

Isaiah Chapters 7-8 – John Karmelich

1. In the last lesson I wrote on Chapter 6, I said it was a weird chapter. These next two chapters are also strange, but in a different way than the last chapter. We're done with the heavenly visions of God's throne room and Isaiah teaching how he was called to be a witness for God. These chapters are a strange mixture of using the local politics of Isaiah's time mixed in with a prediction of Jesus birth to come literally seven centuries later. If that's not confusing enough, the text explains what will happen to Israel both over the next century as well as their long term future as they continue to collectively reject God's plan for them. The underlying point is God's plan for the redemption of humanity will continue despite Israel's collectively failure to do His will.
 - a) I'm saying Chapter 7 is a political message and a prediction of Jesus' birth. Now that is a combination you don't see very often in either a political message or in a bible study.
 - b) First the politics. This is not Isaiah stating his view on the political issues of that day. It's more like, "OK everyone, all of us living here in Jerusalem are in a tough situation due to local politics. Let's face it we're facing a foreign army on the verge of wiping us out as a city and a country. So are we going to trust God or not during this tough time?"
 - c) OK John, that sounds like a typical bible prophesy message. You said Isaiah also gives us a "Christmas prediction" here. How can that possibly tie in with a pretty typical message to trust God when times get tough? Thought you'd never ask. Here goes:
 - i) First, remember that the nation of Israel at that time was divided into two separate kingdoms. Isaiah was living in the Southern Kingdom, in Jerusalem the capital of that kingdom. Besides being a prophet for God, Isaiah was also a respected priest that was given the opportunity to speak to the current king of that kingdom. We'll read in this text of Isaiah warning the king as well as all of Israel what'll happen to them if they continue to reject God with their lives. The promise of Jesus birth gets mixed in this story as if to say God's game plan will continue as planned whether or not those Israelites choose to accept and be part of that plan.
 - ii) To understand how that prophesy works, we need to remember an important rule about how bible predictions work: They usually have a short term fulfillment that will validate the speaker as a prophet of God as well as a long term fulfillment that is the key message of the prophesy. The classic example is Ezekiel's prediction that one day Israel will be an independent nation again. Within a hundred years of his prediction, Israelites were allowed to return to that land after the Babylonians had relocated them out of that land. However they came home part of another empire. Ezekiel's prediction didn't come exactly true for millenniums. It wasn't until 1948, when that prediction came true and they became an independent nation again.
 - iii) My point is that God often has His short-term and long-term fulfillments of bible prophesy. We'll find that to be true as we go through this text in Isaiah as well.
2. All of that leads me back to these chapters. Hopefully you all get the idea by now that the nation of Israel will mess up badly, both in these chapters as well as through this time in history. Other than understanding that Isaiah makes a prediction of the birth of Jesus here, why should we care about any of this stuff? The application for us is that when we have to face our own tough times as the Israelites were doing here, we can realize that God's still has His salvation plan worked out for our lives as well as humanity. If we are willing to focus on that plan, He promises to bring joy to our lives no matter the circumstances we are facing at that moment.
3. That leads me to my lesson title: How God's working out His plan for salvation despite whatever we're doing with our lives at the moment. It's about realizing whether we like it or not, we live in a world He created and He can do whatever He wants with this world as it belongs to Him in the first place. We can have a joy filled live despite whatever we have to deal with simply by trusting in His plan for our lives both individually and collectively no matter what our circumstances.

4. Confused? Great, let me summarize these two chapters in a few thoughts: The lesson focuses on the Southern Israelite Kingdom during the time they were two nations. The other Israelite group was a few decades away from ending its existence. Those living in the "North" who survived will be relocated a long distance away as God has had enough of their rebellion against Him. Isaiah is telling us that the Northern Israelite Kingdom is in an alliance with the adjacent country of Syria. Those two kingdoms are threatening the Southern Kingdom where Isaiah is based. All the people living in that Southern Kingdom were scared as they were facing extinction or at the least a war with by these other two kingdoms.
- a) God's message for the Southern Kingdom was effectively, "You're really scared because of a very real threat of extinction. However, I God know your country's long-term future. By trusting Me through this threat, I God will end it, because this is "My land" and I'll decide who'll rule over it and not some other king or group of kings."
