***Immanuel***

**Second Sunday in Advent December 8, 2024**

***Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David!  
Is it not enough to try the patience of men?  
Will you try the patience of my God also?  
Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign:  
The virgin will be with child and give birth to a son,  
 and will call him Immanuel.”*Isaiah 7:14**

**Why Isaiah needed**

1. Beginning in Isaiah:

1. Isaiah introduces us to God’s holiness and salvation

2) Isaiah’s message reveals God’s judgment and his restoration, with the restoring ministry of   
 Messiah always in the background.

3) Isaiah’s questions to Ahaz: Who are you going to trust? To whom are you going to listen?

2. Visualizing the message of Isaiah:

A close-up of a newspaper

Description automatically generated

**Putting the *analogia scripturae* to work: Isaiah 7:10-17**

*10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 11 “Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”*

*12 But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test.”*

*13 Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. 15 He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right. 16 But before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. 17 The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—he will bring the king of Assyria.”*

1. Hermeneutic keys for reading the prophets

1. Always begin with a commitment to read all Scripture as God’s inspired word

2) The prophets are preparing God’s people for Messiah in their message of judgement

and restoration

3) Piper’s Golden Rule: “Read the author as you would have the author read you.” The context  
 is especially important in this text – we need to know why Ahaz didn’t turn to God.

4) Leave room for one promise with multiple fulfillments – but here the promise must fit both the Isaiah 7-9 and Matthew 1 settings.

5) Names are a “sign” (see 18:8). Isaiah 7-9 can be seen at the “tale of four names” as God   
 reveals his provision for his people even as they commit spiritual adultery.

2. Isaiah responds to Ahaz’ hypocrisy (the most evil king according to 2 Kings 16) – he will turn to   
Assyria but not to God. So the remnant left will have to stand on tiptoes to survive the “flood” of the Assyrians (see Isaiah 8:6-8). A remnant will be saved because “God is with us” (8:9-10).

3. The sign of a child is a reminder to God’s people that he is present to deliver his people (see Gen. 21:22; Exodus 3:12; Deut. 2:7; Joshua 1:5; Psalm 46:7).

4. “God with us” is a promise that even evil Ahaz will see God break in to save his people, and the remnant will be even be returned – the double promise of *Shear-Jashub*!

5. The key question: To whom will I turn when God is “hiding his face”

*16 Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples.*

*17 I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob.   
 I will put my trust in him.*

*18 Here am I, and the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion.*

*19 When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? 20 To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. 21 Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. 22 Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.*

Isaiah 8

**Living in the fulfillment of the promise**

*18 This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. 19 Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

*20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

*22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”*

*24 When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25 But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

Matthew 1

1. When my Rezin and Pekah are on the doorstep, the object of my faith will be revealed, just as   
 Joseph’s faith is revealed

*7 Yet this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “ ‘It will not take place, it will not happen . . . . If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.’ ”*

Isaiah 7

2. God is at work even when his methods are counterintuitive – a virgin giving birth?!?!

*28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose . . . .*

*31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Romans 8

3. God is still in the business of breaking in

*6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5

4. The child/son is the sign, in very large part, because the Son is central to our salvation

*31 What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Romans 8

*16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

John 3

**Three Things You Should Know about Isaiah**Derek Thomas

at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/3-things-isaiah>

**1. Isaiah was overwhelmingly influenced by a vision of the holiness of God at the outset of his ministry.**

On the day King Uzziah died (740/739 BC), Isaiah had a vision of God “sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up,” while seraphim called to one another,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!” ([Isa. 6:1, 3](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%206%3A1%2C%203/))

The threefold repetition of the adjective “holy” is a Hebraic way of expressing unmatched intensity. Only in [Isaiah 6:3](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isaiah%206%3A3/) is this done three times in the Hebrew Bible. Its effect upon Isaiah can be seen in the fact that the word “holy” (Heb. *qadosh*) occurs more frequently in Isaiah than in the rest of the Old Testament combined.

The word “holy” is related to the idea of being separate or distinct. Isaiah’s God is not an extension of the created order, someone who can be manipulated. The people of Isaiah’s day, governed by Uzziah, Azariah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, were deaf to the prophet’s warnings. In the eighth century BC, as in our day, man’s mind was forever creating idols shaped after human desires and predilections.

