

CHRIST IN THE PSALMS AND PROPHETS

December 11, 2022 | *Christ, The Sign of Our Deliverance*

SERIES PREVIEW

Last year, Oakwood small groups studied the life of Jesus. One of the things we learned was that Jesus's life was part of a larger story that began long before He was born and will continue until after He comes again. All of human history centers on the man we profess to be the savior of the world. It is not surprising that Christians following Christ's ascension continue to define our lives in terms of Jesus's story. What may be surprising to many is that the generations before Christ's birth looked forward to His coming. This series will examine eight Old Testament passages that anticipate the first coming of Christ. Each lesson will identify the main idea of the passage and give special consideration to how the passage points to the first coming of Christ. May this series prepare your heart to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

PREPARATION

GETTING READY

What Scripture passages do you most often hear at Christmas (think Old and New Testament)?

Read Isaiah 7:1–16.

Ask God to help you see when you are exchanging His deliverance for something less.

THIS WEEK

KEY BIBLICAL TRUTH

God is a surer source of deliverance than anything this world can provide.

THEOLOGY APPLIED

God has provided deliverance from sin through His Son, Jesus Christ.

MEDITATE

“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14).

GETTING STARTED

+This section will introduce the main idea of the lesson and the passage's connection to Christ.

❓: *Why are Christians more cognizant of the Old Testament's witness to Christ at Christmas than at other times of the year?*

❓: *Can you describe a time when you were saved by either a person, a device, or a circumstance?*

Christmas is a time when Christians celebrate the birth of Christ. More so than during the rest of the year, we are aware of the Old Testament's witness concerning His coming because our minds are drawn to the verses that anticipate His birth. One verse we frequently encounter is Isaiah 7:14 because it is quoted in Matthew 1:23. In this verse, Matthew declared that Jesus's birth fulfilled Isaiah 7:14 because He was born of a virgin, and His coming meant God was now with His people. But Isaiah 7:14 is not an isolated verse that floated around until Matthew applied it to the birth of Jesus. These words are part of an amazing message promising God's deliverance of His people. Understanding the entire message that Isaiah 7:14 is a part of will help us appreciate what Matthew was doing when he applied this verse to the birth of Jesus.

As we explore Isaiah 7:1–16, we will see that the main idea of this passage is “trusting God over other forms of deliverance.” This was a crucial theme during the times of Isaiah and Matthew. It is a crucial theme for our time as well.

❓: *What do you need to be delivered from?*

❓: *How is your need for deliverance different but similar to that of the audiences of Isaiah and Matthew?*

APPLICATION POINT – Isaiah 7:1–16 and Matthew 1:23 anticipate God's deliverance of His people. Their audiences needed deliverance from foreign powers and their own covenantal failures. It is unlikely that we share their need for deliverance from a foreign power, but we do need deliverance from our own sins against God. Romans 3:23 declares that everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. This means everyone—regardless of social, economic, or any other status—needs to be delivered from the grip of sin. Isaiah speaks to us from his

own time to tell us to look to God for deliverance. Our temptation is to look for deliverance somewhere other than God, but as was the case for Isaiah's audience, this will never work.

■ UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

+This passage begins with a sketch of the historical situation in which the prophecy was given (Isaiah 7:1–2) followed by God's instructions to Isaiah (Isaiah 7:3–9). The Lord, presumably using Isaiah as His mouthpiece, then declared the sign of Immanuel to the king (Isaiah 7:10–16). This lesson will consider the historical situation and God's instructions to Isaiah together and then consider the sign of Immanuel.

1. ISAIAH'S SITUATION

2. ISAIAH'S SIGN

GOING DEEPER

+This section will discuss the meaning of Isaiah 7:1–9 and 7:10–16 and draw applications from it for our times.

1. ISAIAH'S SITUATION

■ ISAIAH 7:1–9 AND 2 KINGS 16

Q: *What kind of king [good or evil] was Ahaz?*

Q: *Where did Ahaz seek deliverance from the Syria-Ephraim alliance?*

The context of Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy is the Syria-Ephraim alliance's threat to the nation of Judah. Syria, located to the northwest of Israel, was a frequent adversary to Israel and Judah during the eighth and ninth centuries B.C. Ephraim is another name for the Northern Kingdom of Israel after the nation split. Where the Southern Kingdom of Judah was occasionally faithful to God, Ephraim was never faithful to the covenant with God, even despite frequent prophetic activity. During Isaiah's time, the king of Ephraim, Pekahiah, was assassinated by

one of his captains, Pekah, who then became king of Ephraim (2 Kings 15:23–26). Pekah formed an alliance with Syria in order to withstand the threat of Assyria, which was the superpower of the ancient Near East at the time. The Syria-Ephraim alliance attempted to gather other nearby nations, including Judah, to help them stand against Assyria, but when Ahaz, king of Judah, refused to join them, they attacked Judah with the intent of replacing Ahaz with a king who would bow to their wishes (Isaiah 7:6).