 - b) OK John, that may be fine and well for Israel back then, but what does any of this have to do with whatever I'm facing? The point for you and me is when we're really scared about something, realizing that God's still in charge, and He cares for our lives, that He'll guide us through whatever we're facing, if we're willing to let Him be in charge of our lives. He wants to use our lives for His glory. When we're really scared about something, know we can tell God about it, who effectively tells us, "I know the future, both short term and long term. Yes I am well aware of what you're facing. Trust Me through this, and allow Me to guide your live for My glory." If we're willing to do that, whatever we face is "worth it" as now we're using the most valuable thing we own, our time for God's glory.
 - c) That leads me back to these two chapters. As we read about the problems those Israelites faced back then, realize that God's speaking to us as well as to them. While our problems may be a lot different from theirs, just as God's saying, "I know all things and I'm working out My salvation plan despite the politics (or problems) of the moment. Therefore, I (God) am asking you to trust Me through this situation as I work out the situation for My glory."
 - d) On that positive thought, it's time to start the text itself.
5. Chapter 7, Verse 1: Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it. ² And it was told to the house of David, saying, "Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim." So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.
- a) I admit, the first few times I read this passage, I was confused. Here are a bunch of names of people and places I don't care about and I don't understand how any of this is relevant to my life. Therefore, allow me to "break this down" and explain what's going on here:
 - b) Let's start with Ahaz. First of all, there's more than one Ahaz in the bible, which makes it even more confusing. This Ahaz was a bad king. He ruled over the Southern Kingdom.
 - i) To say he was the son of Jotham , son of Uzziah, is like giving us his full name. It also distinguishes him from another bad king named Ahaz who ruled at one time over the Northern Kingdom.
 - ii) You can read more about this Ahaz in "Kings" and "Chronicles", but let's just keep it simple and realize this was not a king who trusted in God.
 - iii) What's relevant for this passage is that Ahaz as well as those living under him in his kingdom were scared, because two other kings, (the northern Israel kingdom as well as the neighboring country of Syria) formed a confederacy and wanted to attack and take over the Southern Kingdom. Ahaz truly feared for his life here.
 - iv) The big threat to all these people was a large empire called the Assyrians that was growing. The two countries next to the Southern Kingdom wanted to form their own little group to collectively stand up to the Assyrians. Ahaz saw these two as a threat his kingship and his rule over the Southern Kingdom. For those living there it meant fighting in a war and there was a real fear of death here.

- c) Like I said in the introduction, these two chapters explain a lot of the local politics that did occur at that time. Isaiah uses these threats to remind the king who's really in charge here and who the Israelites should really focus upon.
 - i) The point for you and me is when we face our own threats or problems what helps for us is to first realize there is a God who knows all things. He knows what we're facing and wants to guide us through that situation for His glory if we let Him. In effect, that's the underlying message of this text. Speaking of which, let's get back to the story, and read of Isaiah's advice to that king of how to handle the problem he's currently facing in his life. Time to get back to who the "players" are we read about in this open text, so we can understand the story itself:
6. Verse 3: Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. ⁴ Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood--because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶ "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it." ⁷ Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "It will not take place, it will not happen,
- a) If the names and places in the first two verses didn't confuse you, all of these will. Realize I won't make you try to pronounce these names and places. All I ask is to follow along as I explain the background of this story to show you how this ancient history is relevant to us today.
 - b) Think of Verses 1 and 2 as the political background to what the main characters here have to deal with. Think of it as their "Mission Impossible" problems they're facing. Of course we don't have a prophet telling us what to do, but we do have God's word as a guide as to how we should face our own issues, which is why we're studying this passage here.
 - c) All of that leads to Verse 3. The first thing God tells Isaiah is to take his son and go meet the king of the Southern Kingdom as God knows the king will publicly appear at this spot at this given time. So why does God tell Isaiah to take his son with him? To understand, we have to know what his son's name means: Isaiah's son is named "Shear-Jashub". Try saying that a few times out loud. His name means "a remnant shall return". In effect, the son of Isaiah was born with a prophetic name. The idea is this boy's name was a witness to this kingdom that despite the danger they faced, God will bring a remnant of Israelites back into this land one day. Since most of us know that historical fact by now, let's return to the story itself.
 - d) Besides the fact that Isaiah was told to take his son along to deliver a message to the king of the Southern Kingdom, the actual words of that message are Verses 4 to 7. In summary Isaiah is telling the king, don't worry about what those other two kings are planning. I'm in charge of this land, not them. As you (Ahaz) realize, I (God) promised that king David's descendants would rule over this land, not foreign kings. While those two kings are very much threatening you right now, I God, see them as a "pile of smoke, but no fire". This is Isaiah's colorful way of saying those two kings aren't a threat to you, even though they are threatening to take over your kingdom at this moment.
