laughs at the thought of having a child in her old age ...

Genesis 18:14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

it is God who has established the "laws of nature " ... He is not bound by the laws He has established ... the One who called into existence the entire universe is not subject to the rules that He established for that creation ... nothing is too hard for God ...

Mary's reply to Gabriel is one of the simplest and yet most profound and appropriate statements by a human being recorded in Scripture ...

Luk 1:38 And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

what does she know about what's to come? ... she knows that there's great blessing, to be sure ... but she doesn't know the details ... and she surely understands that with the blessings are going to come real hardships ... in the immediate future is going to come the awkward situation of being pregnant before the consummation of her marriage to Joseph and then a lifetime of off-color remarks from rough people with no appreciation of who the baby is ... but her response is one of humble and beautiful submission to the will of God, and confidence in His goodness and His ability to strengthen and bring her through what He gives her to do ... one can hear in the words of Mary here the words of her son years later in the garden ...

Luke 22:42 "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."

it is no wonder that Mary was chosen by God for this task ... her heart is right ... her reply is one we ought to admire and determine to imitate ... the word the ESV translates "servant" and that that other versions translate "handmaid" is literally "slave girl" ... it indicates complete obedience ... JC Ryle: "Let us seek in our daily practical Christianity to exercise the same blessed spirit of faith that we see here in the Virgin Mary. Let us be willing to go anywhere, to do anything and be anything, whatever be the present and immediate inconvenience, so long as God's will is clear and the path of duty is plain." ... Ryle goes on to quote from Hall: "All disputations with God after His will is known arise from infidelity. There is not a more noble proof of faith than to captivate the powers of all our understanding and will to our Creator, and without all questionings to go blindfold wither He will lead us."