**2. Isaiah’s ministry was seemingly ineffective by God’s design.**

To show Judah’s faithlessness, God sent the prophet on a fool’s errand. At the close of the temple vision of God’s holiness, where God’s glory was put on display, God gave Isaiah a somewhat strange commission. For more than fifty years, Isaiah was required to proclaim a message simple enough for a child to understand ([Isa. 28:9–10](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2028%3A9%E2%80%9310/)) but impossible for hardened political leaders to comprehend ([Isa. 6:9–10](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%206%3A9%E2%80%9310/)). In this way, Isaiah’s ministry set a precedent. When the disciples asked Jesus why He spoke in parables, Jesus answered them by citing from Isaiah’s commission ([Matt. 13:14–15](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2013%3A14%E2%80%9315/); [Mark 4:10–12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Mark%204%3A10%E2%80%9312/)). God’s true disciples will make sense of it, but the merely religious will not. In the same way, Isaiah’s message was scoffed at and rejected.

And what was his message? It was a message of political crisis. In 745 BC, Tiglath-Pileser III came to power in Nineveh, the capital city of the empire of Assyria. And the Assyrian king had only one thing on his mind: world domination. Immediately following the vision of God’s holiness, we are told of Assyria’s successful conquest of the Northern Kingdoms of Aram and Israel, and despite a treaty between the two kingdoms to thwart Assyria’s advances, it proved too little, too late ([Isa. 7:1–2](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%207%3A1%E2%80%932/); see also 17:3). Then Judah became a target, and Assyria’s aim was clear: “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. 7:6](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%207%3A6/)). Assyria was attempting to end the entire redemptive purpose of God and bring an end to the line of David. Ahaz, Judah’s king, thought that a way to survive this threat was to make an alliance with Assyria, but Isaiah made it clear: Ahaz was playing with fire ([Isa. 7:17](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%207%3A17/)). Judah’s kings were no longer sovereign; they were puppets to the Assyrian hegemony. Even the otherwise godly Hezekiah, four decades after Ahaz, played the same deadly game, making a treaty with Pharaoh and thinking an alliance with Egypt would prevent Assyrian aggression. But Isaiah’s response was blunt: Hezekiah had made “a covenant with death, and with Sheol” ([Isa. 28:15](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2028%3A15/)). Instead of trusting in the promises of God, exercising *faith*, the kings of Judah showed their soft underbelly, an inclination to trust their own ways rather than the word of the living and true God.

**3. Isaiah is known as the *evangelical* prophet.**

Amidst the decaying glory of the Davidic kingship, Isaiah prophesies, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” ([Isa. 7:14](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%207%3A14/)), and two chapters later:

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 . . . .  
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. ([Isa. 9:6–7](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%209%3A6%E2%80%937/))

Seven hundred years before it happened, in the midst of Judah’s winter, Isaiah promises Christmas—the virgin birth of Immanuel, the Savior of sinners!

But that is not all. In addition to a promise of a coming king and ruler (see [Isa. 11; 60](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2011%3B%2060/)), Isaiah is most known for his four Servant Songs ([Isa. 42:1–9; 49:1–13; 50:4–11; 52:13–53:12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2042%3A1%E2%80%939%3B%2049%3A1%E2%80%9313%3B%2050%3A4%E2%80%9311%3B%2052%3A13%E2%80%9353%3A12/)). The prophet foresees God’s coming and growing up as a man ([Isa. 53:2–3](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2053%3A2%E2%80%933/)) and becoming the Suffering Servant upon whose shoulders the sins of His people are placed. By way of substitution and satisfaction, the guiltless Servant will die and come to life again and divide the spoils of His victory ([Isa. 53:7–12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2053%3A7%E2%80%9312/)). In the closing verse of [Isaiah 53](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isaiah%2053/), mention is made that the Servant “bore the sin of *many*” ([Isa. 53:12](https://www.esv.org/verses/Isa.%2053%3A12/), emphasis added). In a discussion with His disciples about who should be first in the kingdom of God, Jesus seemed to provide a summary of His mission: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for *many*” ([Mark 10:45](https://www.esv.org/verses/Mark%2010%3A45/), emphasis added; see also [Matt. 20:28](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%2020%3A28/); [John 13:1–17](https://www.esv.org/verses/John%2013%3A1%E2%80%9317/)). Evidently, Jesus had reflected on these words about the Servant and understood them as speaking about Himself.