Ahaz realized Judah was overmatched against the Syria-Ephraim alliance. Isaiah says Ahaz’s heart shook as a tree in the wind (Isaiah 7:2). To find deliverance from this alliance, Ahaz went to Assyria, the nation Syria and Ephraim were afraid of, to beg for help (2 Kings 16:5–9). Isaiah opposed his plan. Although the need for deliverance was obvious, Isaiah believed Judah must look to God for deliverance rather than Assyria. Consorting with Assyria would only increase the nation’s spiritual decay.

❓: *Why is it more appealing to find our own solutions to our problems than trust in God?*

❓: *Can you describe a time when your solution to a problem only made things worse?*

APPLICATION POINT –When we encounter challenges and need deliverance, we often think like Ahaz did. Our first instinct is to scheme to find our own way of deliverance. The problem when we rely on ourselves is that our sinful hearts often lead to sinful decisions that make matters worse for us, not better. Our instinct is to solve unrighteousness with unrighteousness. We justify our own unrighteousness by thinking it was needed to solve the problems we were facing. Isaiah’s message for us would be the same as it was for Ahaz. Do not look within yourself for deliverance. Do not trust in others for deliverance. Our only hope is to look to God for the deliverance we need. He should be our first instinct when we need to be delivered from any situation or out of any sin.

❓: *Who did God tell Isaiah to take with him when he confronted Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3)?*

❓: *What does Isaiah’s son’s name mean?*

Before turning to the sign of Immanuel, a few more details concerning Isaiah’s confrontation with Ahaz will be helpful to discuss. God instructed Isaiah to take his son Shear-jashub with him to confront Ahab (Isaiah 7:3).

Shear-jashub is not mentioned in the remainder of the narrative. It does not seem as though he had an active role in the encounter. Why did God tell Isaiah to bring him? The key is the meaning of the boy's name. "Shear-jashub" means "a remnant shall return," an allusion to the exile of Judah. A remnant of Judah would return from exile. There are two sides of his name. Knowing a remnant would return from exile would provide hope for a people facing or in the midst of exile, but before the exile took place, the name would also be a warning or condemnation to all who knew the boy. Isaiah proclaimed God's willingness to deliver Judah from the Syrian-Ephraim alliance (though Ahaz did not listen), but Shear-jashub's presence would have warned Ahaz of the limits of God's deliverance. God would work in their favor this time, but they should not assume this would always be the case. There would be a time in the future when God would work against the sinful nation. They needed to repent while God continued to look on them with favor.

❓: *Why do we often assume current prosperity indicates God's pleasure with us?*

❓: *Why would God deliver Judah in this situation even though He planned to exile them in the future? What does this reveal about God's character?*

APPLICATION POINT – It would be natural to assume that God's deliverance from a situation implies His approval, but Isaiah's confrontation with Ahaz reveals this is not the case. God was willing to deliver Ahaz from the Syria-Ephraim alliance, but He certainly did not approve of Ahaz. Ahaz was an extremely wicked king. His wickedness and the wickedness of several kings after him is what would lead to Judah's exile. God is gracious to be patient with us to repent, but there will come a time when the opportunity for repentance is over. We should never make the mistake of thinking our deliverance out of a situation or a life of relative ease is a sign of our righteousness. Our righteousness is not determined by our circumstances but by our obedience to God.

❓: *What did God say would come of the Syria-Ephraim alliance?*

❓: *What warning did Isaiah give Ahaz after he said the alliance would not stand?*

God declared through Isaiah that the Syria-Ephraim alliance would not stand because both nations would be defeated and abolished within sixty-five years. The duration of sixty-five years would not mean much to Ahaz or the rest of the royal family in the moment. That was plenty of time for the alliance to gain victory over them. But God's declaration implied that the alliance posed no real threat to Judah. Even though the odds seemed insurmountable, the danger would not last, just as the nations would not last. There would be no real threat to

Judah if Ahaz would trust in God. This is a remarkable revelation of God's providence. Although the kings of Syria and Ephraim thought they were gaining control of their own fates by forming this alliance, nothing they could do would stop their downfall because God had ordained it.

