

## II. CRISIS AND THE CHRIST (IMMANUEL)

## CHAPTERS 7 - 12

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## A. PROMISE OF IMMANUEL

## 1. THE CRISIS 7:1-9

TEXT: 7:1-9

- 1 And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to war against it; but could not prevail against it.
- 2 And it was told the house of David saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart trembled, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest tremble with the wind.
- 3 Then said Jehovah unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shearjashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the highway of the fuller's field;
- 4 and say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither let thy heart be faint, because of these two tails of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.
- 5 Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have purposed evil against thee saying,
- 6 Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set up a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeel;
- 7 thus saith the Lord Jehovah, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.
- 8 For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken in pieces, so that it shall not be a people:
- 9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.

## QUERIES

- a. Why was Isaiah told to take his son to meet Ahaz?
- b. Who is Tabeel?
- c. Who is warned "to believe"?

## PARAPHRASE

During the reign of Ahaz (the son of Jotham and grandson of Uzziah), Jerusalem was attacked by King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel (the son of Remaliah). But it was not taken; the city stood. However, when the news came to the royal court, Syria is allied with Israel against us! the hearts of the king and his people trembled with fear as the trees of a forest shake in a storm. Then the Lord said to Isaiah, Go out to meet King Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub, your son. You will find him at the end of the aqueduct which leads from Gihon Spring to the upper reservoir, near the road that leads down to the bleaching field. Tell him to quit worrying, the Lord said. Tell him he needn't be frightened by the fierce anger of those two has-beens, Rezin and Pekah. Yes, the kings of Syria and Israel are coming against you. They say, We will invade Judah and throw her people into panic, then we'll fight our way into Jerusalem and install the son of Tabeel as their King. But the Lord God says, This plan will not succeed, for Damascus will remain the capital of Syria alone, and King Rezin's kingdom will not increase its boundaries. And within sixty-five years Ephraim, too, will be crushed and broken. Samaria is the capital of Ephraim alone and King Pekah's power will not increase. You don't believe Me? If you want me to protect you, you must learn to believe what I say!

## COMMENTS

v. 1-2 **THE CONFEDERACY:** Rezin, King of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel (Ephraim) in Samaria, had formed a coalition

against Assyria. It is probable that they tried to get the Judean ruler to join with them against Assyria. Rezin and Pekah first attacked Judah when Jotham was still on the throne (2 Kings 15:37) probably to coerce the Judean ruler to join their alliance against Assyria. In II Chronicles 28:5ff we learn that Ahaz was delivered into the hands of the Syrians who smote him and 120,000 men of Judah were slain. But Ahaz and his forces were suddenly released at Jericho and returned to Jerusalem. Then in II Kings 16:5 we learn of a third attack of Rezin and Pekah upon Jerusalem. At this time Ahaz was prepared to become a satellite-state to Assyria in return for Assyria's protection against the northern coalition (Cf. II Kings 16:7-9). It was, no doubt, just prior to Ahaz's overture to the Assyrians that Isaiah met with Ahaz to deliver the Lord's promise that the coalition of Rezin and Pekah would not be able to stand against Judah. Ahaz was beginning to be overcome with fear toward Syria and Israel. The coalition was determined to get rid of Ahaz and place a man on Judah's throne who would do their bidding.

v. 3-9 THE COMFORT: Isaiah and his son, Shearjashub ("A remnant shall return") were sent to meet Ahaz at a precise point—the point where the water from the upper pool emptied into the conduit. The boy was to serve as a symbolic sign of hope. Ahaz was told to be quiet and calm. Rezin and Pekah were "lots of smoke but no fire" according to the Lord. They are burned-out, smoldering stumps. God knows their threatenings and He knows that in 65 years they will both have disappeared utterly. The coalition wishes to set up the son of Tabeal (the original form of the name suggests he was a Syrian) on the throne of Judah in the place of Ahaz. But God promises, "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass." Israel and Syria have only human heads (v. 8) while the head of Judah is the Lord God. In 721-722 B.C. Sargon took Samaria (II Kings 17:16-24) and in 669 B.C. Esar-Haddon of Babylon sent colonists to occupy Samaria and entirely destroyed the nationality of Israel. This was 65 years from the time of Isaiah's prediction here (733 or 734 B.C.). All Ahaz had to do was to accept this promise and believe God and he would be established on the throne of Judah. But

Ahaz would not believe it (Cf. II Kings 16:7-18; II Chron. 28:16-20).

