

## Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 5

### Isaiah 5:1-6:18 Judgment to Blessing

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Let's move ahead to chapter 5:1—6:18 as the last section of the first six chapters of the book. We've seen two sections so far beginning with judgment and ending with future blessing. The first case was judgment and then blessing in the very distant future, that is, the Millennial. The second case was judgment, then blessing in the less distant future that I would take as referring to our present time. In the third section, again, you have judgment and it ends with blessing, but blessing experienced for the most part by Isaiah himself. You see the section here that ends in Isaiah 6:1-13 is that chapter that you're familiar with, where Isaiah sees a vision of the Lord. The Lord takes the coals from off the altar and anoints Isaiah to bring his word to the people. So in that sense you see with these three sections you move from the very distant future, less distant future, into the time contemporary to Isaiah himself.

#### Isaiah 5 – God's Disappointment with His People – Series of Woes

But let's go back just—and again I'm not going to discuss this section much at all—I want to move on. But Chapter 5 is a chapter of woe. It describes God's disappointment with his people. Again, it uses a figure. The figure here is the picture of a vineyard. Chapter 5, verse 1, says, "I will sing for the one I love, a song about his vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now I will tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge; it will be destroyed. I will break down its wall, it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated; briars and thorns will grow there.

I will command the clouds not to rain on it.’ The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice but saw bloodshed, for righteousness but heard cries of distress.”

So, under the picture of this vineyard, which God has cared for, but which has not brought forth fruit, the Lord says he is going to bring justice; he is going to lay it waste. And what follows then, in verse 8 and on, is a series of six woes pronounced on this godless people Israel. You notice verse 8: “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field until no space is left.” Verse 11: “Woe to you who rise in the morning to run after their drinks, who stay up late at night till they are inflamed with wine.” Verse 18: “Woe to those who draw sin along with cords of deceit, and wickedness as with cart ropes.” Verse 20: “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil.” 21: “Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.” 22: “Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine, champions at mixing drinks.” So you have that series of woes pronounced on this godless people.

From what little gardening I’ve done, I can conceive Isaiah’s image. You know you work hard: you plant, and then you get a drought and you get nothing out of it, and you can say forget it. It seems to me it’s entirely within the realm of possibility. Somebody put all this work and effort into—here in this case, vines, which—from what little I’ve read about vineyards—that is a very tricky business. It requires a lot of skill and know-how and a long period of time to develop it. So you put all that effort into it, and then, for whatever reason, you get nothing. You could just say, “Well, I’m just going to plow it under, and start over.” God will prune, cast into the fire and it will be burned.

#### Isaiah 6:1-13 Blessing for the Prophet

That’s the picture here in 5:1 on down through the end of the chapter; then you get to 6:1-13, which is a chapter of blessing. Now, this blessing is primarily for the prophet because the Lord anoints Isaiah to bring God’s word to the people. You’re familiar with Isaiah’s call. I say primarily to the prophet, but it’s not exclusively that. The people, for the most part, aren’t going to listen to Isaiah. Isaiah’s told that they’re not going to

respond, but the chapter still ends on a note of blessing for the people. You see in chapter 6, verse 11, Isaiah says, “For how long, O Lord?” You see, they’re not going to listen, “and he answered, ‘Until the cities lie ruined, and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted, the fields ruined and ravaged.’” That’s referring to the coming judgment, the exile, “until the Lord has sent everyone far away, and the land is utterly forsaken.” But then verse 13: “And though a tenth remains in the land it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.” It seems that what God is saying through Isaiah here is that after the exile there will be a remnant, and then a remnant of a remnant, so God’s people will be preserved. Israel is not going to be totally wiped out or destroyed. Nothing could totally destroy God’s people until the promises were fulfilled through them in Christ, by the coming of Christ. So stumps are going to be left. There’s still the stump there, and there’s still life in the stump. That’s where this branch idea comes in: it’s going to be a shoot that comes out of that which is left, out of the life that remains. So there is a hint of blessing there. The people in the preservation of the remnants, through all the judgment that they will experience, still should have hope.

#### Isaiah 7:12 Book of Immanuel

Let’s go on to number 2. Go back to your outline. We’re going through the content of Isaiah and 1. In the outline is Isaiah 1-6; 2 is 7-12. That’s this next section in the structure, often called, “The Book of Immanuel” because of the reference to Immanuel in chapter 7, verse 14. So let’s look at Isaiah 7-12, “The Book of Immanuel.” This section is probably one of the better known of the book. It’s quoted in the New Testament. There are some clear references in it to the coming of Christ. But it’s a section for which historical background is quite important.

