

## **Dr. Marv Wilson, Prophets, Session 31, Isaiah 7, Messianic Themes**

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This is Dr. Marv Wilson in his teaching on the book of Isaiah. This is session 31, Isaiah 7, Messianic themes.

All right, I'm going to pray.

Let's begin with prayer. Our Father, this is the day you have made and we thank you for life this day, for the beauty around us as spring begins to emerge. Thank you that you are the God who, as Jeremiah reminds us, is as steady as the seasons of the year, who is dependable.

We thank you when other things fall apart around us or go up and down like stock markets or emotions that people have. When things become unglued, we thank you that you are the rock. Thank you for the imagery we have from the prophets.

Help us to look to the rock from which we were hewn from, that rock or quarry called Abraham, Sarah, Peter, and the apostles, and our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the cornerstone upon whom we stand. Thank you for these solid things from scripture that help us in our perspective. So guide us this hour as we study you with each student. I thank you for each life. Give them the desire of their hearts as they commit themselves more each day to you and follow your voice. For Christ's sake, I pray this. Amen.

Alright, today I want to talk about the famous Emmanuel passage in chapter 7, where even in this judgment, the first half of the book, 1-39, there is hope. There is hope through the coming of what is Emmanuel.

Literally, Emmanuel, that is with us, God. Who was a hope here in chapter 7, which will be our focus today, to Mr. No-Faith, King Ahaz, who would not trust the Lord. And so, in the very next chapter where we read of a child who was born, quite likely, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, was to be, in a sense, that Emmanuel, which was assuring to Ahaz that despite his lack of faith, God would be faithful to the promises of the house of David.

More about that specifically. But it also has a distant hope, a deeper meaning, a *sensus plenior*, as we know, through the ultimate meaning of God with us, as Matthew's Gospel uses that passage. This passage, of course, has been argued and debated considerably in chapter 7, because when the RSV in 1952 came out, it translated Alma, a young woman, where for 350 some odd years, King James translated it Virgin.

What is the correct way to translate this child who would be born and be called Emmanuel? Born from an Alma. The historical background for chapter 7 is Judah, toward the early part of Isaiah's prophetic ministry, is being threatened by a Syro-Ephraimite war. Ahaz was on the throne at this time, because he's the first proper name we read in chapter 7. When Ahaz was on the throne, two kings were getting ready to march up to Jerusalem.

One was King Pekah, who was king of Ephraim, that is, king of Israel, the northern kingdom. And he was in an alliance with Rezan. Rezan was the king of Syria.

So, Judah now, the date is roughly 735. At this time, we know Ahaz's dates are 735-715. So we're talking about those years which are immediately ahead that will lead to the destruction of the northern kingdom.

The juggernaut on the horizon was Assyria, you will recall. And Assyria comes into play here in this seventh chapter. Syria and the northern kingdom had actually formed an alliance against Assyria, and they wanted the southern kingdom to come in as a third.

Syria, Ephraim, and Judah, they hoped. They were determined to bring Ahaz and Judah into their coalition, even if it amounted to removing Ahaz from the throne. When you read ahead here to verse 6, it refers to the son of Tabeel.

We don't know much about that expression, but they had in mind some other king, perhaps coming from the east, coming to be a substitute as a puppet king. Ahaz, of course, would have no part of the coalition. And so, these two allies, Syria and Aram, as Syria is known, A-R-A-M.

So, you have Syria up here, Damascus, its key city, being linked with the whole northern kingdom, Ephraim, or Israel, as it is called, threatening now Judah in the south. Ahaz didn't want to be part of that coalition, and so they were about to march against him, coming up to overpower Jerusalem. In verse 1, where the southern kingdom was under threat of imminent attack from the coalition of Ephraim and Aram, Syria, and the northern kingdom, Isaiah decided he better get ready for a potential attack.

We know everybody was emotionally on edge. Verse 2 says, the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken as the trees of a forest are shaken in the wind. So, they're very nervous.

And the Lord says to Ahaz, go out with your son Shear-Jeshub. Now, keep in mind that he had one son who was already born. Ahaz's wife already had a child.

My suspicion is, and I think this is the most logical way of interpreting this, but not the only one, is that Isaiah's first wife, the one that bore him, Shear-Jeshub, a remnant will return, passed away. And he is going to remarry, and the Alma that he will remarry will bear that son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, who is linked with this name Emmanuel. I'll say more about that momentarily.