### QUIZ

1. What was the purpose of the confederacy of Syria and Israel?
2. Why had they attacked Judah?
3. What was the attitude of Ahaz toward the confederacy?
4. Why was Isaiah sent to speak with Ahaz?
5. What was God's promise to king Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah?

### 2. THE CHRIST 7:10-16

TEXT: 7:10-16

- 10 And Jehovah spake again unto Ahaz, saying,
- 11 Ask thee a sign of Jehovah thy God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.
- 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt Jehovah.
- 13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; is it a small thing for you to weary men, that ye will weary my God also?
- 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Immanuel.
- 15 Butter and honey shall he eat when he knoweth to refuse the evil, and choose the good.
- 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken.

## QUERIES

- a. Was Ahaz right in refusing to tempt Jehovah?
- b. Who is the virgin?
- c. Why mention that the child would eat butter and honey?

## PARAPHRASE

Not long after this, the Lord sent this further message to King Ahaz: Ask Me for a sign, Ahaz, to prove that I will indeed crush your enemies as I have said. Ask anything you like, in heaven or on earth. But the king refused. No, he said, I'll not bother the Lord with anything like that. Then Isaiah said, O House of David, you aren't satisfied to exhaust my patience; you exhaust the Lord's as well! All right then, the Lord Himself will choose the sign—a child shall be born to a virgin! And she shall call Him Immanuel (meaning, "God is with us."). By the time it would take for the child to be weaned and come to know right from wrong, the two kings you fear so much—the kings of Israel and Syria—will be dead.

## COMMENTS

v. 10-13 THE SIGN OFFERED AND REFUSED: Ahaz made no move to show that he believed God's promise concerning the continuity of the kingdom of Judah. He was silent. God, to stir up his faith, offers a sign to guarantee fulfillment of His promise. Ahaz haughtily refuses the sign in language he intended should sound pious and loyal, but Ahaz had already decided to do his own will. He knew as well as anyone that when God commands a man to ask for a sign it is not putting God to the test to obey Him. Ahaz, like many others before and after him, wanted to work things out in his own way! His way seemed to be so much better. To be an ally of this great and feared monarch of Assyria was so much better than being an ally of an invisible God. Isaiah

rebukes the king (v. 13) by pointing out that the king may try the patience of men (God's prophets) and not suffer dire consequences, but it is no small matter to try the patience of Jehovah by hypocrisy and rebelliousness.

v. 14-16 **THE SIGN COMPELLED:** Ahaz tried to fool the prophet with his feigned piety. But God was not fooled and spoke through Isaiah that He would give Ahaz a sign whether the king wanted one or not. This sign would not be wasted, as we shall see, for it would establish the faithfulness and veracity of God to keep His covenant. And if Ahaz refused to appropriate it, others of the "house of David" would!

