

O Come, O Come, Immanuel! - Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23

I. Introduction: The Players

- A. Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, the Northern territory in Palestine (a.k.a., “Samaria”, “Ephraim”)
- B. Rezin, king of Syria (a.k.a., “Damascus”)
- C. Ahaz, king of Judah, the Southern territory in Palestine
- D. The Assyrian Empire, led by Tiglath-Pileser III
- E. Isaiah (“Yahweh is salvation”), the prophet of God newly commissioned in Chapter 6

II. The Prologue – 734 B.C.

- A. As the Assyrian Empire expands westward, Syria and Israel seek to compel Judah to form an anti-Assyria alliance.
- B. Ahaz, king of Judah refuses, and endures a series of attacks by Syria and Israel (2 Kings 15:29-37; 2 Chron 28:1-19).
- C. Ahaz hears of yet another impending invasion, and faces a crucial decision...Whom will he trust?!?

III. Isaiah 7:1-14

In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. 2 When the house of David was told, “Syria is in league with Ephraim,” the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

3 And the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field. 4 And say to him, ‘Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. 5 Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, 6 “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,” 7 thus says the Lord GOD:

*“It shall not stand,
and it shall not come to pass.
8 For the head of Syria is Damascus,
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.
And within sixty-five years
Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.
9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.
If you are not firm in faith,
you will not be firm at all.”*

10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, 11 “Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” 12 But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.” 13 And he said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. 15 He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the boy knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted. 17 The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—the king of Assyria.”

1. What divine promises did Ahaz seem to forget when he hears of the Israel-Syria coalition against him? What attitude does Isaiah say should he display in this situation (v. 4)? Should we?
2. How did Isaiah’s son drive home Isaiah’s message? What should Ahaz have realized at this point?
3. What does verse 10 communicate about the role of a prophet? See also Gal 3:8.

4. Why did Ahaz respond the way he did? What was he trying to do?
5. For what purpose did God offer a sign to Ahaz? What signs do we enjoy for the same purpose? What was the sign for Ahaz?

“It seems to be the only word in the language which unequivocally signifies an unmarried woman. No other available Hebrew word would clearly indicate that the one whom it designates was unmarried. Consequently, no other word would have been suitable for fulfilling the requirements of the sign such as the context demanded.”

-E.J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, Vol 1., 288. (on the use of the Hebrew word for “virgin”)

6. What is the significance of the sign for Ahaz’s immediate conflict? How is Is 7:14 both a prophecy for Ahaz and for all Christians? What does God being “with” someone entail?
7. Despite God’s sign, what was Ahaz’s choice? What happened? See 2 Kings 16:5-9

IV. The Epilogue

- 732 BC – Two years later (after Ahaz event), Syria was plundered by Assyria and Israel and Judah were made vassal states.
- 722 BC – Israel’s king Hoshea rebels and is destroyed by Assyria.
- 612 BC – Babylon will destroy Assyria and soon begins deporting Jews from Judah into exile.

“In that very hour, in which Isaiah was standing before Ahaz, the fate of Jerusalem was decided for more than two thousand years.” – Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (1866)

V. The Ultimate Fulfillment!

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. 20 But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

*23 “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).*

24 When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, 25 but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus. (Matt 1:28-25)

1. What are some of the similarities between the choices faced by Ahaz and Joseph? What happened to aid Joseph’s decision?
2. What can we learn about God’s purposes in the Old Testament from the prophetic fulfillment in Matthew?