

AN UNEXPECTED SIGN Sunday School- December 13, 2009

Unifying Topic: **PROPHETS FORESHADOW MESSIAH'S BIRTH**

Lesson Text

I. A Sign For A King (Isaiah 7:13-17)

II. An Angel Appears To Mary (Luke 1:30-33)

III. Nothing Is Impossible (Luke 1:34-38)

The Main Thought: Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14, KJV).

Unifying Principle: People often look for proof or signs that God is involved in our world. What proof do we have in such involvement? Isaiah prophesied of the coming Messiah who would be Immanuel (Emmanuel)—God with us—and Luke centuries later told how God sent the angel to reveal good news to Mary.

Lesson Aim: To help students appreciate how Jesus' birth was prophesied in God's Word.

Life aim: To teach how God's plan for our salvation through Jesus Christ is deeply rooted in His sovereign will, and that He has the power to miraculously fulfill His will by using human beings like Mary.

7:13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; [Is it] a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?

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

7:15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.

7:16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.

7:17 The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; [even] the king of Assyria.

1:30 And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

1:32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:

1:33 And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.

1:34 Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

1:36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

1:37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

1:38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

HISTORY:

Chapter 7:1-12

From now on in the Book of Isaiah, the names Israel and Ephraim and Samaria all refer to the northern half of the land that God promised to his special people. The southern half of the land is called Judah, and includes Jerusalem, David's capital. The nation split into these two separate nations after the death of Solomon (see 1 Kings 10:1-16).

Isaiah 1-6 focus on the spiritual situation and needs of the people. Isaiah 7-12 focus on the political situation in which Judah found itself "in the days of Ahaz" (736-725 B.C.; Isaiah 7:1) and the failure of the nation's leaders to trust the Lord. Isaiah begins by bringing a message of divine judgment to both Israel and Judah. The year was 734 B.C. Ahaz king of Judah in Jerusalem was about to be attacked by an alliance of the Northern kingdom of Israel and Syria. He was frightened by the possible end of his reign and by the invading armies who killed many people or took them as captives (2 Chronicles 28:5-21).

1. The Test

¹ <http://www.cameronlaw.com/study/289.php>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sundayschool.html>

[Isaiah 7:1](#) Uzziah, the king for over 50 years, had died. Time has passed and Uzziah's grandson is now on the throne. What problem does Ahaz face? (Two kings have laid siege to his country.) Aram is Syria. Anything seem odd about the other country that is laying siege to Judah? (The other country is Israel - the ten tribes to the north. Their brothers are ready to attack them!) [Isaiah 7:2](#). How did Judah react to the news that its brothers to the north had joined Syria to attack it? (It greatly upset them. Their "hearts ... were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.") Let's see what God does next.

2. The Counsel

[Isaiah 7:3-4](#). Let's get into this story. What is God's counsel to King Ahaz? What does God call Syria and Israel? (Smoldering stubs of firewood.) Is it a compliment? Is this what you want in a fire? (You want fire, not smoke. You want an entire log, not just the ends.) What do you think God means by this? (Israel and Syrian were about to fall to the Assyrians. Ahaz should not be worried about them. He says these countries are really in decline.) Pekah, the King of Israel, is referred to as "the son of Remaliah." (The extent of God's insult is not obvious. In that culture you showed contempt by calling a person by the name of their father-if their father was not well known. Nothing is said about Remaliah in the Bible other than he was the father of Pekah. God is saying, "This is the son of an unimportant man.") No one has attacked Judah.

3. The Context

We've looked at the message. Let's look at the context for a minute. In verse 3 God tells Isaiah to meet King Ahaz on the road by the waterworks. What does this tell you about Isaiah's working relationship with the King? (If Isaiah were a trusted confidant, he would not have to try to tackle the king out on some road.) What does this tell you about King Ahaz? (He was not a good king. We can find proof for this by reading [2 Chronicles 28:1-3](#).)