#### Historical Background [Isa. 7:1] Ahaz’s Alliance with Assyria

You read in 7:1, “When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram, and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to

fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. Now, the house of David was told, ‘Aram has allied itself with Ephraim’”; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by wind.”

Here is a pre-sketch of the historical background. Rezin and Pekah: Rezin of Damascus, Pekah of the Northern Kingdom, attacked Ahaz of Judah. People of Judah are fearful because they are being attacked by a much more powerful coalition than Judah itself. Israel was more powerful than Judah, and Syria was more powerful than Israel. The two of them had combined to attack Judah. The purpose of the attack you read in chapter 7, verse 6: They say, “Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart, divide it among ourselves and make Tabeel king over it.” So the purpose was to replace Ahaz and put their own puppet in power in Judah, someone who would cooperate with them. And generally the thought is that what they wanted was someone on the throne of Judah who would cooperate with them in opposing Assyria. Ahaz didn’t want to ally himself with them against Assyria. They wanted someone who would. Now, more details of that historical background can be found in 2 Kings 16 and in 2 Chronicles 28. If you look at 2 Kings 16, you notice in verse 5, “Then Rezin king of Aram (Syria), Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, and besieged Ahaz.” Look at verse 7. “Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, ‘I am your servant and vassal. Come up, save me out of the hand of the king of Aram (Syria) and of the king of Israel who are attacking me.’ And Ahaz took silver and gold found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria.” And you read, “The King of Assyria compiled by attacking Damascus and captured it. Then Ahaz went to Damascus and met with Tiglath-Pileser.” So you get more detail in 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28, but what we learn is that in the situation that’s described in Isaiah chapter 7, when Ahaz is threatened by Rezin and Pekah, he turns to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria and sends his messenger to Tiglath-Pileser with tribute and asks for assistance.

Now, I think it is quite probable that that had already happened. He had already made that contact with Assyria when you come to this specific situation here in Isaiah

chapter 7, because what the Lord says to Isaiah is, verse 3, “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.” Notice that geographic location: “the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool on the road to the Washerman’s Field.” That’s where the water supply for the city was provided for and he’s probably doing something to strengthen the defenses of the city against the attack by these kings from the north. And the Lord tells Isaiah, “Go to that place and give this message to him.” Here’s the message in chapter 7, verse 4, and following: “Say to him: ‘be careful, keep calm, 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. Aram, Ephraim, and Remaliah’s son have plotted your ruin, saying, “Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart, divide it among ourselves and make the son of Tabeel king over it.” Yet this is what the Sovereign Lord says: “It will not take place, it will not happen,” for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within 65 years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. 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.”” Now Isaiah doesn’t say anything about Ahaz’s plan to seek assistance from Assyria. He doesn’t mention it. But what he says is, “God will protect you. This is not going to happen.” That is, Ahaz is not going to lose his throne because of these people. It will not take place. It will not happen.

But at the end of chapter 7 verse 9: “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.” The King James says there, “If you will not believe, surely you will not be established.” “You don’t need the help of foreign powers” is what Isaiah’s saying. And the implication is if you do seek your security there, that is by trusting in something other than in the Lord, then that’s going to be your doom. “If you do not believe, you will not be established. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”

Now, evidently, the response of Ahaz is skeptical. And you read in verses 10 and following that the Lord comes again with an additional message. Verse 10 says, “Moreover, the Lord spoke again unto Ahaz, saying: Ask a sign of the Lord. Ask it either in the depth or in the height above. But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask, neither will I test the

Lord.’ Then Isaiah said, ‘Hear now O house of David, is it a small thing for you to weary men; will you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and she’ll call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread shall be forsaken by both her kings.’” So evidently, Ahaz was skeptical.

The Lord then comes to Isaiah with this message: ask for a son. if you don’t believe what I’m telling you, ask for a son. God will demonstrate that what I say is true. Ahaz dismisses that with what seems like a pious statement: he didn’t want to tempt God, or test God. Ahaz says, “I will not ask, neither will I test the Lord.” I think that what’s really behind that is he didn’t *want* to trust the Lord. He didn’t *want* to take the path that Isaiah was suggesting. What he wanted was the security of this alliance with Assyria. That’s something that he felt would guarantee him that Rezin and Pekah would not push him off the throne. So he says, “I’m not going to test the Lord with asking for a sign,” but Isaiah says – verse 13 – “Hear now O house of David, is it a small thing for you to weary men; will you weary my God also?” There’s an element of rebuke there. So “the Lord is going to give you a sign, the virgin’s going to conceive and bear a son, and his name will be Immanuel.” So you get that sign of Immanuel given in verse 13 through 16. And that brings up the question of interpretation, which again is not an easy one.

