



Study #3 - Isaiah 7:1-9:7

Introduction

Remember last week's study on Isaiah 6 where we learned of Isaiah's amazing vision of the LORD God followed by the prophet's own cleansing from sin by the LORD himself and him being sent to preach a message of judgment against God's people - a message that will provoke an even greater rejection by God's people until that judgement is complete.

Context

Chapter 7 begins with king Ahaz who along with the people of Judah find themselves terrified and fearful. The events described in verses 1-9 take place in 735 BC around 5 years after Isaiah's vision described in chapter 6.

1. What is taking place in Judah at the time to cause such fear? 7:1-2 (Judah's nearest neighbours in the north decided that it was time to become anti-Assyrian and wanted to force other small nations into their alliance against Assyria)
2. According to Isaiah, why are these fears completely unfounded? 7:3-9
3. What course of action does Isaiah urge Ahaz to take? Why the mention of Isaiah's own son in 7:3? And what is the significance of this son's name?
4. What action does Ahaz take? (see 2 Kings 16:7-8)

We saw in chapter 6 that the LORD is the true king who rules the universe. Isaiah knows

this but what about Ahaz?

The sign

5. Why does Ahaz refuse to ask for a sign from the LORD even though Isaiah encourages him to do so?
6. How does the LORD respond to this refusal?
7. What do you notice in 7:10-13 about the choice of pronouns "your God" and "my God"?
8. How might this be a fulfilment of Isaiah 6:9-10?

Before looking at how the sign is fulfilled in the New Testament let's think about this sign in the context of the book Isaiah itself.

Notes

There is much that is difficult to unravel in this section. Isaiah seems to be presenting us with something of a riddle.

The word for "virgin" in 7:14 can also be translated as "young woman of marriageable age". The fact that the translators of the Hebrew OT into the Greek version went for the word "virgin" is understandable given that normally a woman in this situation would be a virgin. Isaiah did have other words available to him to if he wish specifically insist on the fact that she was a virgin and that the child to be born would be the result of a virgin birth. What therefore is the sign? The context leads us therefore to see that it is the birth of a male son to a young woman. There is nothing particularly miraculous here. Included in the sign seems to be the hardship that the child will face in early life (7:15-17). The curds and honey here is a description of food of the scarcity that Judah will experience perhaps because of the raging conflict that Isaiah predicts.

The son in question could be referring to a son to be born to Isaiah (see 8:3), although we know that Isaiah already has a son (7:3). If the son to be born is Isaiah's second son this would make sense of 8:3-4 which seems to align with 7:15-17.

Ahaz is being told that he will see the birth of a male child to a young woman and that before the boy is too old Aram and Israel will be laid waste. The same boy will see a time of agricultural hardship due to the invasion of the Assyrian army. The name Immanuel, which as we know, means "God with us", is not necessarily positive. It could well refer to God's presence with Judah in judgement. (See 8:8, 10)

Is it possible that we are to put the 2 names together and see that the young woman of 7:14 is one and the same as the prophetess of 8:3? If so Immanuel - God with us and Maher-shalal-hash-baz - quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil are one and the same

person. In this case, God's presence with Judah can be seen as the threat of judgement - embodied by the arrival of the Assyrian army that sweeps everything before it like a mighty river. 8:7-8. There is hope however, for 8:9-10 describes the ultimate failure of the Assyrian attempt on the conquest of Judah - this is played out in graphic detail in Isaiah 36-39 under the reign of king Hezekiah. (Note the difference in attitude of Ahaz and Hezekiah, both of whom receive a sign from the LORD - see Isaiah 39:7-8). This reading of 8:11 sees "God with us" as being positive even though previously it is negative. The 2 edged nature of the sign which expresses both hope and judgment are thus intertwined.

In Isaiah 9:6-7, the prophet speaks of a son born in incredibly exalted terms. This would seem to indicate a change in which the sign in its initial context is broadened and expanded. One possibility is that in this context, Isaiah is referring to the city of Jerusalem often described in the Old Testament the virgin daughter who will give birth to one to come in the line of David - the messiah. Alternatively the son born to her is seen to be the faithful remnant.

The sign in the New Testament

Read Luke 2:12 and Matthew 1:18-25 & 4:12-17

Taking each of these passages in turn discuss how the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled in the Gospel narratives.

From darkness to light

Read Isaiah 8:11-9:7

9. What is the LORD's message for Isaiah himself in the last section of chapter 8?

What will he be pressured or tempted to do?

The situation of the people of Judah that Isaiah is seeking to minister to as described in 8:22 contrasts sharply with what follows in chapter 9. The opening verses describe the invasion of Zebulun and Naphtali, 2 tribes of Northern Israel by Assyria in 732 BC (see 2 Kings 15:29). What an incredible turnaround however! Isaiah is truly a prophet of great hope for all God's people and even for those who are not yet God's people.

Prayer

Praise God that, although we, like the people of Judah, deserve God's judgement he saved us. Close by reading Titus 3:3-7 - verses that we looked at last week.