On who has Ahaz been relying? (He worshiped other gods. He was so corrupt in his worship that he sacrificed his own sons!) If Ahaz is so corrupt, why is God trying to help Ahaz? (This shows that God keeps trying to work with us. No one who is lost will be able to complain that God did not do enough to save him or her.) What does the fact that Israel had allied with Syria suggest to you? (God did not intend that His people be allied with other nations to gain power. Neither of the two nations of "His people" are faithful to Him. He has decided to offer help to Ahaz - perhaps to bring him back to faithfulness, perhaps because of God's love for his ancestor, King David.) [Isaiah 7:5-6](#). What did Syria and Israel have in mind for Judah? (Tear it apart and put someone else on the throne.) Why did they want to replace King Ahaz? Because he was corrupt? (Our lesson quarterly and the commentaries I read suggest a background that I have not brought into this lesson. The suggestion is that Israel and Syria are concerned about the rising power of Assyria. They want Judah (King Ahaz) to join in an alliance with them to resist Assyrian expansion. If Ahaz will not join them, they will attack and put someone on his throne who will cooperate. King Ahaz, [2 Kings 16:7-9](#) reveals, has entered into a secret deal with the Assyrians to be their ally.)

4. The Solution

[Isaiah 7:7-8a](#) According to God, who is the power of Aram (Syria)? (A man - Rezin.) [Isaiah 7:8b-9a](#) Who is the power of Ephraim (Israel)? (The son of an unimportant man.) [Isaiah 7:9b](#) On whom should Judah and Israel have been relying? On whom should we rely? (burn this text into your memory. "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all!" The serious defect in all of the planning and maneuvering I discussed above is that no one is relying on God's power. They are all relying on other people.) [Isaiah 7:10-12](#). Compare [Matthew 4:7](#). Has Ahaz suddenly become a godly guy? He speaks the same words that Jesus spoke hundreds of years later! Is Ahaz's attitude like that of Jesus? (No! The real difference is who invites the test. Here, God invites the king to test Him. God invites us to test Him when it comes to paying tithe. See [Malachi 3:10](#).) What kind of test could the king give God? What was God offering? ([Isaiah 7:11](#) seems to be an offer of any kind of sign. Either in heaven or the depths of the sea.

Isaiah 7:13-17: A Sign For A King

From now on in the Book of Isaiah, the names Israel and Ephraim and Samaria all refer to the northern half of the land that God promised to his special people. The southern half of the land is called Judah, and includes *Jerusalem, David's capital. The nation split into these two separate nations after the death

of Solomon (see 1 Kings 10:1-16).

[Isaiah 7:13](#). Put yourself in God's place. If you offered a "test" to show you were reliable, how would you feel if the other person (who was not relying on you), said "That's okay. Some other time, maybe." (The Old Testament reveals that God wants obedience, accepts anger towards Him, but hates being ignored or considered irrelevant. Ahaz definitely has the wrong response here.) [Isaiah 7:14-15](#). There are various theories for how this prophecy was fulfilled in the days of Ahaz and Isaiah. Instead of speculating on their history, let's look at ours. Prophecies can have more than one fulfillment. What comes to your mind when you read this text? (Read [Matthew 1:22-23](#). This prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus.) When you face problems, when you are tempted to rely on other humans for help, how is the birth of Jesus a sign to stand firm in faith, a sign to rely on God? (This was the ultimate rescue of humans! We were consigned to eternal death. We had no power to save ourselves. God loved us so much that He made the ultimate sacrifice to save us. Now there is a sign for you!) Read [2 Kings 16:7-9](#) and [Isaiah 7:17-20](#). King Ahaz thought he was hiring the Assyrians to protect him. What did the Assyrians end up doing? (Destroying his country. Humiliating him.) Ahaz traded God's money, he traded God's offer of free help, for the help of another person. Is that you? Do you use the Lord's money to try to get yourself out of problems? Do you turn to others to solve your problems and your worries instead of relying on God? When Jesus came to die on our behalf, He showed that He was willing and able to solve our greatest problems. Will you put your trust in Him?

