

—{1}. **Isaiah 7:10-17** **God's Double Sign**

A. Introduction

1. signs

- a. Lord Jesus commends those that have not seen and believe
- b. at times believers have asked for signs and these have been granted – like Gideon, fleeces have been laid out and the Lord has sent them back wet or dry – doors have been opened – doors have been closed
- c. Calvin commented that we should grieve that God's holy truth should need the assistance of signs because of our weakness, but then adds that we should not then despise those which God graciously gives, and particularly mentions that Baptism and the Lord's Supper, when done in truth, are such signs^{—{2}}.
- d. it is for that reason that we deferred this message, wherein a double-sign is given, to Ahaz and to us, to this a Sunday on which we commemorate the Lord's Supper

2. « Let us read through this 7th chapter of Isaiah, and, as I shall be making a few comments along the way, you should follow this reading in your own Bibles. There is so much in this passage that I could teach a whole series on it, but I won't do that – at least not this morning! »

B. The Sign in Its Historical Context

1. who was this Ahaz?

- a. we can get a capsule sketch of this king and his character from the historical books « – let us turn to 2 Kings 16 »
- b. In 2 Kings 16:1-4 we read, "1 ¶ In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham, king of Judah, became king. 2 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem; and he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, as his father David had done. 3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had driven out from before the sons of Israel. 4 He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree."

- c. Ahaz was an evil king; as a king he was more in tune with the kings of Israel than those of Judah, but even in Judah he was not the worst king they had – but he comes pretty close to the top of the list
2. what was the political situation like when Ahaz became king?
 - a. a couple verses back in 2 Kings 15:37 we read, “In those days the Lord began to send Rezin king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah against Judah.”
 - b. and then some verses later in 2 Kings 16:5-6, “5 ¶ Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. 6 At that time Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram, and cleared the Judeans out of Elath entirely; and the Arameans came to Elath and have lived there to this day.”
 - c. Judah and Jerusalem were a state under siege by the kings of the nations north and east of them; by Israel (Ephraim) and Aram (Syria) and this is how the first verses of this 7th chapter describe the situation
 3. how did this new king respond to this situation?
 - a. we have already read the words of the Lord through Isaiah to Ahaz as he is up checking the city’s water situation
 - (A) ‘Take care’ – watch out! be careful! don’t be rash!
 - (B) then, ‘be calm’ – be quiet! be trusting! be at peace!
 - (C) God is in charge, He is not going to allow these two kings to have their way with Judah
 - (D) ‘It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass’ – God has said it and you can be fully assured he means it
 - b. but Ahaz had his own plans already in his mind, even if not already put into action
 - (A) and those plans did not include God’s help
 - (B) « let’s continue to read in » 2 Kings 16:7-8, “7 So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, ‘I am your servant and your son; come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are rising up against me.’ 8 Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasuries of the king’s house, and sent a present to the king of Assyria.”

4. So God had something further to say to Ahaz
 - a. literally this read, 'The Lord continued to speak to Ahaz'
 - b. this may have been through the mouth of Isaiah, but it was God's own words to this king of his people
 - c. verse 11 shows the condescension of this action in 2 ways
 - d. first, He identifies Himself to Ahaz as 'the Lord thy God'
 - (A) not simply to Ahaz as his sovereign (though He was) but as Yahweh, the God with whom Ahaz had a covenant relationship, arising from the fact that he was a descendent of Abraham and also that he was a descendent of David, with both of whom God had made a covenant for them and their children
 - (B) you may be sinful and rebellious, Ahaz, but I am a gracious God and my covenant with you still stands
 - e. second, He gives Ahaz a carte blanche – that is a signed piece of paper on which the recipient can write his own demands and have them met – here by the sovereign God
 - (A) you know – especially if you do the cryptic crosswords – that in English there are words that sound the same and may even have the same spelling, but have totally different meanings; homonyms – in this verse 11 there is such a word in the Hebrew: Shealah which can mean
 - (1) 'Go ahead, ask it!' – an emphatic command, or,
 - (2) 'towards Sheol,' i.e., as far downwards as possible
 - (B) but either way, the intent of the verse is the same: God gives a command to Ahaz – not a suggestion – to ask from Him, He who is the covenant God of His people, ask indeed a sign that He will keep His people
 - (C) and the scope of that sign God offers is without limit!
5. How does Ahaz respond?
 - a. he knows that, unlike his own Ba'als, the God of Israel can meet any challenge he could give – history shows it
 - b. and he then would be forced to change his plans – they did not include God, they included the king of Assyria
 - c. but he tries to put a good spin on it, 'I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord' – Deuteronomy 6:16 says "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah." – as Henderson has said,

'Ahaz hypocritically pretends that there is no necessity for Divine interference and professes to regard as sin what God had graciously accorded to him.'^{3} – Ahaz did not care if he sinned!