*This article is part of the* [*Every Book of the Bible: 3 Things to Know*](https://www.ligonier.org/learn/collections/3-things) *collection.*

**ESV Study Bible, Isaiah**

*Theme*

The central theme of the book is God himself, who does all things for his own sake (48:11). Isaiah defines everything else by its relation to God, whether it is rightly adjusted to him as the gloriously central figure in all of reality (45:22–25). God is the Holy One of Israel (1:4), the One who is high and lifted up but who also dwells down among the “contrite and lowly” (57:15), the Sovereign over the whole world (13:1–27:13) whose wrath is fierce (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4) but whose cleansing touch atones for sin (6:7), whose salvation flows in endless supply (12:3), whose gospel is “good news of happiness” (52:7), who is moving history toward the blessing of his people (43:3–7) and the exclusive worship due him (2:2–4). He is the only Savior (43:10–13), and the whole world will know it (49:26). To rest in the promises of this God is his people’s only strength (30:15); to delight themselves in his word is their refreshing feast (55:1–2); to serve his cause is their worthy devotion (ch. 62); but to rebel against him is endless death (66:24).

A microcosm of the book’s message appears in 1:2–2:5. The Lord announces his basic charge against the people: they have received so much privilege from God and ought to be grateful children, but “they have despised the Holy One of Israel” (1:2–4). He describes the purpose of the various judgments they face, namely, to bring them to repentance, or at least to preserve a remnant who *will* repent (1:5–9). Judah is very diligent to observe the divinely appointed sacrifices, but the people’s hearts are far from God, as their unwillingness to protect their own weakest members exhibits (1:10–20). The Lord called his people to be the embodiment of faithfulness in this world, and yet they are now filled with rampant unfaithfulness at every level (personal, religious, and social); but God intends to purge Zion of its sinful members and set her up as a beacon of light for the whole world. In view of this glorious future, Isaiah’s contemporaries should commit themselves afresh to walking “in the light of the Lord” (1:21–2:5).

*Purpose, Occasion, and Background*

Isaiah announces God’s surprising plan of grace and glory for his rebellious people and, indeed, for the world. God had promised Abraham that through his descendants the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1–3). God had promised David that his throne would lead the world into salvation (2 Sam. 7:12–16; Ps. 89:19–37). But by Isaiah’s time, the descendants of Abraham and many members of the dynasty of David no longer trusted the promises of God, aligning themselves instead with the promises—and the fears—of this false world. Judah’s unbelief in God during the pivotal events of Isaiah’s lifetime redirected their future away from blessing and toward judgment. At this historic turning point, Judah moved from independence under God’s power to subservience under pagan powers.

What, then, of God’s ancient promises? Is the gracious purpose of God defeated by Judah’s sin? Isaiah answers that question. After the prefatory chapters 1–5, his answer unfolds in chapters 6–27, and the rest of the book develops the serious but hopeful message of these chapters. Isaiah’s answer is that, although God must purify his people through judgment, he has an overruling purpose of grace, beginning with Isaiah himself (ch. 6), spreading to Judah (7:1–9:7) and Israel (9:8–11:16), and resulting in endless joy (12:1–6). Even the nations of the world are taken into account (13:1–27:13). The purpose of Isaiah, then, is to declare the good news that God will glorify himself through the renewed and increased glory of his people, which will attract the nations. The book of Isaiah is a vision of hope for sinners through the coming Messiah, promising for the “ransomed” people of God a new world where sin and sorrow will be forever forgotten (35:10; 51:11).

Isaiah’s book envisions three historical settings (see chart): (1) chapters 1–39 are set against the background of Isaiah’s own times in the late eighth century b.c.; (2) chapters 40–55 assume the Jewish exiles in Babylon in the sixth century as their audience; and (3) chapters 56–66 take the returned exiles and subsequent generations of God’s people as their backdrop. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the chapters have relevance only to their assumed audiences: the long-range prophecies of chapters 40–66, as already indicated, challenge all the people of Judah in Isaiah’s time to accept their role in a story that is headed to a glorious future and to live faithfully in that light (cf. 2:5, on the heels of 2:1–4). Further, the entire book, as canonical Scripture, addresses all the people of God until Christ returns.