I think that at least the threat of the attack was what motivated Ahaz to make the alliance with Assyria. The attack – if you look at that 2 Kings passage – was not successful. 2 Kings 16:5 “They besieged Ahaz but could not overcome him. At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath for Syria” – now that’s way down on the gulf of Aqaba – “and drove the Jews from Elath.” And the Syrians came to Elath from up there to stay so they could take some territory, but they really couldn’t – they weren’t able to conquer Ahaz. Now verse 7 says, “So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser.” He sent the messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, probably in anticipation of that attack, or maybe even during it. I don’t think that Tiglath-Pileser really was the reason that initial attack wasn’t successful. Now, undoubtedly, Rezin’s people wouldn’t have given up; they would have

come back and done it again. But within two years Assyria had attacked Damascus and the Syrian threat then was really destroyed. The initial attack was not successful. I don't think Assyria was directly involved at that point, but the Syrians could've come back again. In the meantime, Ahaz had made that alliance with Assyria.

### Isaiah 7:13-16 – Various Approaches

#### 1. Entire Passage Refers to the Immediate Situation with Ahaz

When you get to chapter 7, verses 13-16, and this sign of Immanuel, there's been various ways to approach this. Some have taken 13-16 as all referring to the immediate situation. In other words, it deals with this question of the attack of Ephraim and Syria, and what it means is a child will be born in the context of that situation. Before that child is old enough to distinguish between good and evil, verse 16, both those enemy kings are going to be gone. So it all deals with the immediate situation.

Now, I think there's some objections to that approach. It doesn't really allow for an element of rebuke. Where's the rebuke to Ahaz? The sign is this child is going to be born, and before the child is very old, these kings are both going to be gone. There is no element of rebuke there at all. It's a blessing. It's a promise of comfort. It really makes verse 13 quite meaningless. Verse 13 says, "Hear now, O house of David, is it a small thing for you to weary men; will you weary my God also?" That seems to be rebuke. It seems that what follows must in some way contain an element of rebuke. So it doesn't really do justice to verse 13.

In addition, when you turn to Matthew's gospel, Matthew says that this is a prophecy of the coming of Christ. Matthew 1:23 says, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive, be with child, and bring forth a son, they will call his name Immanuel," which will be interpreted as 'God with us.'" In verse 22 it says, "All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, 'A virgin shall conceive.'" Matthew applies it directly to the birth of Christ. So some take it all as referring to the immediate situation, but it seems to me that doesn't do justice in the context of the element of rebuke in the passage, and it certainly doesn't do justice to the

New Testament citation that applies it to the birth of Christ.

## 2. Entire Passage Refers to Christ

The second approach is that some people take the entire passage as referring to Christ. The idea here would be that in view in the unworthiness of Ahaz, God will replace him with a worthy occupant on the throne of David, namely with Christ, with Immanuel. Now again, that view has its difficulties. The difficulty with this view is that it lacks sufficient relationship to the immediate context. It really causes difficulty in interpreting verses 15 and 16 that say, “Butter and honey shall he eat when he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread shall be forsaken by both her kings.” That’s certainly referring to the immediate situation. How does that apply to Christ? So it seems that the first view that applies all of it to the immediate situation doesn’t do justice to verse 13; and the approach that applies it all to Christ doesn’t do justice to verses 15 and 16. Now some have tried to make 15 a prediction of the simple life of Christ as a child, but you can hardly detect that from verse 16. I’m not sure you can even do it with verse 15.

## 3. Multiple Fulfillment: Ahaz’s Son [Hezekiah] and Christ

Now another approach then, given the difficulties of both of the former two, leads some to advocate a multiple fulfillment, which would find fulfillment in a contemporary child--perhaps Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, or a child of Isaiah the prophet,--but a contemporary child on the one hand, and also finds fulfillment in Christ on the other hand.

