

**Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 6**  
**Virgin Birth, Isaiah's Son (Isa. 7-8)**

Review Isaiah 7

We've been discussing Isaiah chapter 7. We were in the midst of looking at verses 13 through 16 at the end of the last hour. Remember, I indicated there are generally three ways in which those verses have been treated by interpreters. Some will try to apply them all to the current situation of the Syro-Ephraimitic war and assume that the sign of the birth in verse 14 is the child that is born either to Ahaz or to Isaiah. Others have tried to apply the entire passage to the birth of Christ on the basis of the Matthew citation of this verse. Matthew does apply it to Christ. Neither of those two alternatives seems to do justice to the specifics of the passage because in verse 13 there seems to be a rebuke to Ahaz. "Hear now, O house of David: Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?" And verses 15 to 16 seem very clearly to speak of the contemporary situation, particularly verse 16—"For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land you abhor shall be forsaken of both her kings." It seems that that can't be specifically applied to the birth of Christ.

So that's led some to advocate a multiple, or dual, fulfillment in which the passage speaks both to the contemporary child of Isaiah and also to Christ. I gave you Walter Kaiser as an illustration of that position. That raises another issue of multiple sense. I think we need to be very careful about that. But it also raises the question of the meaning of the term '*almah*'. In the King James version it translates it "a virgin shall conceive." If this is Isaiah's wife, how can that apply to the mother of those children? It seems best to take verses as words of rebuke to Ahaz, on the one hand: you are an unworthy representative of the house of David, so you will be replaced. On the one hand, it is a rebuke to Ahaz. But on the other, it is directed to a different audience: there are words of comfort to the godly people still in the land. Verse 13 is rebuke to Ahaz, whereas 15 and 16 are comfort for the godly people of the land. The thing combines those two thoughts together and is

something you have to bring to the text, and admittedly that is the difficult part of interpretation here. The thing that binds them together is to say on the assumption that if he were to be born within the year, within the normal time of pregnancy, then those two things would happen. In other words, it's not the prophecy that he will be born then, but Isaiah used the term of pregnancy as a basis for the measurement of time. Assuming that if he were to be born presently, then before he would know enough to distinguish right and wrong, before the child would or could know that the invading kingdoms would be gone. I don't think the prophecy says specifically when the child is coming; the assumption is if he were to come within a year, before he was more than a little older the kingdoms you fear will be gone.

‘Alma [virgin, Isaiah 7:14]

I want to go a bit further with this question of the *‘almah*. The Hebrew term there is *‘almah*, “behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son.” I think that that is a strong objection to understanding the specifics of verse 14 to be referring either to the king's wife or the wife of Isaiah having a son. There is no indication that Ahaz' wife was a virgin or that the wife of Isaiah was a virgin. In fact, we know that Isaiah already had a son, Shear-Jashab, when Isaiah went out meet and to confront King Ahaz. God told him to take his son Shear-Jashab in Isaiah 7:3.

Now, there have been a number of interpreters who have argued that *‘almah* does not really mean “virgin”; it means “young woman.” Therefore, the term might refer to Isaiah's wife or to Ahaz' wife. And in fact, if you look at the Revised Standard Version translation of Isaiah 7:14, it says, “Behold, the young woman shall conceive.” There is a footnote in the RSV that says “or virgin,” but that is put in a footnote. If you look at the New English Bible it says, “The young woman will conceive,” and there isn't any footnote. It just leaves it at that. So it removes entirely any suggestion of virgin birth. The question is, then, what does this term *‘almah* mean?

Let me make a few comments on that. First, *'almah* is not the usual word for “virgin.” “Virgin” is normally the translation of a different Hebrew word, not of *'almah*. Normally, the word translated “virgin” is *bethulah*. You might say well, if *bethulah* is the term used commonly for virgin, why did Isaiah not use *betulah* instead of *'almah* to make it clear? Look at your citation there on page 17, the first paragraph at the top of the page. This is taken from E. J. Young’s volume one of his three volume commentary on Isaiah, page 288, first paragraph there. Young says, “In Joel 1:8 the *bethulah* is clearly a married woman. And in later Aramaic incantation texts the Aramaic equivalent of *bethulah* refers to a married woman. If Isaiah had used this word, *bethulah*, he would of left us in confusion. We could not have known precisely what he had in mind. Was he there speaking of one who was truly virgin, or did he rather have in the mind one who was betrothed, or one who was actually a wife. In light of these considerations, it appears that Isaiah’s choice of *'almah* was deliberate. It seems to be the only word in the language which unequivocally signifies an unmarried woman. No other available Hebrew word would clearly communicate 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. None of these other words were pointing to an unusual word. Only *'almah* makes clear that the mother was unmarried.”