♀: *How does God's providence give us confidence regarding His deliverance of us?*

♀: *How does God's providence underline the insufficiency of our attempts to find deliverance on our own?*

APPLICATION POINT – Life happens to us moment by moment. We can plan for the future, but even the most strategic plans often come to nothing. That is why we are so bad at trying to deliver ourselves. We need a surer hope of deliverance, and God's providence provides us with that hope. Nothing takes God by surprise. No matter what challenges we face or what circumstances arise, we can have confidence knowing God is in control. If He ordains our deliverance from a situation, nothing can override His will.

2. ISAIAH'S SIGN

☒ ISAIAH 7:10–16, MATTHEW 1:18–25

♀: *How did Ahaz respond when he was told to ask for a sign from God?*

♀: *Do you think Ahaz was being pious or disobedient in his response?*

The Lord directed Ahaz, again presumably through the mouth of Isaiah, to ask for a sign. Before getting to the details of this sign and how it is related to the first coming of Christ, it is important to consider Ahaz's response. Ahaz refused to ask for a sign because he would not put God to the test (Isaiah 7:12). At first glance, his refusal seems pious. He was alluding to Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." But even a cursory consideration of the context exposes his piety as completely false. He was a wicked, idolatrous king (2 Kings 16:1–4). He did not want a sign from God because he did not want any reason to trust God. He wanted to trust Assyria instead. Furthermore, it is God who demanded he ask for a sign. Refusing to do so would seemingly test God more than following His command. Finally, God lamented Ahaz's refusal as wearisome (Isaiah 7:13). His

refusal to ask God for a sign was false piety at its worst.

❓: *Why do people think they can get away with false piety?*

❓: *How does false piety multiply one sin with another?*

APPLICATION POINT –False piety reveals a lot about what a person thinks about God. It emerges either from a heart seeking to impress others rather than God or from thinking God will not know the difference. In the first instance, the person denies God’s worthiness of such devotion and idolizes the opinion of others. In the second, the person denies God’s ability to truly examine the human heart. God will not allow either attitude to remain long. You may fool others, but you will not fool God. He can see through false piety. Oddly, false piety multiplies transgressions because not only are you not pious, but you are also adding sin by trying to appear pious. If you struggle with false piety, the key is to follow Jesus’s suggestion in Matthew 6:6, the practice of prayer and Bible reading in private.

❓: *How does the birth of the child correspond to God’s deliverance of Judah from the Syria-Ephraim alliance?*

❓: *In what ways were the circumstances surrounding Jesus’s birth like the circumstances surrounding the Syria-Ephraim alliance?*

The sign Isaiah gave Ahaz is the birth of a child (Isaiah 7:14). Before the child learned right from wrong (Isaiah 7:15), the threat would be over and the two kingdoms would be no more. Even though Ahaz refused to trust God, Isaiah’s prophecy came to pass. The kingdoms of Syria and Ephraim lasted only twelve to fifteen more years before they were conquered and dispersed by Assyria. Isaiah 7:14 has often been taken as a prediction of the birth of Christ. This interpretation stems from a quotation of this verse in the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 1:22–23 says, “All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.” Since Matthew said the birth of Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s words, Isaiah must have been predicting the birth of Christ.

There are difficulties with this interpretation, however, that may lead us away from this explanation of Isaiah 7:14. First, taking Isaiah 7:14 as a prediction of Christ’s birth does not fit well with the context of Isaiah 7:1–16. This

passage is about the Syria-Ephraim alliance and how Ahaz would respond. The birth of the child mentioned in Isaiah 7:14 was supposed to be a sign to Ahaz to trust God for deliverance from the alliance rather than relying on help from Assyria. Isaiah did not seem to think he was making a prediction of the birth of Christ that would occur hundreds of years later. Instead, he seemed to be giving a tangible sign of God's faithfulness to Ahaz. Second, the birth of this child appears to coincide with the downfall of Syria and Ephraim and the deliverance God promised for Judah (Isaiah 7:16). This would not be the case if these words were a prediction of the birth of Jesus hundreds of years later. Finally, the key for identifying Isaiah 7:14 with Jesus is the word "virgin." Who else could possibly fit this criterion except Christ, who was born of the virgin Mary? The problem is that the Hebrew term *almah*, which underlies the translation "virgin," does not emphasize a girl's virginity. Instead, the term emphasizes that a girl had reached child-bearing age. It refers to a young woman who was capable of bearing a child. Thus, "virgin" is not really a suitable translation. Even if an *almah* was a virgin, it would have been understood she was no longer a virgin once she gave birth to the child Isaiah predicted.