**Simplified Overview of Isaiah**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Isaiah 1–39** | **Isaiah 40–55** | **Isaiah 56–66** |
| **Date and Setting** | The eighth century b.c. (700s); the Assyrian threat | Prophecies about the sixth century b.c. (500s); the Babylonian exile | Prophecies about all times and occasions until the end |
| **Audience** | God’s rebellious people craving worldly security | God’s defeated people under worldly domination | All who hold fast to God’s covenant |
| **Actions** | God purifies a remnant of his apostate people through judgment | God consoles his discouraged people in exile | God prepares all of his true people for his promised salvation |
| **Message** | “In returning and rest you shall be saved; … But you were unwilling” (30:15) | “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed” (40:5) | “Keep justice, and do righteousness” (56:1) |

First, in his own times, Isaiah prophesied “in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (1:1). Called by God “in the year that King Uzziah died” (6:1), his long ministry began in 740 b.c. The external threat of Isaiah’s day was the militant Assyrian Empire rising to power in the east. The question forced upon Judah by this threat was one of trust: in what will God’s people trust for salvation—in human strategies of self-rescue, or in prophetic promises of divine grace?

This question of what and whom to trust intensified on two occasions. The first occurred c. 735 b.c., during the reign of King Ahaz. Under pressure from Assyria, the northern kingdom of Israel formed a pact of mutual defense with Syria, and together these two kingdoms aimed to force Judah into alignment with them (ch. 7). But God could be trusted to stand by his commitment to defend the Davidic throne. Accordingly, Isaiah assured Ahaz of God’s saving purpose. But Ahaz refused God, preferring the power of Assyria, and negotiated for pagan protection (2 Kings 16:5–9). Thus Ahaz surrendered the sovereignty of the Davidic throne to a nation hostile to the kingdom of God, and achieved nothing in return. The coalition arrayed against Judah failed—Syria fell in 732 b.c. and Israel in 722, as God had said they would (Isa. 7:16; 8:4).

The second crisis occurred in 701 b.c., during the reign of Hezekiah. This time Assyria was the threat. As before, the temptation was to negotiate an alliance of defense with human powers, in this case with Egypt (30:1–7; 31:1–3; 36:6). Judah chose the false refuge of human promises rather than to rest on the Lord’s “sure foundation” (28:14–22). Assyria then set out to punish Judah for its pact with Egypt. Hezekiah tried to buy peace from the Assyrians (2 Kings 18:13–16), but they turned on him (Isa. 33:1). Under extreme pressure, Hezekiah finally put his trust in the Lord and found him to be powerfully faithful (chs. 36–37).

The eventual downfall of Judah was foreseen in Hezekiah’s unguarded openness to Babylonian influence (ch. 39). Isaiah discerned in Hezekiah’s enthusiasm for Babylon a future of captivity there for God’s people.

Second, Isaiah was enabled by God to address the Jewish captives far away in Babylon in the sixth century b.c. He announces a promise that God is coming with a world-changing display of his glory (40:5). To prepare for his coming, the exiles must return to the Promised Land (48:20). They must not be demoralized by the impressive but empty culture of idolatry in which they live (41:21–24), nor should they resent God’s use of a pagan conqueror, Cyrus the Great, as their liberator from Babylon (44:24–28). They must look by faith for a greater liberator still to come, the messianic “servant of the Lord” (see note on 42:1–9). He will bring justice to the nations (42:1–4) and save his people from their ultimate captivity, the guilt of sin (52:13–53:12). Since the faith of God’s people had already proven weak, God pledges that he alone will accomplish this, for his own glory (48:9–11).

Third, Isaiah addressed the returned exiles and subsequent generations of God’s people with messages of challenge and hope, to keep their faith and obedience steady until God fulfills all his promises. Isaiah makes clear the spiritual and universal nature of God’s true people (56:3–8; 66:18–23). He sees the final triumph of One who is “mighty to save” (63:1). His prophetic eye looks beyond the fraudulence of this world, all the way forward to the eternal finality of God’s renewed people in a renewed cosmos (65:17; 66:22). “Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28).[[1]](#footnote-1)

**EBC on Isaiah 7**J. *The Sign of Immanuel (7:10–25)*

See introductory note at 7:1–9. Is this section to be viewed as one oracle or should we make a division after v.17? The latter hardly seems necessary, as the remainder of the chapter is most naturally viewed as an exposition of the significance of the concluding clause of v.17. Moreover, there is a link between the curds and honey of v.15 and v.22.