So, he is accompanied by his son. He goes out to check the water supply because if there is going to be an invasion, you have to make sure that Hezekiah's water tunnel is working, except Hezekiah hadn't made his water tunnel at this time. So, he had to make sure that other sources of water were working because the water tunnel would not be made for a few more decades.

So, he's out at the aqueduct that was bringing water into the town, and Isaiah comes to him, and he says, be careful, keep calm, don't be afraid, don't lose heart. And then Isaiah describes Pekah and Rezin as two smoldering stumps. In other words, they were two tree stumps, firebrands, and pieces of firewood burning in the forest.

The original translation of the Living Bible gives the contemporary sense that in using the expression, they are have-beens. That is, don't worry about them. They're virtually impotent.

They're just smoking stumps in a forest. So, don't worry about Pekah and Rezin. Now, the prediction is that this is what the Lord says in verse 7: it will not take place; it will not happen.

In other words, Judah is not going to be invaded by this coalition of the two northern kings. But, within 65 years, Ephraim is going to be too shattered to be a people, and Samaria is going to be broken up. And I think the implication here is ethnically broken up.

As many of you know, in Jesus' day, the Samaritans were considered to be half-breeds; they were mongrels, and they were mixed people. Why were they viewed that way by the strict, traditional, orthodox Jews of Jerusalem? Because when the northern kingdom was being attacked by Assyria, from this time on, and after it fell, 721, and the rulers that followed, particularly up to Esarhaddon's time, which takes us to about 670-669, there was a lot of resettling of peoples that came into the region. They came from the far recesses of the Assyrian empire, and they settled in Samaria, in Ephraim, in the northern kingdom.

As the ten northern tribes were deported, and non-Israelite colonists came into the area. That really took place on a very large scale, beginning under Tiglath-Pileser III, which was during Ahaz's reign, and continued big time under Esarhaddon, as I said, from 669 and following, and on. So, ethnically speaking, the northern kingdom was broken up as a people.

It was shattered as a people. Now, the word to Ahaz that's critical here is, don't go with a political alliance, don't go for the power you can see in the flesh by human eye, trust God. There's a wonderful pun here, it's the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 15-6, Abraham believed God.

Comes from the same root as our Habakkuk 2-4 passage, Emunah. Same word from which our Amen word comes, or the word Emet, for truth. Here it carries the idea of being firm, being solid, being steady, and in that way, dig in, trust the Lord.

Isaiah says, if you do not stand firm in your faith, lo ta'aminu, which happens to be a hiphil in Hebrew, which carries the idea of standing solid or firm. He says, if you are not solid or firm in your faith, you will not stand at all. Lo ta'aminu, where here now he uses a niph'al, and where niph'al's are usually passives.

Here, it carries the idea that if you do not stand firm, that is believing and trusting in God, because that's what the word Amen means: to rely on, to trust on, that's your support. If you don't do that, you will not be stood firm or passive; that is, you will not be established in your position. Or to put it very simply, no faith, no fixity, no confiding, no abiding, you're not going to last.

And, of course, our English word confide comes from the Latin fido. So, if you're not going to have faith, you're not going to last, you will not abide, you won't be firmly established and set in your position. So, Ahaz, have faith, trust God, don't worry about this.

Now, Ahaz was weak in faith. Lo ta'aminu, lo ta'aminu. If you will not stand firm, you will not be set in your position and established and you're not going to be lasting.

Ahaz was very weak in faith, so Isaiah begs him to have faith, to trust in this airy thing called theology. Trust the promises of God. This meant belief in Yahweh's faithfulness to his covenant promises to David, which he had given in earlier generations.

In other words, Ahaz, you're not going to be the last person on the throne of David here in the southern kingdom. David's dynasty is going to endure. Do you believe that, Ahaz? That was really pragmatically the question.

Now, Ahaz, of course, didn't care to trust that very abstract thing called theology, to trust God. He wanted to think in his mind of that Assyrian threat, that power, the kind of thing that humans worry about, the thing he could see, rather than believing the promises of God. So, the Lord says to Ahaz, well, look, ask for a sign.

And the Lord offered him a confirmatory sign, anything he might have asked. He said, look, I'll give you a carte blanche, I'll give you a blank check, you name it. It could be anything.

From the deepest depths, anything in the highest heights. That, again, is a merism, M-E-R-I-S-M. We've seen some of these in our study of the prophets.

Where you deal with antonyms or extremes to make a statement of everything being included, great, and tall came into the city. Rich and poor, good and evil, these are merisms which refer to everything.