 - e) Before I explain what happens next, let's pause to recall why we should care about any of this stuff. The underlying issue isn't the local politics. The underlying issue is that God's in charge. Realize that the king was a "bad dude" who didn't care for God and the story of his life is that he turned to other false gods despite being king of the Israelites. There's an old joke about this Ahaz guy, that effectively says the only good thing about him is he had a son named Hezekiah who was a great king. The point is when we deal with our issues, realize that God's telling us that He's still in charge and wants to guide us for His glory in spite of whatever we have to face in our lives at this time.

- f) That leads me back to these verses in Chapter 7. Isaiah is warning King Ahaz about the 2 kings north of him that want to attack and take over that Southern Kingdom. Isaiah states in effect that God's telling this king that their plan won't be successful. The reason it won't be successful isn't because Ahaz is a good king. It won't be successful as God did promise that only a descendant of King David would be king over the Southern Kingdom. Realize that's still true! The last Israelite king over Jerusalem and the Southern Israelite Kingdom was a descendant of David and there won't be another one until Jesus returns to be a king over that country. Therefore this invasion will fail not because Ahaz's is doing God's will, but because God's keeping His promise to King David about his descendants ruling there.
 - g) I could bore you with more historical trivia about this invasion, but let's just say Isaiah is correct about how he describes this history, let alone the results. Therefore, since we have a lot of text left to go, let's move on.
7. Verse 8: for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.
- a) Remember that Isaiah is still speaking for God here. Yes we have some more names you'll probably forget in a short time. Then we have the statement that "Ephraim", which is part of the Northern Kingdom will be dead in 65 years. Let me explain a few of these details:
 - i) First, "Aram" is another name for Syria. This is Isaiah saying there is an area north of the Northern Kingdom of Israel called "Aram" back then. The lead city of Aram is Damascus. The leader of that city is named Rezin. The reason Isaiah is reciting these facts as if to say God knows all things and He knows who's trying to lead an invasion against the Southern Kingdom. However that invasion will fail so there's no reason for the Southern Kingdom to worry about it.
 - ii) Then Isaiah says "matter of fact", speaking of failure, the Northern Israel Kingdom will no longer exist in 65 years. What Isaiah didn't know at the time he wrote this is that the Northern Kingdom would be conquered in about 20 years time. The 65-year reference is to the time when the Assyrian Empire who did that conquering is going to relocate the surviving Israelites by spreading them out all over the place. The philosophy of the Assyrians was in order to prevent rebellion they'd separate families and groups so they would not unite to rebel against them in the future.
 - iii) I give you all that historical background as a reminder of how prophesy has more than one fulfillment. The initial fulfillment in Isaiah's lifetime is when the Assyria Empire conquered the Northern Kingdom. The literal fulfillment came after Isaiah lived and died when the Israelites living in that kingdom got scattered all around that empire. My point is to help us see bible prophesy occurs in patterns that can occur in more than one instance.
 - iv) Speaking of predicting the future, that leads me well into Verse 9:
8. Verse 9: The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.' "
- a) Let me remind all of us that the main purpose of studying the bible is not to learn history. I only explain this history enough here so we can understand what it is Isaiah's saying as he preaches to the king of the Southern Kingdom. To paraphrase Isaiah, of the 10 tribes of Israel that made up the Northern Kingdom the dominant tribe was called Ephraim. That became a nicknamed for that whole Northern Kingdom as again, they were the dominant tribe. The capital of the "North" was the city of Samaria. The king of the "North" is a son of someone Ahaz knew, the "Son of Remaliah". Isaiah doesn't give the king's name. It is Isaiah's colorful way of saying that northern kingdom is so dead, I won't even state a name of the current king.
 - b) Like I just said, I only want to give enough history to explain the story. The point here is that Isaiah is trying to warn King Ahaz (the Southern King) that unless he starts trusting in God, he too will be as dead as that unnamed king of the Northern Kingdom.