To consider the "sign" here to be given, one must first consider the Hebrew word *almah*, translated in the ASV "virgin" and in the RSV "young woman" and in some other versions "maiden." The Hebrew and English Lexicon of The Old Testament by Brown, Driver and Briggs says of *almah*, "young woman (ripe sexually; maid or newly married)." Gesenius' Hebrew lexicon, the accepted authority among practically all Hebrew lexicographers says, "a girl of marriageable age . . . the notion of unspotted virginity is not that which this word conveys, for which the proper word is *bethulah*." Keil and Delitzsch say in their commentary here, ". . . whilst *bethulah* signifies a maiden living in seclusion in her parents' house and still a long way from matrimony, *almah* is applied to one fully mature, and approaching the time of her marriage . . . It is also admitted that the idea of spotless virginity was not necessarily connected with *almah*, since there are passages (e.g. Song of Sol. 6:8 where it can hardly be distinguished from the Arabic *surrije*); and a person who had a very young-looking wife might be said to have an *almah* for his wife . . . the expression itself warrants the assumption that by *almah* the prophet meant one of the young maidens of the king's (Ahaz') harem . . ." We conclude then, that a child was to be born to one who might be a young woman who was a virgin, or a young woman of marriageable age not necessarily a virgin, or a married woman who was very young looking, or perhaps a young woman who was a member of a king's harem whatever her state of virginity.

Perhaps the more immediate question is, Who is "Immanuel"? The literal meaning of the word is, of course, "God with us." It should be apparent that Immanuel of 7:14, 8:8, and the "child" of 9:6 and the "branch" of 11:1ff is one and the same mighty divine personage. This can be none other than Christ, the Messiah. But, if the passage here under discussion (7:10-16) constitutes a real prophecy of Christ, how are we to explain the plain reference in 7:16 to events belonging to the days of Ahaz and Isaiah? How can the coming of Christ to years of discretion, *some seven centuries after Ahaz*, be made to fix the time for the forsaking of the land of Israel and Syria? And how could a child's coming to age of understanding some seven centuries after Ahaz be a "sign" to Ahaz? Surely some more immediate birth of a child must be in view here.

The late Dr. J. Gresham Machen, famous defender of the inspiration of the scriptures and world-renowned scholar, wrote in his classical work, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, "In reply, either one of two things may be said. In the first place, it may be held that the prophet has before him in vision the birth of the child Immanuel, and that irrespective of the ultimate fulfillment the vision itself is present. 'I see a wonderful child,' the prophet on this interpretation would say, 'a wonderful child whose birth shall bring salvation to his people; and before such a period of time shall elapse as would lie between the conception of the child in his mother's womb and his coming to years of discretion, the land of Israel and Syria shall be forsaken.'

"In the second place, one may hold that in the passage some immediate birth of a child is in view, but that that event is to be taken as the foreshadowing of the greater event that was to come . . . So in our passage, the prophet, when he placed before the rebellious Ahaz that strange picture of the mother and the child, was not only promising deliverance to Judah in the period before a child then born should know how to refuse evil and choose the good, but also, moved by the Spirit of God, was looking forward, as in a dim and mysterious vision, to the day when the true Immanuel, the mighty God and Prince of Peace, should lie as a little babe in a virgin's arms."

According to Machen's second explanation, then, a young woman (*almah*) contemporary with Ahaz and Isaiah would conceive and bear a son and call his name Immanuel. Before this child should reach the age to be able to choose the good and refuse evil, Israel and Syria would no longer be a threat to Judah. This contemporary *almah* and her child was a *type* of the virgin Mary and her child, the Christ! In view of the many prophecies of the Old Testament which have two fulfillments and are typical of the Messiah or the messianic age (Hosea 11:1 etc.), and in view of the plain necessity for a contemporary sign to Ahaz, we have no problem in accepting Machen's second explanation.

But who is the *almah* whose child-bearing in Ahaz' day constitutes the "sign" that Jehovah gives? Two unsatisfactory answers have been given in the past: (a) Isaiah's wife. She named her son Maher-shalal-hash-baz and the *almah's* son was to be named Immanuel. Besides, Isaiah's wife would hardly be a young-looking woman since Isaiah was about 60 years old at this time; (b) Ahaz' wife, Abi (Abijah), mother of Hezekiah. But Hezekiah was born before Ahaz came to the throne (as pointed out by Jerome) so his birth could not have been referred to within the reign of Ahaz as lying still in the future! Who she was we do not know. We do know that she and the birth of her child and the divine deliverance of Judah connected to that birth became a type of the virgin who would conceive when the Holy Spirit came upon her and give birth to the Messiah who would bring the divine deliverance from sin and death finally and completely (Matt. 1:23), and would sit upon the throne of Judah forever. This is the concept Ahaz refused to believe, that God's throne, God's people, God's covenant could be perpetuated without some recourse to human power. So Ahaz thought to protect the throne of Judah and perpetuate it by making alliance with pagan Assyria. Ahaz assured himself that Assyria was his only source of help against Israel and Syria.