**10–11** This oracle probably followed closely on the previous one, for it is related to the same situation. It implies (see esp. the reference to “patience” in v.13) that the earlier prophecy has been rejected or at least treated with noncommittal evasion by the king. If there was even a spark of faith in Ahaz, God was willing to give it an opportunity of expression. He responded to Gideon’s repeated request for a sign, even though it followed a clear revelation of his saving will (Judg 6:14, 17–18, 38–40). Once again, as in the day of the Midianite menace (cf. 9:4), a superior foe was threatening the nation. God went even further this time in his patience with human weakness, for he actually offered Ahaz carte blanche, the unrestricted choice of a sign (v.11). Reinforcement of such an overflowing gesture of grace hardly seems conceivable, and yet it is secured by the possessive pronoun “your.” This reminds him of his special relationship to God as the chosen people’s king (cf. 2 Sam 7:11–16). For further comment on this verse, see comment at v.14.

**12** Ahaz made his plans, and they did not include God or his will. Ahaz’s reply was a monumental piece of hypocrisy. As O. Kaiser (in loc.) aptly puts it, “There are situations in which outward piety and inward unbelief are identical.” Ahaz probably had Deuteronomy 6:16 in mind. It would be good to think that this reveals at least some small attempt earlier in his life to come to grips with this book, which the king was obliged to know and follow (cf. Deut 17:14–20, esp. vv.18–19). Just as Satan was later to quote and misuse Scripture in the temptation of God’s Son—to which Jesus gave reply from the very verse Ahaz must have had in mind (Matt 4:6–7)—so here a godless king made an inappropriate and unbelieving allusion to what God had said. It is not testing God to do as he says!

**13** Ahaz was still addressed as “house of David” (cf. v.2), with its implication of special promises and also of a continuing dynasty; but here the prophet spoke of “my God” instead of “your God” (cf. v.11). Ahaz may have been the current occupant of the divinely secured throne of David; but it was incumbent on him to hear the divine word through the prophet who, unlike him, was in a sensitive and responsive relationship with God. It was that relationship that made the king’s rejection of the prophetic word a trial of God’s patience and not simply man’s. God was weary of his unbelief (cf. RSV and comment at 1:14).

**14–17** This great passage is both important and difficult. We will assume its integrity, for the text has come down to us whole; and a satisfying interpretation of it as a whole can be given. The main interpretations that have been given follow below.

1. The mother is royal, perhaps the queen, and so the child is a royal prince, perhaps Hezekiah (J. Lindblom, *A Study on the Immanuel Section in Isaiah 7:1–9:6 [Lund: Gleerup, 1958], p. 41*).

2. The mother is Isaiah’s wife, and so the child is one of his sons (Clements, *Isaiah 1–39*, in loc.).

3. The prophecy does not refer to a specific mother and child but to mothers in Judah generally, who will give their offspring names symbolizing hope in God (cf. 1 Sam 4:19–22) (O. Kaiser, in loc.).

4. The mother is the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus Christ (cf. Matt 1:22–23). (Young, *Book of Isaiah*, in loc.).

5. The mother is a royal contemporary of the prophet, whose child’s name would symbolize the presence of God with his people and who would foreshadow the Messiah in whom God would be incarnate. (J.A. Alexander, in loc.). This view really combines 1 and 4.

Before suggesting a solution, it may be helpful to set out the main facts and problems that a satisfactory interpretation must come to grips with.

1. The mother and child must be seen as a sign to Ahaz. In fact, the reference to the house of David may suggest that the sign will be significant for the whole dynasty.

2. Why did Isaiah use the word *ʿalmāh* (translated “virgin” by the NIV and “young woman” by the RSV), and what is its exact significance here? This has been much disputed. See Notes.

3. Does the Hebrew perfect tense in v.14 mean “will be” (as NIV translates it) or “is” or “has been?” Grammatically all three are possible.