So, as all-inclusive, he could have asked him for a sign. But Ahaz had made up his mind to go with Syria, so he sort of rejects God flatly here. He wanted to make friends with the biggest of them.

2 Kings 16, verse 7, gives us the background of this passage. 2 Kings 16, starting with verse 5, Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, came up to wage war in Jerusalem. They could not conquer Ahaz.

Because at that time, it says, Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, I'm your servant. So here, Ahaz is telling Tiglath-Pileser, I'm your servant, your son. We're family.

We're in bed together, militarily speaking. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me. Ahaz also went to the First National Bank of Jerusalem and removed, there it is, silver and gold that was being stored in the chambers in the back of the temple.

And he took these treasures and sent these as a matana, as a present/gift, to the king of Assyria. Money talks, and that's what the next verse says here. The king of Assyria hearkened to him.

And the king of Assyria marched up against Damascus and took it. He actually killed Rezin, the text says. And the next thing you read in verse 10 is Ahaz goes up to Damascus to have a conference with the Assyrian king.

So, Ahaz had made up his mind to go with Assyria. Now, the kind of friend that Assyria would prove to be is described in the verses that particularly follow this Immanuel passage from verses 17 to the end, verses 18 to the end. Ahaz was only going to get temporary relief.

This was only a band-aid solution because that was made clear in verse 17, and it's reinforced in verses 18 to 25. Eventually, by 701, which is three decades later, Assyria will come into Judah and overrun the land.

And it's described almost like the soldiers, like bees, verse 18, coming and settling everywhere in the land, in the ravines, in the crevices, in the rocks, in the thorn bushes, in the water holes. And so, they are coming in to attack Judah. And verse 20 says the king of Assyria, who is described as a razor from beyond the river, is coming from Mesopotamia, and he's going to devastate the land.

And notice the three kinds of shaving he's going to do as a razor. To shave the head, to shave the pubic hair, and to shave the beard. All three are mentioned.

Clean sweep. Symbolic of the Assyrian attack that would happen under Sennacherib 701, 46 wild cities of Judah. And they were pounding on the door of Jerusalem at Hezekiah's time, and he was shot in there, as Sennacherib's own annals tell us, like a bird in a cage.

Surrounded. And then you know the story of how God intervened miraculously. This, then, was the Syria, which he only had temporary relief from, in bringing presence, building an alliance with him, fearful of the Rezin and the Pekah alliance.

So, he only got temporary relief. Didn't solve the problem. Now, Ahaz would not put the Lord to the test, verse 12 said.

He would not ask an oath, a sign. And so, Isaiah says, Here now, you, house of David. One of the problems we have with most translations is that you, often in English, are ambiguous.

Is it you singular or you plural? Here, we have you plural. You, house of David. Or verse 14, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign.

You, plural. This you plural seems to imply the house of David. Not just singularly Ahaz.

And what would this sign be? Even though he is trying the patience of the Lord, he would not trust the Lord who is willing to give him a sign. So, he says, alright, Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. And so, Isaiah tells him what this sign will be.

He says, the Alma will be with child, and will give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel. And then immediately goes on to say it will not be but a few years before the land is going to be devastated because the description here is not normal agricultural things being eaten, but curds and honey seems to speak to us of a very simple diet, perhaps the result of the overrunning of the Assyrian army. And by the time this child reaches accountability, perhaps the age of 12 or so, we know from

Pirki Avot in the Mishnah, by the time a child was 13, they were old enough to take upon themselves the commandments.

So perhaps that takes us down to about 721. It talks about the two kings you were dreading are going to be laid waste by that time. And that's true.

By 721, the northern kingdom would fall to Assyria, and Damascus also would be taken captive. But back to verse 14, which I particularly want to focus on now. The question that is often debated about this word Alma, A-L-M-A, sometimes pronounced Alma, is it a virgo intacta? Here, we will use the Latin, an untouched maiden.

Is that implicit in Isaiah's use of the word Alma? Let me make an important linguistic aside here. First of all, there is no word in any language in antiquity that in and of itself means Virgo intacta. All Alma means, the word that's used here, is a young woman of marriageable age.

Presumably, a virgin, but not conclusively so. There simply is no word in the languages of the ancient Near East that is the equivalent of Virgo intacta. Some have argued that the words Betula, B-E-T-H-U-L-A-H, and Betulah are interesting in Michigan. We got Betula, Michigan, and Alma, Michigan.

Betula, King James, is often translated as virgin. And the translators of the King James translated Alma, virgin. The RSV came along in 1952 and said a young woman would conceive.