- d. well it is one thing to waste Isaiah's time – he was called to preach to deaf ears and blind eyes – but another, God's
- e. "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a {literally, the} virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

6. How did Ahaz perceive this sign?

- a. well, he didn't change his plans, and, indeed by the very way that the Lord gave it, as you can tell from the next verses, Ahaz was allowed to continue in his rebellious way
- b. let me first deny one suggestion on this subject, namely, that there was then, at that time, a miraculous virgin birth
 - (A) the Bible records no such birth as it certainly would if it had occurred
 - (B) the sign in its context has no need for such a miracle
 - (C) this sign would prove its truth in looking back
 - (D) and most important, such a birth would have put that boy in the same position as Jesus Christ, born without original sin; only two men in all history were without original sin: Adam and Jesus Christ; Romans 5:11-19 shows that sin is an inheritance from our father back to our first father Adam; only Jesus Christ was ever born without an earthly father
- c. a second way of viewing this sign, which I concede to be a possibility, but rather a stretch on the passage, is that the sign was given to Isaiah in vision, and the narration of that vision to Ahaz constituted a sign
- d. however, the words 'the virgin' singles out a particular, identified woman as being part of that sign
- e. I believe then, that the best explanation of what this sign was to Ahaz is that summed up by Geoffrey Grogan^{4}, 'An unmarried young woman within the royal house would shortly marry and conceive. Her son would be called Immanuel ("God is with us"), probably in ignorance of the prophecy (which may have been given in the presence only of Ahaz) and possibly even as a presumptuous gesture to give support to the king's pro-Assyrian policy. Before the child is old enough to eat the characteristic food of the Land of promise in its solid form (and so, if this is meant, well before the age of moral discretion), the Assyrians would lay waste the lands of Aram and Israel, which they did in 733-732 BC, only a year

or two after the prophecy is given.'

7. so Ahaz has his sign – unasked for but given in grace
 - a. before this child knows to eat proper food and not put buttons, sticks and stones in his mouth, both Rezin and Pekah would be gone – as indeed they were
 - b. and, with that fulfilment, would begin the fulfilment of the warning, verse 17, 'The Lord will bring on you ... the king of Assyria.'
 - c. that is the first, historical part of the sign, given to Ahaz, so that when it occurred, he was given by the grace of God an opportunity to repent and trust in his Lord God.

C. The Sign to the House of David and to Us

1. but this historical and meaningful application to Ahaz
 - a. in no way exhausts what is contained in this verse
 - b. for there is in these words, in this Messianic prophecy, a more far-reaching sign and prophecy
 - c. to start with, the word 'you' in verse 14, 'The Lord Himself will give you a sign ...' are in the plural
 - d. there is a sign here for more than Ahaz
 - e. and in chapter 1, Matthew tells us what that sign was – it was a sign of a salvation far greater than from the kings of Aram and Israel – as the angel says "20b 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' 22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 'Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel,' which translated means, 'God with us.'"
 - f. as there is no record as to who the young woman of Ahaz' day was, there is no record of Mary calling her son by the name, 'Immanuel' – but it is undoubtedly true
 - g. the writer of the Gospel, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit that possessed Isaiah in writing his 'gospel', takes of its words and finds the deeper meaning that was denied to the unbelieving Ahaz, and even veiled from the prophet Isaiah, himself, as described in 1 Peter 1:10-11, "10 ¶ As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, 11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He

predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.”

h. let us glory in some of the aspects of this second and more important part of this double sign given to Ahaz

2. Jesus Christ was Born without Sin

- a. unlike, His mother, who though a chaste, young woman, was born of a human father and so was a sinner needing salvation just as us – she confessed God as her Saviour
- b. we are all, in the hymn-writer’s words, sinners by choice and sinners by birth
- c. but Jesus of Nazareth, divinely conceived, was not
- d. and for that reason, He, the pure and spotless lamb of God could take away the sins of the world – he could take away my sin – past, present, and future
- e. “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

3. Jesus Christ was God in the Flesh

- a. Immanuel – God with Us
- b. for about 33 years, God walked on this earth, as a man
- c. He was tempted in all points, like unto us, without sin
- d. Adam, created without sin, fell into sin, and brought the curse of sin on every man, woman and child born of him
- e. Jesus, born without sin, immaculate, God himself, offered Himself as a sacrifice – not an animal sacrifice of which countless numbers were sacrificed – but as the unique, one and only Son of God, of infinite value, for the world’s sin
- f. and, this same Jesus, now seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high is able to plead on our behalf, knowing the feeling of our weakness and infirmities
- g. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

4. Jesus Christ is God with Us

- a. the child unknown to us, Immanuel, of Ahaz’ day, was a token of God’s presence with His people, the

nation of Judah in this crisis which they faced

- b. the phrase 'God with us' echoing through Isaiah 7 to 11
- c. but our known Immanuel, is God with Us, today
- d. as the hymn-writer expresses it,

You ask me now I know He lives,
He lives within my heart!

- e. the great and marvellous wonder that is a sign to the world around us, to unbelievers, is that God dwells in His people
- f. primarily, each and every believer is to be the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in us
- g. but Christ dwells in us, the hope of glory
- h. and the Father, too, takes up His residence with us
- i. so the triune God resides within, as Paul prays for believers "... to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:19)
- j. that means that at any instant, in any place, and in every circumstance, you can call upon the Triune God residing in you, and He is there to answer
- k. that is true now in a mystical fashion, but one day it will be true in a visible, glorious fashion as God dwells with us in the place prepared for us, in His glory, for ever and ever

D. Conclusion – in participating in the communion service we have a visible reminder of these truths; let us rejoice in the miraculous Jesus, born of a virgin, crucified under Pontius Pilate, risen again the third day, ascended into heaven, and coming again to receive us to Himself.

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RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
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2. Adapted from Calvin's Commentaries, Isaiah 7:12.
3. Biblical Museum, James Compter Gray ed., *in loc*
4. Grogan, Principal, Bible Training Institute, Glasgow, Scotland; EBC *in loc*