- c) OK, time to bring that statement back to you and me. Let's assume we already believe in Jesus as God and "all that". What does this warning to Ahaz have to do with us? What in effect is God warning us through this prediction? Remember that to believe that Jesus is God and then not doing anything about it is a wasted life. Ahaz was an Israelite king but he never honored the God that ruled over that people. God's telling Ahaz, "Whether you like it or not, you're leading My people and that means you have to listen to Me to guide your life". God's effectively telling us the same thing: I want to guide your life so you can make a difference for Me. Be willing to study My word as to learn how I want you to live as a witness for Me. That's living the Christian life in a few thoughts.
 - d) In the meantime, the problem with King Ahaz is that he just wanted to go live his life the way he wanted to and not put his trust in God. Therefore, God offers Ahaz a "deal" over the next few verses. Speaking of which:
9. Verse 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."
- a) I have to admit, I'd be tempted by this question. If God offered me a "sign", I'd be tempted to ask for riches or fame or something to benefit my own life. At the least, I might ask for something simple just to prove God was real. The reason we don't get these types of signs is that God wants us to walk by faith and study His word as our proof that He's real. I do find that for new Christians, God will often allow cute coincidences to occur so that he or she will grow in their faith. As we mature as believers, such "coincidences" occur less and less as God wants us to trust Him and not "signs".
 - b) I also admit, that Ahaz sounds religious as he tells Isaiah "I won't ask for a sign." Realize that way Ahaz lived out his life was proof he didn't trust in God. His response is more of "I don't want to trust in God, so I won't ask for a sign from Him."
 - c) That leads to Isaiah's response which surprisingly is a Christmas message:
10. Verse 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."
- a) First, notice that Isaiah is no longer just speaking to the king. He's addressing these verses to the "House of David". Realize that's just an alternative title for the Southern Kingdom. From here we'll get a mixture of predictions about the immediate future of that time along with a prediction about Jesus birth.
 - b) With that said, let's focus on the "fun stuff": Understanding how these passages become a famous prediction of Jesus birth that's been quoted for millenniums by Christians. Again, realize that bible predictions usually have short and long term fulfillments. Since I assume most of us reading this are Christians, let's focus on the "fun stuff".
 - i) First, realize that the Hebrew word translated "virgin" here, can also mean "young maiden". Religious Jews will argue that all Isaiah is saying is that this sign is just about a young woman giving birth. Personally, that's not much of a sign as you'll find young women giving birth to children on a daily basis. What's interesting is about 2-3 centuries before Jesus was born, the leading Jewish scholars of that day made a Greek translation of the entire Old Testament. When they translated this into Greek, they used a word that definitely means virgin. My point is scholars of about "200BC" (that's when it was completed) believed Isaiah was making a future prediction about a virgin who was going to give birth as a sign of the miraculous.

- c) OK, that explains the famous long-term prediction that Isaiah is saying here. Remember that Jesus wasn't "born" until about 700 years after Isaiah's day. Wasn't there also a short term fulfillment of these verses? Yes there was. That's why the text is a strange mixture of things that occurred in Isaiah's near future with things that occurred centuries later.
 - i) The text says that when this baby is born, he'll be called Immanuel. That word is translated "God be with us". Yes it's a title for Jesus, but I assume most of us know that by now. There's no reference in this book to any baby given that name. What many scholars think is Ahaz had a good son born soon after this prediction. That is the short term fulfillment. Despite the fact that Ahaz was a bad king who never worshipped God, his son was Hezekiah, a well respected good king. Even though Hezekiah was never known as Immanuel, scholars think the short-term fulfillment is a reference to him. To be honest, the commentaries are full of strange views on a short-term fulfillment of this prediction and we don't know for sure.
 - d) Since we can't talk about what we don't know, let's focus on what the text says. The verses say that before this boy is old enough to make good decisions, both the land of Syria and the Northern Kingdom will no longer exist. That's why I like the "Hezekiah theory" for an immediate fulfillment of these verses. The reason I'm still convinced that Jesus is the long term fulfillment is based on how the Jewish scholars translated the word "virgin" in Greek as well as the New Testaments commentary on that prediction.
 - e) That leads us back to the text. Isaiah is warning the Southern Kingdom, that the Assyrian Empire will be a much bigger threat than the Northern Kingdom and Syria as that empire will conquer both of them and be a real threat to the Southern Kingdom. Yes the Southern Kingdom will survive the growth of the Assyrians, but we'll get to that in future chapters. In the meantime, Isaiah is saying in effect, "You want to worry about a threat, forget about those two adjacent kingdom's, a real big threat is coming!" Like I said in the introduction, these chapters are a strange mixture of local politics and a prediction of Jesus birth!