Next paragraph, “If however the mother is a married woman, then was the child illegitimate or not? If the child were illegitimate, would such a birth be a sign? The whole context, indeed the whole biblical context, rules this out. On the other hand, if the mother were a good woman, then the birth would be out of the ordinary and an unusual birth where the mother is unmarried and a good woman. When this fact is understood it becomes apparent in all of history that there is only one of whom this could be predicated, and that was Mary mother of the Lord.”

You notice what Young does there lay stress for the need of the term *'almah*. He lays stress on the unmarried state more than on the virginity aspect of

the meaning of the word, not that the word does not include the idea of virginity. But the central significance in the word '*almah*' seems to be "unmarried" if you look at it in the Hebrew. The confusion with *bethulah* is that sometimes it is translated "virgin," but is not always about an unmarried woman; there are cases where she is really not an unmarried woman. So the term '*almah*' indicates an unmarried woman. Secondly, the term '*almah*' is used to refer to a virgin. If you look at those instances of usage, you can find that in no case is she a married woman; it is always an unmarried woman.

In at least one case it's clear that the word designates one who is not only unmarried, but she is also a virgin. That's in Genesis 24. If you turn to Genesis 24, that's the story of Abraham sending his servant to find a wife for Isaac. There's some interesting terminology used there. If you look at verse 43 of Genesis 24, you read--this is the servant speaking--"Behold, I stand by the well of water; and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin ('*almah*') comes forth to draw *water*, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink; And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: *let* the same *be* the woman whom the LORD hath appointed out for my master's son."

That's the King James translation. Take that verse 43, and compare that verse with the term '*almah*' with verse 16. If you back up to 15 you read, "Behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder. And the damsel," that is *na'arah*, "was very fair to look upon, a virgin," *bethulah*, a virgin. Then notice how *bethulah* is qualified, "neither had any man known her." Ambiguity exists there, but here that ambiguity is taken away when it says, "She is a *bethulah*, neither had she known any man, and she went down to the well and filled her pitcher and came up."

Now you see you have in this chapter that she was a *na'arah*, *bethulah*, and '*almah*'; they are all used of Rebekah, and the context makes it very clear that she was unmarried and that she was a virgin. Dr. MacRae, I remember, years back

stated how I should define the word ‘*almah*’: he suggested that she was unmarried, or a young woman of an marriageable age. A young woman of marriageable age, and one of whose characteristic is that she be a virgin.

#### LXX Translation of ‘*Almah* as *Parthenos*

Now, the third consideration is the way in which the Septuagint translated Isaiah 7:14. When they translated this into Greek the question is: How did they understand ‘*almah*? If you look at the Septuagint, you’ll find that they translated the word *parthenos*, which is normally also translated “virgin.” If you go to Matthew 1, verse 23, it says, “Behold, the *virgin* will be with child”; that is also the *parthenos*. Now, some have argued that settles the case, for the Greek translators have used the word for “virgin,” and that gives us a clear understanding by how it’s quoted in the New Testament. So it’s clear that ‘*almah* in Isaiah 7:14 means “virgin.”

However, it’s not so straight forward as that for the reason that *parthenos* is also ambiguous, much like *bethulah*. Look at your citation on page 32, bottom of the page. This is taken from Harry Orlinskey in the *Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary* article on “Virgin.” He says, “Whether *parthenos* was a virgin or not was a secondary matter to be determined, possibly, by the context. Indeed the term *parthenias* denoted an unmarried woman, and the name *parthenos* was sometimes honorifically used for the sacred prostitute, thus there is the name *parthenos* for the temple in Athens. When early Christianity developed the belief of the virgin birth of Jesus, it was the natural to point to a possible proof text in Isaiah 7:14, which speaks of “virgin,” in the Septuagint *parthenos*, and consequently of the Hebrew term that was translated ‘*almah*.” But what he points out there, you see, is that *parthenos* much like *bethulah* is not always totally clear because some usages obscure that.

