

Isaiah Session 5: Isaiah Chapters 7 and 8

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. John Oswalt covers Isaiah chapters 7 and 8, examining the critical decision of King Ahaz regarding whether to trust God or rely on an alliance with Assyria during the Syro-Ephraimite crisis. Dr. Oswalt unpacks the dual-fulfillment prophecy of the Immanuel sign, clarifying the linguistic nuance of the Hebrew word *alma* and its implications for both the immediate historical context and the ultimate virgin birth. The session also addresses the dangers of human fear and conspiracy theories, challenging believers to sanctify the Lord of Hosts as their ultimate sanctuary rather than falling into spiritual darkness.

Outline

I. Introduction and Structural Placement

- A. Introductory prayer focusing on being shaped by God's character and nature.
- B. Reversal of upcoming session dates (No session October 29th; Session 7/8 continued on November 5th studying Chapters 13 and 14).
- C. Structure of Division 2 (Isaiah Chapters 7-39): Trust as the basis of servanthood.
 - 1. No one can become a servant of someone they do not trust.
 - 2. Follows the model of Chapter 6 as a revelation of God and of self.
 - 3. Sub-section 7:1-12:6 represents 'no trust' under King Ahaz, mirroring the exam Hezekiah passes in Chapters 36-39.
 - 4. Sub-section Chapters 13-35 represents 'programmed learning' lessons in trust.
 - 5. Chapter 7:1 to 9:7 centers on children as signs of the promise (Immanuel in Ch. 7, Maher-Shalal-Hashbaz in Ch. 8, the child in Ch. 9).

II. Historical Context: The Syro-Ephraimite Crisis (735 BC)

- A. The Assyrian expansion toward Egypt paring down the Northern Kingdom.
- B. The anti-Assyrian coalition of Syria and Israel (Ephraim).
 - 1. Attempt to force Judah (ruled by King Ahaz) into the alliance.
 - 2. Ahaz's reluctance: Caught between fear of Assyrian terror and fear of the coalition.
- C. The conspiracy to depose Ahaz in favor of Tabe'el (the 'goodness of God').

D. Ahaz's secret fallback option: Collecting treasure to bribe Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria to attack Syria and Israel.

1. The absurdity of hiring a dangerous predator (the metaphor of mice hiring a cat).

III. The Encounter at the Conduit (Isaiah 7:1-17)

A. The precise location of the encounter: The conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the washer's field.

1. Same location where 34 years later the Assyrian Rabshakeh demands Hezekiah's surrender.
2. Highlights the contrast between Ahaz's refusal to trust and Hezekiah's trust.

B. The symbolic presence of Shear-Yashub ('Only a remnant will return').

1. Symbolic object lesson acting as a double-sided prophecy (good news for the remnant, bad news for the rest).
2. Theological tension: Divine foreknowledge versus human freedom.

C. The four divine imperatives to Ahaz: Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, do not let your heart faint.

1. Identifying fear and anxiety as the root causes of sin (dating back to the snake's attack on God's trustworthiness in the Garden).
2. The danger of comfortable modern living obscuring the daily necessity of trusting God.

IV. The Rejection of the Sign and the Immanuel Prophecy

A. God's offer of a sign as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.

B. Ahaz's refusal of the sign under a cover of false piety ('I will not put the Lord to the test').

1. False piety as a mechanism to avoid putting oneself in a risky position where God must show up.

C. The pronouncement of the Immanuel Sign (7:14-17).

1. Linguistic analysis of Hebrew terms for young woman: Na'arah (young woman), Betula (strict virgin), and Alma (maiden of marriageable age).
2. Isaiah's deliberate selection of 'Alma' to encompass a double significance.
3. Immediate 13-year fulfillment: Before a child conceived then reaches the age of moral accountability (12-13 years old), Damascus (732 BC) and Samaria (722 BC) will be deserted.
4. Ultimate fulfillment: Reflected in the Greek translation's (Septuagint) use of the specific word for virgin, realized in the virgin birth of Jesus.
5. Immanuel as a double-edged razor: A sanctuary for those who walk with Him, but a drunken razor of judgment for those who reject Him.

V. The Threat of Maher-Shalal-Hashbaz and the Warning against Fear (Isaiah 8)

A. Short-term fulfillment: Isaiah's union with the 'prophetess' producing a son named Maher-Shalal-Hashbaz ('The spoil speeds, the prey hastens').

B. The divine warning to Isaiah: Do not walk in the way of this people.

1. Rejecting the cultural obsession with conspiracy theories.

2. Recognizing that history is not controlled in back rooms but is ultimately governed by God.

C. Sanctifying the Lord of Hosts.

1. Definition of 'Lord of Hosts': Lord of Heaven's armies, ruling over all history.
2. Meaning of 'regarding Him as holy': Treating Him as the transcendent ruler rather than a small god designed to make our prayers come true.
3. Substituting the fear of global disasters with a healthy fear of displeasing or offending God.

D. The dual nature of God: Sanctuary and Snare.

1. Sanctuary for those who go His way; a snare for those who fly in His face.

E. The dark reality of rejecting God's word.

1. Seeking counsel from mediums and necromancers who chirp and mutter.
2. The inevitable outcome of rejecting the Torah: Distress, hunger, rage, and being thrust into thick darkness (post-modern meaninglessness).