 - f) Remember this whole speech by Isaiah is a response to Ahaz saying he won't ask God for a sign. Isaiah's response is, "Too bad king, I'm giving you a sign anyway!" The short-term sign is about the change in the political landscape of the area to come soon. The long-term sign is the birth of Jesus who will one day rule over all who trust in Him as God.
 - g) While I'm done explaining "those signs", Isaiah himself is just getting warmed up!
11. Verse 18: In that day the LORD will whistle for flies from the distant streams of Egypt and for bees from the land of Assyria. ¹⁹ They will all come and settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks, on all the thornbushes and at all the water holes. ²⁰ In that day the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the River--the king of Assyria--to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also. ²¹ In that day, a man will keep alive a young cow and two goats. ²² And because of the abundance of the milk they give, he will have curds to eat. All who remain in the land will eat curds and honey. ²³ In that day, in every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels, there will be only briars and thorns. ²⁴ Men will go there with bow and arrow, for the land will be covered with briars and thorns. ²⁵ As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briars and thorns; they will become places where cattle are turned loose and where sheep run.
- a) Let me make this simple. Isaiah's telling Ahaz effectively, "You worried about the future? Let me (God) tell you what's going to happen in the future to your country! The two great powers that exist near you at this time will use your land as a battleground! That would be the Egyptians to the south and the Assyrians to the north. Isaiah uses cute nicknames for each of those two empires. Egypt is a land where flies are everywhere. Assyria is also known for bees as they are plentiful in that land. My point is simply that Isaiah uses these colorful nicknames to describe these empires. It's as if God's saying it's no big deal for Me to have these guys come to Israel to fight each others. I can have them come here as easily as I can have a fly or a bee travel in this direction.

- b) If you haven't figured it out by now, Isaiah's the kind of person who likes to use colorful word pictures to make his point. He's also using language that Ahaz would understand what it is Isaiah is talking about. While we have to learn what these terms mean, for Ahaz he didn't need an explanation or an encyclopedia to get the message.
 - i) For example, the word "River" in Verse 20 refers to the Euphrates River, which is where the capital of the Assyrian Empire was located.
 - ii) The references to "settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks" is just a colorful way of saying, "they will be everywhere". The point is these two armies will use the Southern Kingdom as a staging ground for a war and soldiers will be everywhere in the not too distant future.
 - iii) That's why the later verses in this text describe vineyards as being worthless. If an army stomped all through a large field, it'd be worthless. That's why the text says that the vineyard won't have much value. The text also describes animals roaming around those fields. Traveling armies need food and they travel with animals as to have food. That's why the text describes animals roaming where fields existed.
 - iv) The text also describes those living in the Southern Kingdom at that time as living upon curds (milk based products like butter or cottage cheese) as well as honey.
 - a) All that's saying is because the fields will be destroyed, people will live off what those animals and insects can produce.
- c) OK John, we get the word pictures by now. Why is Isaiah announcing all of this? To start it is to tell King Ahaz what the future will bring. Remember he's worried about an alliance between the Northern Israelite Kingdom and Syria. What God's saying through Isaiah is in effect, "Don't worry about them. You've got much bigger problems coming your way!"
 - i) That's not a very comforting message to us. So is God saying to us, "Don't worry about your problems, because bigger ones are coming?" What God's saying is we don't know what our future holds! Therefore trust in Me as I'll guide you through whatever does happen in the future. What God does ask of us is that we make the best decisions we can given the information at hand, and assuming our decisions do not violate any biblical principals for our lives. That's the underlying message given to King Ahaz here: Bad stuff happens and if you trust Me, I'll guide you to deal with things that will occur.
 - ii) In the meantime, I'm ready to move on to Chapter 8. As my veteran readers know, the chapter breaks were not added until millenniums after this was written.

12. Chapter 8, Verse 1: The LORD said to me, "Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.² And I will call in Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberekiah as reliable witnesses for me."
- a) To understand this, remember that there was no stationary store in that day. For Isaiah to go get a large scroll and a pen, he had to go to the local market or find people who traded in those items. Remember that pens in those days were the kind you had to dip in ink to write a message. Realize that Isaiah was an ordained Jewish priest. Part of their job was to copy bible scrolls for others to read. My point is when God told Isaiah to go get a large scroll and a pen, it's something he knew how to acquire.