Notice he says whether *parthenos* indicates a virgin or not needs to be determined by the context, and that’s where I think the Matthew context is also

important because look at Matthew 1:18. It says, “Now the birth of Jesus was this way: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child from the Holy Spirit.” So when you use *parthenos* in that context with that qualifier, it’s like the qualifier back in Genesis 24 for *bethulah*. It is clear that *parthenos* in a Matthew 1:23 is used to indicate virginity because it was “before they came together.” You notice, in verse 25, it is made doubly clear. We see “He knew her not until she had brought forth her first born son.” So there’s no question at all that in Matthew there is a double qualifier with the term *parthenos*. So it seems to me quite clear here, in fact, Isaiah 7 speaks in verse 14 of the virgin birth. It seems very difficult to apply that to either later king Hezekiah or to the son of Isaiah. It seem to be talking of the coming of Christ. So verse 13 is a rebuke to Ahaz. You are going to be replaced, and then assuming the child were to be born within the year, verses 15 and 16 give comfort, not rebuke, but comfort to the godly remnant he is speaking to. So in verses 15 and 16 you have a transition of thought, but there is no continuation of rebuke to Ahaz, only the words of comfort to God’s people.

#### Long Term Prophecies Coupled with a Short Term Prophecy

Page 15 of your citations, bottom of the page, the last paragraph, Hasel Bullock suggests in his article from 1987: “After Isaiah’s long range pronouncement, the prophet turns to the other immediate peril, the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, and follows the pattern that fits prominent in his writing by supporting this long term prediction with a short range predication that is able to be observed by his contemporaries. The long range prophecies, Isaiah 7:14 and 15, have a long time to be fulfilled and the short-term prophecy is Isaiah 7:16. Now, whether you break it between 15 and 16, or between 14 and 15/16 together, is up to the interpreter.”

Isaiah's Son [Isaiah 8] not = Child of Isaiah 7

There are some difficult interpretive problems here but I understand chapter 8 in much the same way Bullock does that there is a short term prediction that certifies a certain fulfillment of the long-term fulfillment. I don't think that you can compare the child of chapter 8 with the child of chapter 7 because the child of chapter 8 is clearly the son of Isaiah. That child is not a virgin birth; besides, he given the name "Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz" not "Immanuel." There are two different children. There was one who was born immediately, in fact, more quickly, you might say, than the one in chapter 7 because of the one in chapter 7 it says, "Before the child can distinguish between good and evil, the evil you're facing will be gone." Of the one in chapter 8 it says that before he will be able to say, "my father and mother," probably earlier within a year of the birth, the invaders will be gone. So the prophecy of chapter 8 must have been a bit later. It was fulfilled more quickly, but it's a different child and it has a different name; it certainly didn't have a virgin for a mother. The son in chapter 8 is not the same child as in chapter 7.

The child in chapter 8 fulfills a similar purpose. But it does it even more quickly, in other words, than the child in chapter 7. You have the child that is born within a year before it can distinguish between good from evil. Then you come to chapter 8, and you have a child who seems to indicate before it can say "my father" or "my mother," the problem will be solved. Verse 4: "Before the child shall have the knowledge to cry, 'my mother and father' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria." It seems that this is a shorter time than the one in chapter 7. So there are two different children, two different prophecies, and two different times. Then this fulfillment can be observed so that the birth of a child can serve as a confirmation of the authenticity of the other, long-range prophecy of the birth of a child by a virgin. In other words, before Christ was born, those kings were gone. If you take it in the immediate context, those people are being told that within two or three years the

problem will be gone. It's not something they could have confirmed. Long-term uncertain future is made certain by the short-term prophecy.