4. Does Immanuel mean “God is with us” or “God with us”? Either is possible.

5. What is the significance of curds and honey (cf. v.22)? Do they suggest plenty and perhaps a secure tenure of the Promised Land (cf. Exod 3:8, 17, Deut 6:3; 11:9; 32:13–15), or, in the context of a developed agricultural society do they represent a mere subsistence diet? Do they simply designate the normal diet of a recently weaned child? Do they even reflect the mythological diet of Babylonian gods, so suggesting his divinity? To this last suggestion it may be replied that it is doubtful methodology to go outside the OT for an explanation of a phrase if a perfectly good one may be found within it.

6. What does v.15 mean? Is the discrimination in view dietary or moral? What age is in view? Commentators vary in their suggestions between two or three years and twenty!

7. Verses 16–17 appear to relate to historical events that actually took place in the comparatively near future. If this is so, how can the child be simply equated with the Messiah?

8. The chapters that form the context of this passage contain a number of other references to children (7:3; 8:1–5, 18; 9:6–7; 10:19; 11:6, 8). Do any of these passages shed light on the Immanuel prophecy?

9. Why did the LXX translators use the unambiguous word *parthenos* (“virgin”) to translate *ʿalmāh*? It is the LXX that is quoted in Matthew 1:23.

10. Can we gain any light from a study of the way Matthew handles other quotations from the OT?

Expressed briefly, the main question is can we find a solution that does full justice to the language of Isaiah and at the same time to Matthew’s application of the prophecy to Christ? Number 2 and the Hezekiah version of number 1 might seem at first sight to satisfy the former criterion but not the latter. It is doubtful, however, whether they really satisfy even the former. Neither the queen nor Isaiah’s wife was a virgin, and there is no clear OT example of the use of *ʿalmāh* for a married woman. It seems to be used consistently to designate a sexually mature but unmarried woman. The LXX translators took it to mean “virgin” (see Notes). There are considerable chronological difficulties in the way of identifying the child with Hezekiah. It seems unlikely that Isaiah’s wife would be designated “the prophetess” in 8:3 and yet be indicated so anonymously here. It seems unlikely too that mothers in general would be referred to by a singular noun with the definite article, despite Calvin’s (in loc.) somewhat uncharacteristic interpretation of “the boy” (v.16) as a general reference. Moreover, one would normally expect a sign to be more objective and specific than a general return to faith and hope among the people (cf. 8:18; 37:30; 38:7, 22; 55:13 is more general but still objective). If v.14 were not followed by vv.15–17, we could make a straightforward equation of Immanuel with the Messiah; but this context raises major problems. These verses certainly imply a close historical relationship between the child and the political situation of Isaiah’s day.

Interpretation 5 above seems the most promising. 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 the support of a complacent piety 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 b.c., only a year or two after the prophecy was given (cf. Introduction).

The “sign” of the child, therefore, constitutes an indication that the all-sovereign and all-knowing God has the situation completely in hand, and it rebukes the king’s lack of faith in him. It is true that the instrument of this devastation was to be Assyria, the very power Ahaz was courting instead of relying wholly on God. But in fact the events of 733–732 not only heralded the downfall in 722 of Samaria—the capital city of the northern kingdom that was a large part of the domain of the house of David in its earlier days—but within a generation led to the devastation of Judah itself (cf. 1:7).

The prophecy was given to the house of David and not simply to Ahaz (“you” in v.14 is plural). In the fullness of time, the messianic Child would be born of that house. He was to be a symbol of God’s salvation of his people, not simply from physical foes like Rezin and Pekah, but ultimately from sin (cf. Matt 1:21). He represents the final purpose of God in his person as well as his work. For he is, in fullness of meaning, God with us; and his mother was a virgin at the time of her conception and not simply, as in the case of the earlier royal mother, at the time of the prophecy. Matthew’s concept of fulfillment is very wide-ranging and flexible and embraces many different kinds of correspondence between an OT passage and a NT event (cf. G.W. Grogan, “The New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 18 [1967]:54–59).