 - b) The first thing God tells Isaiah to write is the name, "Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz". I'm glad I have "cut and paste" as spelling that name is almost as bad as having to pronounce it. To save you the trouble of looking it up, that name means, "Speed to the spoil" or "Hasten to the booty". Whether or not Isaiah liked it, what God is telling Isaiah is that he's going to have another son (remember Isaiah had another strangely named son that he took with him to speak to King Ahaz). Imagine if you were a young man and God said to you, "I've got good news and bad news: The good news is you'll have a new son soon. However, you'll have to name him, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz! Now deal with that news, while I God, get back to the rest of my message I want to give you!"

- c) Why God gives Isaiah's son that strange name is coming up in Verse 3. The next thing God tells Isaiah is that what he's to preach next will also be "echoed" by two other people. There's an Old Testament law that says in effect, in order for a thing to be true there has to be at least two witnesses in agreement in order for something to be accepted as true. That is why God's telling Isaiah I'm also going to have these two other men be a witness for Me to "echo" what I'm about to tell you.
 - d) The reason God does this is He's about to tell Isaiah what's going to happen quickly. That is why God tells Isaiah to give his son a prophetic name and other men will also state this message about what's about to happen soon. All of that background leads to Verse 3:
13. Verse 3: Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. ⁴ Before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria."
- a) To appreciate Verse 3, you have to think like a young married man. Isaiah was thinking, well if God said I'm going to have a son, it's time to call my wife and get at it, so I'll have this new son. That's a more descriptive way of describing Verse 3.
 - b) All of that leads back to the odd name of that son. Verse 4 is saying that before the boy is old enough to say "mommy or daddy", the Assyrian Empire will take away whatever was owned by the countries of Syria or the Northern Kingdom. Remember that the boy's name means, "Hurry to the spoil". All I'm saying is the boy is named prophetically to announce that the two small kingdoms north of where Ahaz ruled, are about to be destroyed by the much larger Assyrian Empire. Remember that Ahaz feared for his life as those two kings threaten to destroy Ahaz's kingdom.
 - c) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. I can really use one of your "why should I care" speeches right now. Yes we understand that it teaches us how God knows all things in advance and can tell us history before it occurs. As you love to say, "we got kids sick at home and bills to pay", so why should I think about this stuff? The point is when we're busy worried about our problems, God's reminds us He not only knows all things but He wants to lead us through whatever we're dealing with. Just as God wanted to guide King Ahaz through his problems of the moment, so God wants to guide us as we face whatever we're dealing with right now. God can be trusted to help us as we have to face whatever it is we have to face at the moment.
 - d) With that positive thought flowing through us, it's time to get back to ancient history:
14. Verse 5: The LORD spoke to me again: ⁶ "Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, ⁷ therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River-- the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks ⁸ and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!"
- a) Well, we've got more strange names to explain here again, let alone another reference to the word Immanuel, so it's time for me to explain all of this so we understand how we can apply it to our lives.
 - b) First, we need to understand who Isaiah is talking about. Remember that he's still talking to King Ahaz about the threat of the Northern Israel kingdom trying to conquer him. God is describing small rivers (or streams) that flow in that Northern Kingdom. Isaiah's saying in his own colorful way, "You know those small streams of water that flow up north, well there happens to be a large river that'll overtake them. That "mighty river" is the Assyrian Empire that will not only destroy Syria and Northern Israel, it'll also be a major problem that the Southern Kingdom will face. That's why we read about Egypt in the last chapter. Egypt is just south of Israel and they go into Israel to face that threat themselves.
 - c) In summary Isaiah's still saying, you think things are bad now, you ain't seen nothing yet!

- d) Then of all things God refers to the Southern Kingdom as Immanuel. Again that word means "God is with us!" So is Isaiah saying that the sign of the "virgin birth" the same as King Ahaz? No. What Isaiah's saying is God loves Israel as His own people. He desires a relationship with those people so He calls that land, "God be with us" as they should trust in Him for guidance. Isaiah said a sign for their future is someone will come who will pay for our sins, (the birth of Jesus). At the same time, "Immanuel" is also a title for those of us who are trusting in God for guidance. That's why we read Isaiah as referring to all of the land of Israel as "God be with us" (i.e., Immanuel!).