But God told Ahaz that he would be given a sign of the divine power to protect and perpetuate the throne of Judah whether Ahaz wanted such divine help or not! The immediate sign to Ahaz (and all in his day) of the divine protection of the covenant



would be the fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction that within a very short time the lands of Pekah and Rezin would be made desolate. The "very short time" is indicated by the prediction that before the child born to the *almah* could come to the age to make the moral choice of good and evil, these lands would be desolate. This "time" element is the real focus of the sign for Ahaz. Some have said that within two or three years from birth most children are able to choose good and reject evil. Isaiah delivered God's sign to Ahaz approximately 734 B.C. and in 732 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser captured Damascus (capitol of Syria) and invaded Israel. This immediate demonstration of God's foreknowledge and power in the perpetuation of His covenant of redemption should establish and confirm His faithfulness to complete His work of redemption in the dim and distant future in the "child" and the "branch" who would be Immanuel. This is the aim of Isaiah 7:14, and this is the application the inspired gospel writer, Matthew, made of the prophecy. The conception of the virgin Mary was the signal to all the world that God had at last arrived at the time for consummation of all His promises of establishing the throne of Judah forever. And the sign given to Ahaz was a type of this divine entry into history given seven centuries in advance.

The child born to the *almah* contemporary with Ahaz will eat butter and honey up to the day it shall be able to choose good and evil. In other words, the danger to Judah, then being caused by the war upon it by Pekah and Rezin would be only temporary—two or three years at the most. Butter and honey are not the ordinary food of an agricultural population. Rather such a diet indicates shortage of staple foods. Judah, under attack by the northern coalition, was suffering food shortages, but God would deliver them from this in a short time. However, because of Ahaz' unbelief and his enslavement of the whole country to Assyria, they would soon be back on their starvation diets (Cf. 7:22).

## QUIZ

1. What may the Hebrew word *almah* mean?
2. Who is the Immanuel of 7:14?
3. What are two possible interpretations of the "sign" to be given to Ahaz?
4. Why could the *almah* of Ahaz' day not be Isaiah's wife?
5. What is the overall idea God is attempting to deliver to Ahaz?
6. What is the application of this prophecy to the conception of the virgin Mary, Matthew 1:23?

## 3. CALAMITY

TEXT: 7:17-25

- 17 Jehovah will 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.
- 18 And it shall come to pass in that day, that Jehovah will hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.
- 19 And they shall come and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the clefts of the rocks, and upon all thorn-hedges, and upon all pastures.
- 20 In that day will the Lord shave with a razor that is hired in the parts beyond the River, even with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard.
- 21 And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall keep alive a young cow, and two sheep;
- 22 and it shall come to pass, that because of the abundance of milk which they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the midst of the land.
- 23 And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, shall be for briars and thorns.

- 24 With arrows and with bow shall one come thither, because all the land shall be briers and thorns.
- 25 And all the hills that were digged with the mattock, thou shalt not come thither for fear of briers and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of sheep.

## QUERIES

- a. Why is Jehovah to bring judgment upon Judah?
- b. What part do flies and bees play in this judgment?
- c. Who is the "hired razor"?

