
Day 180 - June 29

The Divided Kingdom (930-725 BCE)

Isaiah Prophecies about a Savior

Readings: *Isaiah 7:1-9:21*

Reflections:

- Here in Isaiah we see some historical data mixed in with Isaiah's prophecies. Ahaz, king of Judah, Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah, king of Israel all march against Jerusalem but are unable to conquer it. Ahaz is confronted for aligning his forces with such an evil mission.
- When Isaiah and his son are told to go talk to Ahaz, God must encourage them. "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid." Many times doing the right thing requires great courage. These words of encouragement for Isaiah are good words for any person who is confronting something that is wrong or someone who is in the wrong.
- In God's first words we discover a powerful truth, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all." In other words, you must place all of your effort into remaining well grounded in your dependence and confidence in God. If you fail to remain deeply rooted in your relationship and trust in God, fear will overtake you and you will start to try to save yourself. In that self-saving effort, you will begin to trust people or trust your own schemes to provide you safety. These people or schemes actually don't save you but set you up for a big failure. If you stand in your faith in God, you will stand in the day of struggle. If you do not remain rooted in your faith in God, you will stumble and fall." This caution is again an important word of wisdom for anyone who is struggling and in that struggle, tempted to be their own savior.
- God wants to strengthen Ahaz and so he asks Ahaz to ask for a sign. A sign is typically a natural event that occurs in a divinely appointed time. This event because of its timing or setting gives those that see it a very clear picture of a truth. For example, the Messiah being born in a manger was a sign to the shepherds. It was a sign that the king would be a king of humility and a king of the poor. There was nothing miraculous about this "sign." It was just a picture that revealed a deeper truth. Isaiah asks Ahaz to ask God for a sign. No doubt this request was an invitation for Ahaz to seek God and seek his perspective on Ahaz's situation. Ahaz rejects this request and wrongly views this form of seeking God as somehow testing God. What is fascinating is that Ahaz was testing God's

patience grace by willfully disobeying him. Yet in this moment, he claims that he doesn't want to test God. This is clearly an excuse, a cover for a heart that is rebellious.

- Isaiah's response is to confront Ahaz with the coming king. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: the virgin (or young woman) will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel (or 'God with us'). He will eat curds and honey (food of a prophet) when he knows enough to reject wrong and choose right." In other words, God is going to give the nation a sign. A young woman, the reader can assume is a virgin, will conceive of a child by God and this child will somehow be a unique expression of God himself being with us. This child will at the age of seven or eight be fully conscious of being called by God and will express the full calling of a prophet at the youngest of ages. This sign itself is very offensive to the religious sensibilities of Israel. God making a girl pregnant? God conceiving a divine child? This child somehow causing God to become human? This all comes right out of the mythology of ancient paganism. It would be a complete slap in the face to everything the Israelites would have thought appropriate for God. Now, they were living in complete paganism and so it was if God was breaking into their world to say, "You want that kind of craziness? I'll give you craziness!"
- Once Isaiah gives this prophecy he immediately rolls back the clock and begins to outline the judgment that will take place prior to this sign being given. The judgment is something that echoes many of the prophecies that the reader has already encountered. Another fascinating event is that while this prophecy is being clearly articulated, a prophetess conceives of a child as a sign to the nation. It is not the coming king but in some way it confirms and points to the coming child that will be born. This child though is a child that symbolizes the judgment on the nation. We will see this kind of parallel happening at other times in Scripture. A prophecy is fulfilled in some limited way in the immediate situation but remains unfulfilled in its fullness until the coming of the Messiah.
- Key verse: "The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear... and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel (north and south) he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." This final part of this verse is applied to Jesus as his whole approach caused the proud and religious to stumble – Romans 9:32.
- "Here I am, and the children the Lord has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty...." It was not uncommon for the lives of the prophets to become signs to the people of God (e.g. Hosea marries a prostitute).
- Isaiah 9:1-7 is one of the key passages applied to the birth and life of Jesus. "He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." It is hard not to see how this prophecy points to the Messiah being the actual presence of God with us, Immanuel. The title "prince of peace" again underscores the role this Messiah will play in revealing to all of his followers the way of peace.

- Following this incredible passage of hope, Isaiah returns to the theme of announcing God's judgment. How horrible it is! "Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring." It doesn't get much worse than this. These stark contrasts heighten the reader's deep longing for the day of Messiah, the coming king who will set all wrongs right. As we look back, all we can say is thank God for Jesus!