- e) Confused? Let me make this simple. God cares for all of us willing to trust in Him in order to guide our lives for His glory. Yes the word Immanuel refers to Jesus Himself as He has to pay the price for all our sins so we can have that relationship with God the Father in the first place. Immanuel also refers to those willing to trust in God, which is why Isaiah calls all of Israel "Immanuel" in this verse. Hope that helps. If not, we'll try Verse 9:
15. Verse 9: Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! ¹⁰ Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.
- a) I have to admit, I do love Isaiah's colorful way of expressing issues. To paraphrase, "Hey all you nations, you make your plans to conquer My people, but realize that I (God) am in charge of this land and not you." Personally, I'd hate to be in the shoes of all those people who call for the destruction of the nation of Israel today when they face God's judgment.
- b) So does that mean modern Israel shouldn't defend itself? Of course not. There's a joke in Israel that goes, "If the Israelites ever lay down their arms, Israel as a country would cease to exist the next day. If the Arab's lay down their arms, the Israelites wouldn't conquer, as they were too busy celebrating the end of their struggle against foreign lands." My point is we don't know what God has planned for the future. He may allow the land of Israel to be conquered again before Jesus returns.
- c) My point is we always have to make the best decisions we can, assuming God's not going to do anything miraculous and allow Him to work in our lives over and above whatever we can do to make our situation better.
16. Verse 11: The LORD spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said: ¹² "Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.
- a) Imagine God speaking to us audibly or overwhelming you with the idea of not following along with the crowd. Remember the big fear of those living in the Southern Kingdom is of an invasion of the Northern Kingdom along with Syria. God wants to make it obvious to Isaiah and then to the Israelites living there at that time that the invasion will fail.
- b) OK John, we get that by now, as you've been beating it over our head the entire lesson. We know that God doesn't give us that same sort of audible message when facing any of our own issues, so why should I care about this? The answer is when we read our bible, it reminds us that no matter what we're facing, God's in charge and He's working out His own plan for humanity His way and on His timing. What God asks us to do is trust Him as we make the best decisions possible given our situation at hand.
17. Verse 13: The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, ¹⁴ and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. ¹⁵ Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured."
- a) Meanwhile while I'm lecturing you to trust God, Isaiah's doing the same thing to Israelites living in the Southern Kingdom at that time. Notice Isaiah does not say, "Trust in God as then everything will go easy in life and you won't have any problems!" Instead Isaiah is focusing on the fact we all have to fear God, as in fearing the judgment day we must face.

- b) While on the topic of judgment, let me add a quick thought here and then I'll get back to the text. I hold the view that if you trust in Jesus, there is no "purgatory", but that we get to spend eternity in heaven if we believe Jesus died for every sin we've ever committed or ever will commit. I do believe there is a judgment for believers, but it's about our eternal rewards based on whether or not we were faithful to use whatever gifts God's given us to make a difference for Him and whether or not we lived by His commandments.
 - c) Believe it or not, Isaiah's making a very similar type of argument. Isaiah's saying many of the people living in Israel will be "broken by a stone" that falls upon them. One can say it refers to the knowledge of Jesus. One can also say it refers to those who do put their trust in God despite all the tragedies that are about to occur in the near future. To say all of this another way, "Life is not going to get magically better if you trust in God. In fact, life will get worse as the majority of Israelites won't trust in Me and I'm going to eventually wipe out both Israelite kingdoms for a lack of trust in Me. However, trusting in Me will spare you on judgment day if you're willing to live by My commandments even during all this "tough stuff" that's about to occur in your lives."
 - d) That's the same type of message God has for you and me. He's not saying life will now go very well for us by trusting in Jesus. In fact, multitudes will die over the millenniums just because they're trusting in Jesus. God promises to guide us through the rest of our lives if we're willing to trust in Him and promise us eternal rewards if we're faithful to whatever He's called us to do. That's the message Isaiah's preaching here and the same message He has for you and me today. OK, on that tough note, back to the text:
18. Verse 16: Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples.
- a) Isaiah is saying "What I just said is a done deal, deal with it and choose whether or not to be one of God's disciples and prove it by living as God calls us to live." Remember that a great danger to any Christian is to give God "lip service" or live as He desires on Sunday and then ignore Him the rest of the week. Isaiah's saying to those of us willing to trust in God no matter what the situation He promises not only eternal life, but that through what is written in His word, it'll lead us to make the best decisions possible so we know we can live as He desires we live so we can make a difference for Him.