A representative of this view is Walter Kaiser. If you look on your citations, page 13, I have a paragraph there from his book on Old Testament theology. Who then was this child? “His Messianic dignity totally excludes the notion that he may have been Isaiah’s son born to some maiden [the virgin] who was married to a prophet after Shear-Jashub’s mother supposedly died.” Some have argued that. Kaiser doesn’t do that. “Still less likely is it a reference to any marriageable maiden, or some particular ideal maiden



present at the time of the proclamation of the prophecy since the prophecy has definitely said ‘the virgin.’” Here’s his own view. “It is preferable to understand him to be the son of Ahaz himself, whose mother, Avi, daughter of Zechariah is mentioned in 2 Kings 18:2:--namely, his son Hezekiah. It is well known that this was the older Jewish interpretation but it is also supposed that Hezekiah could not be the predicted sign of 7:14 since on present chronologies he must have already been nine years old at that time.”

This last point has to be thoroughly studied before it is adopted. The chronology of Israel and Judah has not been proven. You can sort of leave that aside, however, as far as the hermeneutical issue is concerned. Without arguing the point at this time, “I would like, (and here’s his conclusion) to boldly suggest that only Hezekiah meets all the demands of the text of Isaiah, and yet demonstrates how he could be part and parcel of that climatic Messianic person who would complete all that is predicted in this Immanuel prophecy.”

You see, he’s saying it’s both Hezekiah and Christ. It’s Hezekiah but he’s part and parcel of that Messianic—Christ—person who completes all that’s predicted. This is Kaiser’s concept of “generic prophecy” where you have this large encompassing concept, that includes a lot of particulars. And he strives to avoid the idea of dual fulfillment by that kind of a concept but I think that it’s plain in the terms that this is “multiple fulfillment,” even though he would deny it. But he feels complete fulfillment of the prophecy encompasses both Hezekiah and Christ. He says, “Only in this, the most recent installment in the Abrahamic-Davidic promise, could it be seen how God was still being ‘with’ Israel in all his power and presence.” In any case, the interpretations have been, it’s all immediate, or it’s all future, or some kind of dual fulfillment idea such as Kaiser’s.

Now, I think there are objections to the dual fulfillment. To me, there’s a hermeneutical problem of dual, or a multiple sense to a prophecy. Was Hezekiah the product of the virgin birth? I don’t see any way you can say that.

#### 4. Vannoy’s View: Rebuke to Ahaz and Promise of Immanuel

It seems to me that the way in which resolution can be found with this, and this is

difficult, but it seems to me that the way in which it can be found is to take these words in verses 13 through 16 as words on one hand as rebuke to Ahaz, and on the other hand of comfort to the godly people still in the land. In other words, you have two distinct audiences. And the rebuke to Ahaz is: you're going to be replaced by a worthy occupant of the throne. That's the rebuke. The comfort to the godly people still in the land, the other audience is that, and here's where you have to introduce something, if a child were to be born presently, before that child would be a couple of years old, the land would be freed of the invading kings.

In other words, Isaiah speaks to the house of David. Verse 13 says, "Hear now, O house of David. Is it a small thing for you to weary men; will you weary God also?" At that time a house of David had someone on the throne who was not interested in the Lord's will or prophecy. Ahaz rested in his own strength and wisdom and in his alliance with Assyria. He didn't want to listen to the word of the Lord through Isaiah. Isaiah says God is going to replace this unworthy occupant of the house of David with one who will follow God. He will be replaced with God's true representative: Immanuel, God with us.

It's not said when that one is coming. To me, this is the crux of the interpretive problem: it's not said when that one is coming. The assumption is if he were to be born, subject to the normal term of pregnancy, before he were a few years old, those two threatening kings would be gone. That's the word of blessing to the godly people.

We're going to have to discuss this further the next hour. But look at your citations, page 15, under Robert Vasholz, "Isaiah and Ahaz: A Brief History of Crisis in Isaiah 7 and 8." It is in response then to Ahaz's unbelief that the sign of the virgin birth was given to Ahaz and to others. The occupant of the house of David, who refused to even ask for a sign, a sign so extraordinary will be given that the hand of God could not be denied. There was a sign that would make even the sign of the shadow of the sun reverse in its advancement pale into insignificance. The sign was that a virgin would conceive and bear a child. An event more impressive than the birth of Isaac to Sarah when she was old.

But then after Isaiah's long-range pronouncement, this prophet turns to the other,

immediate parallel, the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. He follows a pattern particularly found in his writings: he supports his long-range prediction with predictions that may be observed by his contemporaries. You find Isaiah makes two predictions: a long range prophecy in Isaiah 7:14 and 15, that Matthew records as fulfilled, and a short range prophecy in Isaiah 7:16 for his audience to witness. That goes on over on to page 16 of your citations sheet. I want to follow up on that. I want to discuss this a bit further, but we're out of time. Let's stop here and we'll continue on this question next time.

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