### Child as a Measure of Time

The Syro-Ephraimite alliance against Judah is a short-term problem, and within a few years it would have passed. I think they heard the prophecy that Ahaz is an unworthy occupant of the throne of David who is going to be replaced. If a child were born today or within the year, before the child was more than a couple years old the problem would pass. The birth of the child is simply used as a basis of time measurement. It does not say that the child will definitely be born, but if he were to be born. It seems to me that holds the two passages together. It's clear in the next chapter, for there is a parallel there.

### Isaiah 7:17-25 Results of Ahaz's Alliance with Assyria

Let's move on. This is a difficult interpretive problem and you can think further on it and come to your own conclusion. In chapter 7, verses 17 to 25; you find the results of Ahaz's scheme. Remember, Ahaz's scheme was to include an alliance with Assyria in order to relieve this threat from Ephraim and Syria. What Isaiah does in verses 17 to 25 is to describe the ultimate effect of Ahaz's reliance on the king of Assyria. Notice verse 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." He made an alliance assuming everything would be quiet. But the Lord says that the king of Assyria is going to come down on you. "In that day the LORD will whistle for flies from the distant streams of Egypt and for bees from the land of Assyria. They will all come and settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks, on all the thorn bushes and at all the water holes. [Notice the phrase here.] 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."



So the Lord says thru Isaiah that the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired. The razor that is hired is Assyria. Assyria was hired by Ahaz ready to shave Syria and Israel (or Ephraim). What Isaiah says is that Assyria's going to come and shave you too. "The Lord shall shave with the razor that is hired," namely, by those beyond the river; namely the king of Assyria "to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also. In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two goats. 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. In that day, in every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels, there will be only briers and thorns. Men will go there with bow and arrow, for the land will be covered with briers and thorns. As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briers and thorns; they will become places where cattle are turned loose and where sheep run." In other words, the conditions are going to be that agriculture will suffer because of the lack of cultivation; vineyards will be destroyed, and grazing space will emerge that doesn't require a lot of agricultural attention. This will be devastation that will come on the land. The agent of this devastation will be Assyria. This is the very country that Ahaz has put his trust in delivering him from the Northern Kingdom and from Syria.

#### Connection with Isaiah 36

Now, the outcome of this alliance that Ahaz made with the Assyrians happens in the time of Hezekiah, his son. The eventuation of this alliance is described in detail in chapters 36 to 39 of Isaiah. That's that historical section that divides between the two major sections of the book. In the time of Hezekiah, Ahaz' son, Sennacherib comes against Jerusalem and he besieges Jerusalem. So that Hezekiah reaps what Ahaz has sowed.

Then the interesting thing is, if you look at chapter 36, verse 2, in the time of Ahaz' son Hezekiah, when Sennacherib is threatening Jerusalem, you read in

verse 2, “And the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem unto king Hezekiah with a great army.” Notice the last phrase. “And he stood by the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.” Remember that location from before. Go back to Isaiah 7, verse 3: “Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, you, and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field.” In other words, on the very spot where Isaiah had confronted Ahaz, telling him to trust in the Lord and find security and confidence in the Lord, this threat against you is not going to succeed. Ahaz clearly did not want to trust the Lord. Instead, he trusted in Assyria, and made an alliance with Assyria. In the very spot Isaiah had warned him that day, the messenger of Assyria now stands and calls for Hezekiah's submission a generation later. So that is the ultimate eventuation of Ahaz's conduct in Syro-Ephraimitic war.

#### Isaiah 8:1-4 Isaiah's son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz -- Writes Scroll

Let's go on to chapter 8. We're still in this section of “The book of Immanuel.” It seems that the historical background in chapter 8 and the general teaching of chapter 8 is very similar to that of chapter 7. Verses 1 to 4 read: “The LORD said to me, ‘Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. And I will call in Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah as reliable witnesses for me.’ Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the LORD said to me, ‘Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. 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.” (NIV).

Isaiah's told to write concerning Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. The King James translates that as a proper name. The NIV does as well, although the NIV has a text note that says Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz means “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.” I think there's some question of whether it should even be translated in

that first instance as a proper name. Clearly, it's a symbolical name, the meaning of it is "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." So take the large scroll and write on it with a pen: "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil." The English is just transliterated there in the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Now it seems that the symbolism of the name "quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil" is that doom is coming to the two kingdoms of Israel and Syria. As is said in verse four, "The wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria." Destruction is coming towards them and eventually to Judah as well.