It is characteristic of Isaiah to introduce a messianic theme at a somewhat general level before spelling it out in unambiguously messianic terms (cf. comments at 4:2 and 42:1). This interpretation, therefore enables us to see the passage as part of a wider pattern in the book. So, we are contending, Isaiah predicted the coming of a boy who would be a sign from God to his contemporaries and who would foreshadow Christ, in whom the terms of the prophecy—abstracted from its historical situation—would be fulfilled in fullest measure. In terms of his heavenly origin and his destiny of suffering, death, and burial, as well as his exaltation to the highest place, where he fills the whole universe (Eph 4:9–10); the ultimate fulfillment in Christ of the sign given to Ahaz embraces in principle the whole range of options presented to that king (Isa 7:11). It is noteworthy that Matthew’s next OT quotation (Matt 2:5–6) comes from a prophecy of Isaiah’s contemporary Micah. This contains mysterious hints of preexistence, makes reference to the child’s mother (Mic 5:2–3), gives Bethlehem as the place of birth, and stresses its insignificance, thus providing a possible spiritual link with the Midian-Gideon theme (cf. comment at 9:4).

**18–19** The phrase v.17 ends with—“the king of Assyria”—should have struck terror in the heart of Ahaz. History has known few races the equal of the Assyrians for sheer cruelty. An international scene dominated by this mighty and ferocious nation was a sure recipe for sleepless nights in the Fertile Crescent, and the prospect of invasion from that quarter presented the mind with an intolerable thought. Yet such was the fate Ahaz was risking by his course of action! The prophet spelled out the consequences in graphic language.

Whistling for insects (v.18) finds mention in a number of classical texts (for documentation, see Young’s note in loc.). To create a universe, God had only to speak; to gather his instruments of punishment, he had only to whistle. In the years that lay ahead, rulers in Judah would look to the Valley of the Euphrates and to Egypt for military help, but God warned Ahaz that both areas were to be viewed as sources, not of support, but of great danger for his people. Lest his reference to bees might maker Ahaz think the invasion is to be somewhat selective and limited in its effect, the prophet pictured them settling in places that were not their normal habitat (v.19). Not since the day of Midian (cf. 9:4) had an invading force been so comprehensively and graphically pictured (cf. Judg 6:1–6).

**20** Isaiah passed with ease from one vivid picture to another. The old enemy, Egypt, recedes from the picture so that the spotlight may be turned on the new and even more terrible oppressor that appeared on the northeastern political horizon. Shaving, particularly of the beard, was a way of inflicting shame on a defeated foe (cf. 2 Sam 10:4–5). The word “hired” seems peculiar till we realize that the Assyrians were well paid—in land and booty—for their trouble. It could also be a glancing allusion to the king’s own inducement to Assyria to come west, though not against him but against his northern enemies (2 Kings 16:7–8).

**21–22** In a passage otherwise dark with judgment, this picture incorporates some element of hope for the future. The judgment will devastate the land, but the survivors will find that small resources will yield adequate provisions (cf. 2 Kings 4:1–7). In this way (cf. 6:13) the purpose of God for his people will continue—if only in a remnant. The fact that “curds and honey” are spoken of in connection with a remnant and with a child who foreshadows the Messiah (see comment at 7:14–17) reinforces other evidence of a divinely purposed link between the two in the prophecies of Isaiah (see comments at 4:2 and at 42:1).

**23–25** The devastation of the country—caused by human foes who are instruments of the divine judgment—will affect the whole economy of the land and will set civilization back a stage or two. The agricultural economy, symbolized by the vine (v.23), will be replaced by the pastoral, symbolized by cattle and sheep (v.25), and even by the regime of the hunter, symbolized by the bow and arrow (v.24). O. Kaiser (in loc.) doubts that these verses are genuine utterances of Isaiah: “The inartistic threefold reference to ‘briers and thorns’ does not give the impression of being the work of the prophet, whose language is always so forceful.” This comment is subjective, for just the opposite impression was made on at least one reader! If the king carried away in his imagination chiefly a picture of a land covered with briers and thorns, then the message was getting through. Perhaps it was even intended as an emphatic allusion to the threat given in the parable of the vineyard (5:6) if this preceded it chronologically.[[2]](#footnote-2)

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1. Crossway Bibles. (2008). [*The ESV Study Bible*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esvsb?ref=BibleESV.Is&off=16433) (pp. 1234–1236). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Grogan, G. W. (1986). [Isaiah](https://ref.ly/logosres/ebc06?ref=Bible.Is7.10-25). In F. E. Gaebelein (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel* (Vol. 6, pp. 62–66). Zondervan Publishing House. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)