 - b) That reminds me of the old joke that the relatively easy thing to do is be a martyr for Jesus but the hard thing is to continue living for Him daily until He calls us home. That's what Isaiah is effectively saying here to us when he says to seal up the law among my disciples as we continue to trust that God's guiding our lives when we do trust in Him.
 - c) I admit this is a tough stretch of verses to get through, but we only have six more to go:
19. Verse 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.
- a) Time for one more of my paraphrases, "Hey God, although most people around me will reject the idea of trusting in You as to how to live our lives, I (Isaiah or fill in your name) will trust in You and live as You desire I live no matter how bad the situation gets around me at this time!"
 - b) I'm reminded of an old story that supposedly took place in the Old Soviet Empire during a time when Christianity was effectively illegal. The story goes that some people gathered in a church when a bunch of soldiers came through the front door carrying guns. Those in the room thought, "we're busted and we're going to die". Most of the worshippers in that room were willing to be martyrs. Some were ready to lie and say they were brought there against their will. The soldiers then asked, "I hear you're worshipping Jesus here, can we join you?" Then everybody exhaled.
 - i) The point of the story is despite the danger of being a true follower of God, some are willing to take that risk in exchange for eternal rewards. That's what Isaiah is saying about himself and those still willing to trust God despite the danger.

- c) That's also the point Isaiah is making here. God knows who are truly His. Those willing to put their time and resources where their mouth is are those who know for sure they're true worshipers of God. In the meantime, it's time to finish the chapter:
20. Verse 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.
- a) If you recall when I started this lesson, I said it was strange. Now that we're at the end of this two-chapter section, I wanted to warn you, it doesn't let up. What's happening here is that instead of asking God for help, people were turning to mediums and spiritists to find out what's going to happen to them.
- b) Think of it this way, whenever you meet people that don't trust in God, it's amazing what they'll actually do when they're worried about the future. The bible term used here refers to people who "consult the dead" for help. Whether or not such people actually have any real power or if they are just con artists, the point is many people will turn to other things when they don't have the answers they're looking for.
- i) I recall after my father died a friend of my mother called her to tell her that he had an ability to contact the dead. I warned my mother about how the bible prohibits that type of action and thankfully she never proceeded. (See Leviticus 19:31 as an example.) My point is such people do exist today as well as back then.
- c) All of that leads back to the text. Isaiah is warning against turning to "false gods" and not to trust in the living God when things get tough. Isaiah gets "colorful" one more time here as he says effectively "those who practice those things will only seek darkness and gloom as there's no eternal hope for one who spends their live turning from God.
- d) It may help to remember what Isaiah is doing in this text: His main interest is seeing his fellow Israelites turn to God to trust them with a difficult future. So is God saying if we just turn to Him, these horrible things wouldn't have happened! Who knows? We've got enough to worry about dealing with the "what is" as opposed to the "what could be". As I stated earlier, multitudes of Christians have been martyred for their faith and multitudes more have had it rough just for believing Jesus is God and died for all their sins. My point is God never says life will be easy if we believe in Him. What God says is if we trust Him, not only will we have eternal life, but He promises to guide our lives here and now as to use it for His glory.
- i) OK, suppose that's true. What do I do next? For starters, make a daily habit to go through His word. Get involved in a bible study group and spend time with other believers. As I love to ask, "What is it you can't stand not doing?" Then find a way to do what you enjoy doing for God's glory. Yes we still have to deal with life and all of that. However, time is the most valuable thing we own and God desires that we use some of it to make a difference for Him.
- e) The reason I'm ending with that little lecture, as in effect that's what Isaiah is doing here. He wants his fellow Israelites to trust God through the crisis of the moment, believe He'll lead them through their lives, and help them deal with the danger they face. That's also a promise God makes to you and me. The reason Isaiah is preaching against "spiritualists" in these verses is that it's an example of things people turn to when they refuse to trust in the God of the Bible to guide their lives. Isaiah also gives a wonderful promise of a great future as he talked about the coming Messiah in this text. In a similar way, we ourselves can look forward not only to heaven, but to a day when Jesus will rule over the world as we know it. In short, it's all worth it problems and all.

21. With that said, time to close in prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You that You have separated us so that we can use our lives to make a difference for You. Help us not to waste our time so we can and do use some of it for your glory. Help us to trust in You through our own difficult times and realize there is a wonderful hope for our eternal future no matter what the outcome of what we have to deal with at this moment. Be with us as we trust in You and be a living witness for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.