

Rightly Interpreting Isaiah 7:14

Three Key Facts to Remember:

1. The birth *must* be a sign. It must be miraculous. The pregnancy of a young woman is not remarkable in itself. If the young woman were married, the pregnancy is even less remarkable. However, if the woman is definitely unmarried and a morally pure, good, and virgin woman—now that’s a sign!
2. The mother of the child is one who is both unmarried and a good woman. We know she is unmarried because the word *almah* NEVER refers to a married woman. Other possible terms could cause confusion because of their broad use. In addition we know she was good, because there is nothing significant about a conception and birth out of wedlock.
3. The very presence of the child brings God to His people. The name Immanuel is *only* used of God. No mere human being can rightly bear that name.

The significance of Ahaz’s sign is simply this: An unmarried, morally pure woman would conceive but not by natural means. She will carry the child to term, and when born he will bear the name Immanuel, meaning “God with us.” In this miraculously conceived child, God will personally visit His people. The transcendent God will come to be physically and directly “with us.”

B i b l e S t u d y

Great Prophecies of the Bible

Isaiah Promises the Coming of the King—Isaiah 7



Introduction: One of the most intriguing and controversial of the Old Testament prophecies is couched in the contemporary crisis of Isaiah 7. Believing scholarship recognizes Ahaz's sign as nothing less than a specific and sublime prophecy of the virgin birth. Careful examination of the prophecy and its context confirms the far-future nature of Isaiah's prediction.

I. The Background to the Prophecy

A. The Political Condition

1. After the death of Solomon, Rehoboam (Solomon's son and rightful heir to the Davidic throne) began his reign. Taking bad advice from his contemporaries, Rehoboam determined to add to his people's burden by levying additional taxes. The 10 northern tribes ("Israel") revolted and named Jeroboam (a man with no legitimate claim to the Davidic throne) to be their king.
2. By the time of the Isaiah 7 prophecy, both kingdoms had experienced changes in their monarchies—Judah was ruled by Ahaz, a legitimate claimant to the Davidic throne, and Israel was ruled by Pekah, a usurper with no legitimate Davidic claim.
3. Both Kings and Chronicles record that hostilities between Israel and Judah had resulted in several military campaigns. However, the more immediate threat to Israel came from the rising Assyrian empire under its ruthless leader, Tiglath-Pileser II. To counter this rising threat, Israel sought and found an unlikely confederate in Syria.
4. In order to further counter the Assyrian threat, Israel and Syria determined to depose Ahaz and replace him with a monarch (probably Syrian) who could be depended upon to attack the Assyrians should the need arise.
5. Facing the threat of losing his kingdom, Ahaz established a confederacy with Assyria and Tiglath-Pileser II himself (II Kings 16:7).

B. The Prophetic Rebuke (Isaiah 7:3-9)

1. Ahaz's confederacy with Assyria was the subject of Isaiah's rebuke. It was unnecessary for the rightful claimant to David's throne to fear overthrow. God had promised a continuing line of kings from David (Davidic Covenant).
2. Isaiah assured Ahaz that the era of Syria and Israel's military might had long since passed—they were merely smoking coals in which the fire was almost extinguished (4).
3. Isaiah told Ahaz the plot to overthrow him would not succeed, that Rezin would continue to reign in Syria and that Israel would be "broken" within 65 years (8, 9).
4. The key to Ahaz's security would lie in his believing in the promises of God, both the Davidic Covenant and Isaiah's word (9).

II. The Promise of the Sign (7:10-17)

A. The Lord offered Ahaz a sign to strengthen his required belief (10).

1. The sign could be of any nature desired by Ahaz—something personal that would confirm the promise of God (11).
2. Ahaz, in false piety, rejected the sign—not because he feared the Lord, but because he feared the sign would come to pass and he would be forced to break his Assyrian alliance. Ahaz's faithless response was weariness to both his people and to God (12, 13).

B. The Lord gave Ahaz a sign

1. The sign was not addressed to Ahaz alone, but rather to the whole "house of David" (13). Plurals in the KJV text reveal this as well.
2. The word "behold" was used to specifically introduce a declaration of monumental importance. Its use emphasizes the uniqueness and significance of the prophecy.
3. The use of the definite article in the Hebrew text, "the virgin" places emphasis upon the character of the unidentified woman. She is "the virgin," not an old woman or a married woman, but rather the *virgin* woman.
4. The word translated *virgin* is the Hebrew word *almah*. Whatever else can be said about the word, it can be confidently asserted that *almah* NEVER refers to a married woman.
5. Some argue that the best Hebrew word for *virgin* would have been *btulah*. However this word may reference a betrothed virgin or (as in Joel 1:8) a married woman. Hence, use of this term could cause confusion.
6. By using the term *almah*, we are assured that this woman had never married. The only question that then remains is the legitimacy of the child. If the child were illegitimate, there would be no significance in the "sign." Unwed mothers are common in all cultures. If, however, the mother were morally upright—pure, virgin—such a birth would have to be miraculous: a married woman, morally pure, now with-child.
7. The child conceived would be a "Son." His name would be called Immanuel, the meaning of which is "God with us." The very name includes the divine name Isaiah employs consistently for God, *El*. The same name is used in Isaiah 9:6 where his name is called "the mighty God."
8. The birth announced then is not any birth contemporary with Ahaz. The prophet announces the birth of Jesus Christ. The only direct application to Ahaz is the prophecy concerning the brief duration of the reigns of Rezin and Pekah (16). Once again, God uses events then contemporary as a platform for far-flung future prophecy!