

Isaiah 6-12

BACKGROUND

- The Hebrew word used in Isa 7:14, *alma*, refers to a young woman of marriageable age. Alec Motyer argues the minority view that Isaiah intended a sexually chaste woman, since other uses of *alma* in the OT seem to be consistent with that meaning.¹ The closest English equivalent is “girl”, a word which presumes rather than states virginity and not used of those who are married. Interestingly, the Septuagint translates *alma* as *parthenos*, “virgin,” prompting Beale and Carson to write, “This would suggest that already before the NT age at least some Jews had come to link the passages in Isa 7-9 together and to deduce that there would be an additional, longer-term fulfillment of the birth of a messianic king, portended by a more supernatural conception.” Despite the LXX’s use of *parthenos*, Jerome writes in the 4th/5th century that the Jews objected to Christian apologetics specifically saying *alma* need not be a virgin.²
- *Historical context*: “Threatened by Assyrian expansion, Ephraim and Aram had formed an alliance and when Judah seemed disinclined to join started exerting pressure (2 Ki 15:37) to achieve a defensive, anti-Assyrian united front of Palestinian states. This led to a large-scale invasion (2 Ch 28:5-8), but in spite of much success the Assyrians were not able to take Jerusalem... Ahaz was under pressure from his advisers to play the astute politician by allying himself with Assyria against the threat of the northern powers (2 Ki 16:7-9)... If only Ahaz could be persuaded to do nothing, to keep clear of compromising alliances, the Lord could be trusted to keep his promises to David and to deal with the Assyrian threat...”

QUESTIONS

- 1) The birth of Immanuel is given as a sign (Isa 7:14). Is it a good sign or bad?
- 2) Isaiah is told to prophesy, but also to “make the hearts of the people calloused and their ears dull” (6:10). One interpretation of this is:

Every time you hear the Word of God preached, you come away from that exposure to his truth either a little closer to God or a little further away from God, either more softened toward God or a little further away from God. But you are never just the same.³

Does this interpretation work? In what areas of your life are you in danger of a hardened heart?

- 3) Who are the virgin and son prophesied in Isa 7:14? (Read Isa

7:12-17; 8:1-8; 8:18; 9:1-7, 11:1-5.) Here are some possibilities:

- a) *Ahaz’s wife and her son, king Hezekiah*. This is found in post-Christian Jewish sources, likely reflecting an earlier Jewish



The Tree of Jesse (cf. Isa 11:10), c. 1520, by “Master James IV of Scotland.”

A tree grows out of Jesse, with OT kings in its branches (David with a harp). Mary and Jesus are at the apex. (The Getty)

¹ D. A. Carson agrees in *For the Love of God*, Vol. 2, May 9.

² Theophylact, writing in the 12th century, asserts that if Isaiah didn’t mean “virgin”, it wouldn’t have been so impressive a sign.

³ Raymond C. Ortlund, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners* (Crossway) p. 81.

interpretation⁴. Hezekiah was seen in some quarters as a type of the Messiah.⁵

b) *Zion and a faithful remnant.*⁶

c) *Isaiah's wife and their son Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.* [Motyer: Why wasn't he named "Immanuel"? C&B: He is called that, in 8:8.⁷]

d) *Mary and Jesus only.*⁸ After all, this child is tied to passages like 9:6, which are clearly messianic, and there is no child in Isaiah's time who was called Immanuel. [C&B: But what about the prediction of the fall of Israel and Aram in 7:16?]

Is the child of Isa 9:6 the same as that of 7:14 and 8:3-4?

- 4) Judah is heading into a very dark time (9:2a). They are told in 8:16-22 to comfort themselves two ways. What are they? How did Jesus' birth (life?) function like that of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz's? What future hope is given in 9:6-8? Motyer writes, "So certain was Isaiah of coming events that he was prepared for the word to 'become flesh' in the person of his first son. Shear-Jashub was thus an 'acted oracle', a visual aid bringing home the word of God that much more clearly." [81] Does Jesus ever serve the same role for us?
- 5) What type of hermeneutic is used by the NT authors in the following passages? (See handout on the NT's use of the OT.)
 - a) Isa 7:14—"The virgin will be with child...and will call him Immanuel," and Mt 1:23
 - b) Isa 9:1-2—"the people living in darkness have seen a great light" and Mt 4:15-16
 - c) Isa 6:9-10—"Be every hearing but never understanding," and Mt 13:14-15
 - d) Isa 8:12—"Do not call conspiracy..." and 1 Pet 3:14-15
- 6) The NT authors are widely regarded as interpreting the OT with techniques typical of 1st-century Jewish interpretation. Of this, Carson and Beale write:

One must conclude that either the exegetical techniques and hermeneutical assumptions do not determine very much after all or else that there are additional factors that need careful probing if we are to explain why, say, Hillel and Paul read the Hebrew Scriptures (or their Greek translations) so differently.

Discuss.

- 7) Beale points out that the people are blind, fat and heartless (Isa 6:9-10), just as the idols they insisted on turning to. How do you see yourself, or others, taking on the appearance of your idols?
- 8) Ahaz is in a very frightening situation, threatened by two nearby kingdoms and by a more distant and much larger Assyria (cf. ch. 7). He wants to play the larger against the smaller ones by courting Assyria, but is told not to. Isaiah tells him, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all" (7:9b).

⁴ Beale and Carson [C&B], *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker Academic) p. 4.

⁵ The Jerome commentary gives this interpretation.

⁶ Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah* (IVP) p. 63.

⁷ Mary points out that the age of the child for the sign of Immanuel is the age of accountability (7:14; 12 years?), and the age of the sign of M'baz is that necessary to say "my father" and "my mother" (8:3)—no older than two, surely. But, see Motyer's explanation, pp. 85-87.

⁸ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP) p. 84-85.

Can you recall a situation where you knew the right way to go but feared it? Or times when survival meant leaning on God rather than something or someone else?

- 9) *Extra credit:* Christians often repudiate the American obsession with rights, pointing out we have no rights, only God's mercy. Please explain, then, Isa 10:1-2.



Fun fact #1: In Mt 13:10-17 Jesus uses Isa 6:9-10 to explain why he didn't unpack his parables for everyone the way he did for his disciples. In doing so, Jesus uses (Mt 13:14) the Greek word *anapleroo*, which means "completely fulfills"—i.e., with the rejection of Jesus by his people, Isaiah's prophecy reached totality.

Fun fact #2: The ancient text of the Hebrew Bible generally considered the best is the medieval Masoretic. "The Isaiah scroll from Qumran [the home of the Dead Sea Scrolls], one of the largest and most complete scrolls there are, provides us with a text of that prophetic book which is literally hundred of years earlier than the Hebrew text of the Masoretes from the early Middle Ages. It is interesting, and some would say inexplicable, why *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* has not done a more thorough revision of its text of Isaiah on the basis of this much earlier manuscript." —Ben Witherington's blog