## PARAPHRASE

But later on the Lord will bring a terrible curse on you and on your nation and your family. There will be terror, such as has not been known since the division of Solomon's empire into Israel and Judah . . . the mighty king of Assyria will come with his great army! At that time the Lord will whistle for the army of Upper Egypt, and of Assyria too, to swarm down upon you like flies and destroy you, like bees to sting and to kill. They will come in vast hordes, spreading across the whole land, even into the desolate valleys and caves and thorny parts, as well as to all your fertile acres. In that day the Lord will take this "razor" . . . these Assyrians you have hired to save you . . . and use it on you to shave off everything you have: your land, your crops, your people. When they finally stop plundering, the whole nation will be a pastureland; whole flocks and herds will be destroyed, and a farmer will be fortunate to have a cow and two sheep left. But the abundant pastureland will yield plenty of milk, and everyone left will live on curds and wild honey. At that time the lush vineyards will become patches of briers. All the land will be one vast thornfield, a hunting ground overrun by wildlife. No one will go to the fertile hillsides where once the gardens grew, for thorns will cover them; cattle, sheep and goats will graze there.

## COMMENTS

v. 17-20 **GOD'S TOOL FOR JUDGMENT:** Ahaz did not believe God's promise and he did not heed God's prophet. Ahaz turned to the Assyrian emperor for help. He so thoroughly submitted himself to the Assyrian he became a vassal of that pagan empire (Cf. II Kings 16:7-8). He also adopted much of Assyria's pagan idolatry (Cf. II Kings 16:10-16). So the prophet Isaiah goes from promises to threats. Days are coming upon Judah unequaled since the shame and humiliation of the revolt of the ten tribes. This judgment will be executed when Jehovah God calls, "psst" (hisses) for the hordes of Assyrian soldiers to swarm into Palestine, overrun Israel and invade Judah. They will come in swarms like flies and bees. During the same time the Egyptians will swarm over the land of Palestine as these two great empires, Assyria and Egypt, struggle for domination of that territory. The "hired razor" will be the king of Assyria, God's instrument of shame and humiliation upon Judah. To shave the head and the beard completely off was a sign of deep humiliation and shame. Just how the Lord arranged for the king of Assyria to do His bidding we do not know. We know that the Lord "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus" to return the Hebrews to their land (II Chron. 36:22; Ezra 1:1) and that He sent a messenger among the nations to stir them up against Edom (Obadiah 1:1) and that in the book of Daniel the Lord deposed and enthroned pagan kings at His discretion.

v. 21-25 **GOD'S WAY OF JUDGMENT:** The swarming armies of Assyria and Egypt tramping through the land and encamping upon it would completely devastate the land's agricultural potentialities. The massive armies of antiquity fed and supplied themselves almost entirely from foraging upon the countryside where they camped. To feed, clothe and supply other necessities for armies in the hundreds of thousands took incredible amounts of agricultural and building commodities. The devastation would be so thorough that the only thing left to eat for the local residents would be milk, butter and honey (v. 22); the vineyards would be all stripped and weeds would grow in their place (v. 23);

only the hunter hunting the wild things of the thicket will be there, and tillable land will be so full of thorns and briers that tear clothes and flesh, no one will ever go there except animals to graze.

Precisely what Ahaz hoped to avert by becoming a vassal of the king of Assyria was what happened to the land because he refused to trust God and trusted in man.

### QUIZ

1. How thoroughly did Ahaz subjugate himself to Assyria?
2. To what extent will the foreign armies come into Palestine because of the sin of Ahaz?
3. How does God "hiss" for these foreign armies to do His bidding?
4. Why was the devastation of the land of Palestine so great?
5. How did the plan of Ahaz to use the king of Assyria for protection turn out?

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### B. PREVISION OF IMMANUEL

#### 1. THE PROPHECY 8:1-8

##### TEXT: 8:1-8

- 1 And Jehovah said unto me, Take thee a great tablet, and write upon it with the pen of a man, For Maher-shalal-hash-baz;
- 2 and I will take unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah, the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.
- 3 And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said Jehovah unto me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz.
- 4 For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and My mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be carried away before the king of Assyria.