You get the same vocabulary used in the verse about Judah in Isaiah 10:5 and 6. "Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a godless nation; I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets." So destruction is coming at the hands of the Assyrians on the Northern Kingdom, on Syria, and on Judah eventually. Thus this name, "Quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil."

Then a sign is given, which is very similar to that of Isaiah 7:14 to 16, although the time period is shorter here. "Before the child will be able to say 'my father or my mother.'" That would be some of the first words a child would speak. Here the child is born and it is clearly not of virgin birth: "I went in unto the prophetess and she conceived." So it seems to me that the child here cannot be the same child as the one in chapter 7. The names are different, the mothers are different. Isaiah 7:14 is clearly Messianic. But what you find historically is the Syro-Ephraimic war in 734 B.C. The fall of Damascus happened two years after that threat. Damascus fell in 732 B.C.

Young says, "The prophecy of the birth of Isaiah's son could be verified as a pledge, or earnest, of the virgin's son." That's similar to what Bullock said. Young suggests that there are two great figures coming, first to the people of God--Immanuel, who will bring salvation--and secondly to Ahaz and his followers--Assyria and its devastation.

You find that in the fifth verse and following: “The LORD spoke to me again: ‘Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah.’”

#### Isaiah 8:5-8 Waters of Shiloah

Now, what I think that’s saying is these people refuse the waters of Shiloah, that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and in the son of Remaliah; in other words they rejoice in their defeat. “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 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!” So Isaiah chapter 8, verses 5-8, show the results again in Ahaz’s alliance with Assyria with sole dependence on the king there. “Since the people will not trust the Lord” symbolized by those waters of Shiloah, since they won’t trust the Lord, the people refuse the waters of Shiloah. Since they refuse to trust the Lord, the Lord is going to bring a mighty river on them that will inundate the land, and that mighty river is Assyria. But the end of verse 8 is significant because that river is going to flood the land, as it were. It is going to go over its banks and channels and is going to go up to the neck. But it is not going to totally overload the land and be totally successful. The reason for that is that it is Immanuel’s land. “It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks 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.” It’s not Ahaz’s land ultimately, it is Immanuel’s land, and because of that the king of Assyria is really powerless to do everything he wants to do, which is to totally destroy Judah. He is not permitted to do that. He can only go as far as the Lord permits him to go. He is carrying out the purposes the Lord wants him to carry out. This does not include the eradication of the land of Judah.

### Isaiah 8:9-10 Assyria, Syria and Ephraim Will Not Succeed in Taking Judah

Chapter 8, verses 9 and 10, show that the nations Assyria, Syria, and Ephraim will not succeed in taking Judah. You read in verse 9: “Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us.” Young says that just as earlier the fact of coming doom was symbolically expressed to the name of Isaiah’s child Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, so here the fact that deliverance is getting a symbolic expression in the virgin’s child, Immanuel. It is Immanuel’s land, so Assyria can only go as far as God permits Assyria to go. It’s not going to be a complete removal. Again, that prediction is clearly fulfilled in the time of Hezekiah in the second part of the book—Isaiah 36-39. The Assyrians are ready to take Jerusalem when the Lord intervenes and sends a plague on Sennacherib. Although the Assyrian annals say he had Hezekiah closed up “like a bird in a cage,” he didn’t take Jerusalem.

### Isaiah 8:11-22 Words of Exhortation

Alright, chapter 8, verses 11 to 22, are words of exhortation for the Israelites in view of the current situation. I’m not going to spend much time on those verses, but let’s read a few of them. Chapter 8, verses 13-14, “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, 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.” What fear is that? The fear of the Lord: “Sanctify the Lord, let him be your fear, let him be your dread.”

Chapter 8, verses 19 and 20: “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? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn.” So those are words of exhortation in view of the current situation.

Let's take a ten minute break, then we'll move on to Isaiah chapter 9.  
Chapter 8 verse 21, flows right into chapter 9 and the Messianic prophecy there.

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