So, here was part of the so-called theological controversy that a new translation, right after World War II, came up with to challenge the King James Version, which was the predominantly used version in the English-speaking world for such a long period of time. Whether Betula or Alma, which means an unmarried woman or let's take Parthenos, which is used in Matthew 1.23 for the so-called Virgin Mary. In the Septuagint, Parthenos is used for Alma.

Now, I made the point that there is no word in the lexicography of ancient Near Eastern languages which in and of itself means virgo intacta. Alma is used in certain Ugaritic texts, and you can check Ugaritic grammar written by my mentor Cyrus Gordon, where he cites a text where words such as Betula are used for a woman who is already pregnant and having trouble bearing a child. And she is referred to as a Betula.

In Joel 1:8, it seems that Betulah is used for a woman who is married and whose husband went off to war and is suddenly killed. And she is referred to as a Betula. Clearly a married woman.

Now, in the second chapter of Esther, women who are in the harem of King Ahasuerus, the Persian king, who had spent at least one night in the palace with him, according to Esther 2:14, and who were called Betulot, the plural of Betulah, in verses 17 and 19. So, here among his concubine, his harem, women are called Betula. In the case of Parthenos, Parthenos was also sometimes described as a, quote, virgin.

But read the story of Genesis 34. And this is why what the Septuagint does often becomes exceedingly instructive. The context of Genesis 24 is the rape of Jacob's one daughter, whose name was Dinah.

Dinah. Shechem raped Dinah. And this just-raped Dinah is twice called Parthenos in the Septuagint.

Genesis 34:3 and 4. So, the reference to her, she's raped, and she's called Parthenos. So, Parthenos can be used for a rape victim in Genesis. So, Alma, Betula, Parthenos, and there are a couple of other words which I won't go into.

What these words in and of themselves simply mean is a young woman of marriageable age. Presumably a virgin. But when you wanted to make the latter crystal clear, this is where certain set phrases were then introduced.

We have this going back as far as Hammurabi's Law Code. In Law 130. What were these set phrases? These were phrases that clarified the sexual status of Betula, Alma, Parthenos type words.

You begin reading this actually in the Bible. Let's take Rebekah, since Rebekah Black is so big today. Rebekah on the mind.

In chapter 24 of Genesis, Abraham is getting a bride for his son Isaac. How is Rebecca described in Genesis 24:16? It says no man had known her. Now, she's described in verse 16 as a Betula.

That would have been redundant or certainly unnecessary if that was implied in the use of Betula, verse 16. She's described as an Alma, A-L-M-A-H, in verse 43. A young woman of marriageable age.

Or a Na'arah in verses 14 and 28. Three different words are used for her. But her virginity could not be certified by any one of those terms.

That's why, in the narrative, it says no man had known her. Now, if somebody asks me, do I believe in the virgin birth? So, let's fast forward to the New Testament. The answer is yes, I certainly do believe in the virgin birth.



But I do not believe in the virgin birth because of any particular word that is used in the original. But Matthew, like Hammurabi in 1700 B.C., like the Genesis narrative, like other places in the Old Testament, if you want to make that crystal clear about the sexual status of this young woman married to Joseph, then you have to throw in the qualifiers. And indeed, in the New Testament, Matthew has three he throws in.

If you remember the narrative, it says it was before they had come together. She knew not a man, and what's conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. Now, when you put those three qualifiers together, Mary, described as a Parthenos by Matthew, is indeed a Wirgo Intacta. Those qualifiers make it very, very clear that when she conceived Jesus, she was a virgin.

So, when these words, Alma, Betula, Naara, Parthenos, only the context can tell. In Coptic literature, 20% of the words approximately in Coptic are loan words from Greek. And there's an early Coptic text where a man and a woman have been living together for about half a century, and they are called Parthenon, plural, which is interesting.

Our point here, then, is, alright, there are two Emanuels. The immediate Emanuel was the birth of a child to Isaiah in his own day, but there's a double reference to a virgin here. The young woman of marriageable age, presumably, was a second wife of Isaiah; the first one that bore her as sheer Jeshua had died.

And there's a local reference to a woman of Isaiah's own day, perhaps described, as chapter 8 does, that she is the one who gave birth to Maher-Shalah-Hash-Baz, who's described as a prophetess. He said I went to the prophetess. She conceived and gave birth to a son. And then by verse 8, it talks about Emanuel, again, God with us.