Luke 1:30-33: An Angel Appears To Mary

Recognizing Mary's fear, the angel Gabriel acts quickly to reassure her and to offer a reason why she should not be afraid. The angel reaffirms what he said in verse 28: "*Thou hast found favor with God.*" Mary has no need to think or to feel herself unworthy. Her social status and humble station in life is not an issue with God. Out of all the women in the world, God chose Mary to "*bring forth a son*" who was to be called Jesus. Jesus would be the Son of God and rule an endless kingdom. The descriptive statement of verses 32 and 33 is the angel's promise and affirmation to Mary that she will bear a son. This son will be the long-awaited Messiah who will "*save his people from their sins*" (Matthew 1:21).

Luke 1:34-38: Nothing Is Impossible

The Messianic affirmations of verses 30 through 33 leave Mary a bit puzzled and bewildered, not because she has doubts about bearing a son, but because she does not understand how it is to take place. She cannot understand how she can give birth to a son without having had sexual intercourse with a man. Consequently, Mary asks the angel how this could happen.

Mary's question seems to assume that she believed that fulfillment of the angel's promise was to take place before the consummation of her marriage to Joseph. Otherwise, if she had envisioned fulfillment of the angel's promise after consummating her marriage with Joseph, there would have been no need for her question in v34.

No one, not even Mary, could have anticipated the angel's answer to her question. The angel explained that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and through the Spirit's power she would become pregnant. Moreover, because this was to be the work of the Holy Spirit, the child to be born would be "*holy*" and would be called the Son of God.

The Apostle Paul's comments in Galatians 4:4-5 help us to understand the mystery of Luke 1:35. According to Paul, it was necessary for Jesus to be born of a woman in order that he might be like those in need of salvation. It was also necessary for Jesus to be holy in order that he might do the work of saving others from their sins.

When the angel explained to Mary God's infinite power, using Elisabeth's conception as an example, Mary accepted her chosen role. The angel led Mary to reason that if Elisabeth (who had been barren all her life and was now beyond the age of child bearing) could bear a child, then surely what the angel promised Mary would also come to pass. Mary quickly understood what many of us have come to learn: namely, that it is no secret what God can do. What He does for one, He can do for all.

The angel's reference to Elizabeth's blessed situation proved to be a source of encouragement to Mary. Mary's faith is strengthened, and as a result she believed that everything the angel told her was possible. Indeed, "with God nothing shall be impossible." It is important to note that this promise of verse 38 is written in the future tense and therefore speaks to any contemporary situation: "*with God nothing shall be impossible.*"

SUMMARY:

In these chapters we see the prophet confronting the pagan king Ahaz of Judah; the sign of the virgin's Son, Immanuel; the predicted Assyrian invasion; the birth of the prophet's own son; and the coming Child who will rule on David's throne. Each is mentioned as a sign. Not only was Ahaz wearying God, but the House of David, that is, the kings of Judah, had been wearying God. They had the pretense of following God, but they did not obey Him in their hearts. Today God can be weary of people honoring God with their lips, but having their heart far from God (Matthew 15:8-9; Isaiah 29:13). While the sign was intended to show that Judah would be safe from the threatened invasion by Syria and Israel, Isaiah does foresee that Judah will later suffer desolation from Assyria and Egypt, the very nations from which Ahaz was seeking help! Ahaz refuses a sign from the Lord. Ahaz was offered the opportunity to ask for a sign. He refuses, hypocritically refusing to test the Lord. The sign of the child Immanuel – "*A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, whose name shall be Immanuel.*" The ultimate fulfillment is Mary will be the mother of Jesus, and before the child to know right from wrong, the land will be forsaken by both kings. This prophecy was fulfilled when Assyria defeated Syria in 732 B.C. and Israel in 722 B.C.

Just as King Ahaz was frightened for a different reason, Mary was both troubled and frightened. God sends a prophet to Ahaz and sends an angel to Mary. The reception of the "Word" coming to them are so different. Acting upon such faith, Mary humbly submits herself in trusting reverence to God: "*Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word,*" May it please God that all who hear His call will follow Mary's example and accept the call.

APPLICATION:

What kinds of things go through your mind as you weigh whether you will follow God's leading or your own logic (desires, will, and so forth)? God expects us to believe Him and his power regardless of circumstances. Surrender to God is an absolute essential both for salvation and service.