If Isaiah 7:14 was not a prediction of Christ's birth, why does Matthew say Christ's birth fulfills Isaiah 7:14? The key to understanding Matthew is understanding what he meant by "fulfillment." The word "fulfill" does not have to refer only to prophetic predictions coming to fruition. "Fulfill" can also refer to an event or person that follows a previously established pattern. This is typological fulfillment. And it appears that in his account of Jesus's birth, Matthew was mostly concerned with showing how Jesus fulfilled types and patterns found in the Old Testament. Matthew's concern for typological fulfillment in the birth narrative is most clearly seen in Matthew 2:18, which says the slaughter of baby boys around Bethlehem at King Herod's command fulfilled Jeremiah 31:15. Jeremiah 31:15 is not a predictive prophecy at all but rather a lamentation of the destruction of Israel. Matthew saw a pattern that began with the death of Jewish children during the exile and was then fulfilled by the death of Jewish children at the time of Jesus.

What pattern did Matthew see in Isaiah 7:14 that was fulfilled by Jesus's birth? In Isaiah's day, God's people were being threatened by a foreign power (the Syria-Ephraim alliance). To make matters worse, they were ruled by a wicked king (Ahaz) who refused to receive God's word. Isaiah foresaw their deliverance and tied their deliverance to the birth of a son from a young woman. This woman's son would be a sign of God's faithful presence with the people, and thus he would be called Immanuel. In Jesus's day, God's people were being threatened by a foreign power (Rome) and ruled by a wicked king (Herod) who refused to listen to God's word. Just as in Isaiah's day, God would deliver His people, and His deliverance would be tied to the birth of a son from a young woman. The birth of this son was a sign of God's deliverance and His presence with His people, and He could thus be known as Immanuel. Unlike Isaiah's day, however, the child born would not be a sign of God's deliverance; instead, He would be the means by which God would bring deliverance. Furthermore, unlike Isaiah's day, the child born would not just be a sign of God's presence but, as Jesus is the Son of God, He would be God's presence with His people. Finally, Matthew affirmed that Christ was born from a virgin (Matthew 1:18–25), which was not the case for Isaiah. Remarkably, the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament that Matthew used, translated *almah* with the Greek word *parthenos*, which does mean "virgin." Thus, Matthew had a translation of

Isaiah 7:14 that highlighted the typological correspondence he was seeking.

Matthew saw that Christ fulfilled a pattern that began in the Old Testament in a new and more meaningful way. Christ's story does not begin in the New Testament. It can be traced back to the Old. Matthew's audience could trust the deliverance Jesus provided just as Isaiah's audience could trust the deliverance the child was a sign of.

Q: *How might a typological fulfillment between Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23 offer us a more meaningful application than a prediction fulfillment?*

Q: *How does Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14 further highlight the emphasis on God's providence in Isaiah 7:1-16?*

APPLICATION POINT – In Isaiah's time, the king should have trusted God to deliver him from the foreign alliance seeking to destroy him. In a similar way, Matthew wanted his audience to know that the ultimate deliverance they needed could be found in Jesus Christ. They did not need to look anywhere else for deliverance from sin and death. This is a crucial point for people today to understand. We should never look inside of ourselves for deliverance or to any other false savior the world offers. Our hope must be found in Christ Jesus. Just as God was faithful to deliver His people during the time of Isaiah, He will be faithful to deliver everyone who seeks deliverance from sin and death in Jesus Christ. Do not look anywhere else for salvation. Do not reject the Savior God has given us.

NEXT STEPS

Ahaz wanted to secure his own deliverance rather than trusting in God. Today, we are tempted to replace the deliverance offered to us in Jesus Christ with other worldly things. Some people think money will deliver them from life's trials. Others seek thrills or throw themselves into work. How are you tempted to replace the deliverance offered in Christ? Sometimes, we are blind to how we do this. It may be helpful to have this conversation with a trusted friend.



PRAY

+Use these prayer points to instill the lessons you learned from God's Word this week.

God, thank you for being a constant source of deliverance in my life.

Jesus, all of history revolves around you. Help me to understand my story in relation to you.

Father, forgive me for the times I have failed to trust you for salvation. Help me to trust in your deliverance in the future.