And so, it would seem that as Matthew makes use of this particular passage, in the immediate context, the birth of Isaiah's child, if this is the Emanuel, and there are a number of interpretations about this, but assuming that this is Isaiah's own child, this would simply be a foreshadowing then of a greater Emanuel to come. The latter is indeed a virgin birth. Now, in the Catholic Church, there were three things that developed as dogmas about Mary.

Just to show you what the Catholic Church did with this. Well, in your particular religious tradition, you may not accept all three of those, but in Catholic teaching, if you're a bona fide Catholic that accepts the teachings of the Catholic Church, you hold to, first of all, the immaculate conception. That is, Mary is conceived without the stain of original sin in her mother's womb.

Mary herself was immaculately conceived. Secondly, she remains perpetually a virgin, even after the birth of Jesus. This reminds us again that Protestants and Catholics have differences in this.

Protestants would say the children mentioned in Mark 6:3, Jesus' brothers and sisters, were children born after Jesus and were not cousins or to be understood differently as the Catholic tradition does. So, Protestants typically don't argue for the perpetual virginity of Mary. The third was declared in 1950, the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven.

Which is obviously a much, much later teaching about Mary. Now, the first child then is God with us providentially, if you will. In Isaiah's own day, the birth of this first child from this young woman, presumably a virgin, but that's not part of the narrative that's being emphasized here.

Providentially, the defeat of the enemies on the north that Judah was fearing. A has his own people, who are all shaken up and fearful of Rezin and Pekah, would be delivered. As I said, this was only a short-term deliverance.

But the second and deeper meaning of Emmanuel, the *sensus plenior*, is God with us. God with us as Redeemer. God is with us in the incarnation.

God is with us in setting us free from the oppression of sin. The ultimate meaning of God with us. So, I think when we look at the account here, we can say that this is a prophecy of the virgin birth.

But again, for it to have any kind of meaning in Isaiah's own day and to Ahaz, it had to have an immediate birth that would be a sign to Ahaz. If the sign to Ahaz is just something coming seven or eight centuries later, and there are some people who argue that way, I am not convinced that it has a singular and precise meaning. I think rather it has a multiple meaning.

And the final fulfillment of the prophecy, in that ultimate sense, comes in the birth of Jesus where the deeper meaning of that is involved. Alright, do you have any questions? That is how I would develop this particular passage. Yes? Yeah.

I think since Catholic teaching is very dependent upon Augustinian emphasis on original sin, and original sin is transmitted from parent to child, and it's inherited genetically, and as Romans 5 says, there is that first Adam, and in that first Adam, because of the transmission of that sin to every member of the human race, and while to us today sin may be a choice, but it's also something passed down. It's inherited. And I think in Catholic thinking, you would want to preserve Mary from this idea that she was born, in any sense, in a sinful condition.

And so, supernaturally, God protected the womb of her mother so that she had, indeed, this immaculate or clean conception of Mary. But here again, this is a teaching of the church. It's not something derived from biblical exegesis.

And in Catholic thinking, your twin pillars in the church are, you know, Scripture plus tradition. But since the church is a custodian and interpreter of Scripture, these other and additional insights are part of the total way in which Mary has been viewed. Protestants renege because Protestants, on average, last time I checked, do not hold Scripture to be of equal authority compared with Scripture.

And so, therefore, this kind of thing would be questioned. Yeah? I think probably to preserve her, to protect her, out of that world of the ancient Neoplatonic world, where the body is either the source of evil or the material world is inferior to the spiritual world. So, out of that world of thinking, to remove one from this veil of tears, from possible corruption and other things, to remove that one to heaven, would keep that one pristine and pure.

So, I suspect that was, in large, the thinking behind it. It was declared as dogma in 1950, which simply means in the tradition of the church, the church is in a position if there is one holy apostolic and catholic church, the church can continue to make other declarations as it deems it wants to make about a variety of things. And so, how we interpret Scripture, Protestants have fought since 1517 for the priesthood of the believer and the right to individually interpret Scripture through the Holy Spirit.

And that, of course, was in stark contrast to the catholic church that gave the official understanding of Scripture, for lay people who really were not qualified at that time. The catholic church has made a lot of growth in encouraging lay people to study the Scriptures on their own.

At the time of Martin Luther, everything was in ecclesiastical Latin and it was difficult and the priests handled the Latin, but the average person, theologically speaking, was not competent in a lot of these ecclesiastical sources that for a thousand years defined theology. So today, it's certainly refreshing that Catholics themselves are reading Scripture more and involved in this process of understanding. All right, I think that will be it for today.

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