

The Book of Isaiah

Lesson 5: Immanuel: A Sign in the Days of Ahaz -- Isaiah 7:1-8:22

Fear has a way of making us reach for the wrong rescuer. That is the story behind these two chapters. King Ahaz of Judah is in a panic. Two enemy kings to the north, Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel, have allied against him and are marching on Jerusalem to throw him off the throne. The verse tells us “the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind” (7:2). The whole nation is trembling like a forest in a storm.

Into that fear God sends Isaiah with a stunning word of grace. Take your son, He says, and go meet the frightened king, and tell him: do not be afraid; these two smoking stumps of kings will not stand; they will be broken. Then comes the line that hangs over everything: “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all” (7:9). God offers Ahaz a simple choice. Trust Me and stand; trust yourself and fall.

God even stoops to offer Ahaz a sign, anything he wants, “deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” But Ahaz, dressing up his unbelief in false piety, refuses: “I will not put the LORD to the test.” He has already decided to trust the king of Assyria instead of the King of heaven. So God gives a sign anyway, a sign for the whole house of David and for the ages: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” which means God with us. Centuries later, Matthew opens his Gospel by telling us this was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:22-23).

These chapters wrestle with the oldest question of faith: when the world is shaking, whom will you trust? Ahaz chose Assyria and got Assyria, a cruel master that nearly drowned his nation. But God’s people are pointed to a different security, to the LORD Himself as a sanctuary, to His unbreakable word, and ultimately to the child named “God with us.” Let us learn from a faithless king what faith looks like, and let us fix our eyes on Immanuel.

Group Discussion: God told Ahaz, “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all” (7:9), yet Ahaz chose to trust Assyria instead. What are the modern “Assyrias” that frightened people reach for instead of trusting God (money, power, alliances, control)? Why do these always end up enslaving the very people who run to them for safety?

Personal Reflection: Ahaz hid his unbelief behind religious-sounding words (“I will not put the LORD to the test”). Be honest: is there a place in your life where you are dressing up a refusal to trust God in pious language? What would it look like to actually take God at His word there this week?

Read Isaiah 7:1-8:22

Study Questions

1. In Isaiah 7:1-9 the LORD reassures the terrified Ahaz that the two enemy kings are only “smoldering stumps” who will not succeed, and concludes, “If you are not firm in faith, you

will not be firm at all" (7:9). What does this teach us about the relationship between faith and stability, and what does it mean to be "firm" in faith? Support your answer from the text.

2. Ahaz and his people trembled "as the trees of the forest shake before the wind" (7:2). When a real threat enters your life, does your heart shake like that, or rest? What is one situation right now where God is inviting you to be "firm in faith" instead of fearful?
3. God offered Ahaz any sign he wanted, but Ahaz refused with the pious-sounding excuse, "I will not put the LORD to the test" (7:10–12). What does this teach us about how unbelief can disguise itself as humility or reverence, and how God responds to a heart that has already decided not to trust Him? Use the text in your answer.
4. Ahaz had already made up his mind to trust Assyria before he ever spoke his religious-sounding refusal. Where are you most tempted to use spiritual language to cover a decision you have already made on other grounds? Name it honestly.
5. Isaiah 8:11–15 tells God's people not to fear what the nation fears but to "honor as holy" the LORD of hosts, who will be "a sanctuary" to some and "a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling" to others. Peter and Paul apply this to Christ (1 Peter 2:7–8; Romans 9:32–33). What does it mean that the very same Lord is a refuge to some and a stumbling stone to others, and what determines which He is to a person? Support your answer from these texts.

6. Isaiah was told, “Do not fear what they fear,” but instead to fear (honor as holy) the LORD Himself. How would rightly fearing God actually free you from being controlled by the things and people you currently fear? Give a concrete example from your own life.
7. In Isaiah 8:16–20 the people are tempted to consult mediums and spiritists (“the dead on behalf of the living”), but Isaiah calls them back: “To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” (8:20). What does this teach us about the authority and sufficiency of God’s revealed word over every other source of guidance? Support your answer from the text.
8. Isaiah 8:19–20 confronts the temptation to seek answers from spiritual sources other than God’s word. Where do you tend to look for guidance and security when you are anxious (horoscopes, the opinions of the crowd, your own reasoning, anything other than Scripture)? How can you train yourself to go first “to the teaching and to the testimony”?
9. Isaiah 7:14 declares, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” Matthew 1:22–23 tells us this was fulfilled in the virgin birth of Jesus, “God with us.” While the sign had meaning in Ahaz’s own day, explain why its full weight rests on the Messianic fulfillment in Christ, what it means that God is now truly “with us” in Jesus, and how this anchors a Christian’s confidence when the world is shaking. Support your answer from Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:22–23, and the meaning of the name Immanuel.
10. Isaiah 8:17 says, “I will wait for the LORD... and I will hope in him.” Having seen Ahaz’s failure and the promise of Immanuel, name one specific way you will let Jesus, “God with us,” reshape how you handle fear and where you turn for security this week.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 1:18–25, Matthew declares Isaiah 7:14 fulfilled in the virgin birth of Jesus, Immanuel, “God with us”; 1 Peter 2:4–8, Peter applies Isaiah’s “stone of stumbling” to Christ, precious to believers but a rock of offense to the disobedient; Romans 9:30–33, Paul shows that Israel stumbled over the stumbling stone by pursuing righteousness by works rather than faith; Deuteronomy 18:9–15, the law forbids consulting mediums and points instead to the Prophet God would raise up (fulfilled in Christ, Acts 3:22–23)

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