

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER SEVEN THE VIRGIN'S SON

“And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up toward Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. And it was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind. Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shearjashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller’s field; and say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established” (verses 1-9).

WE ARE now to consider a portion which has been the subject of endless controversy throughout the Christian centuries, but which the Holy Spirit makes clear to those who are ready to receive His testimony, because of the way in which this scripture is used in connection with the birth of our blessed Lord. During the reign of King Ahaz, the grandson of Uzziah, war broke out between Judah and Israel. Pekah, the son of Remaliah, who was king of Israel, entered into a confederacy with Rezin, king of Syria; and these together went up to besiege Jerusalem. Though the siege lasted for some time, they were unable to subjugate the holy city. When Ahaz learned of the confederacy against him, his heart and the heart of his people were moved with fear, for Ahaz had walked in the ways of the kings of Israel rather than in those of the house of David. He had, therefore, little or no reason to expect divine help against his foes. But God’s heart was toward the people of Judah, for the time had not yet come to deliver them up to their enemies.

There had been quite a measure of return to the Lord during the days of Jotham, the father of Ahaz, and God heard the prayers of His almost distracted people and sent the prophet Isaiah to meet Ahaz and give him a word of encouragement.

Isaiah took with him his son Shear-jashub, whose name meant, “*The remnant shall return.*” All of Isaiah’s children seemed to have been named prophetically in order that they might be signs to the people of Judah.

The message that came to Ahaz was one of trust and comfort. He was exhorted to take heed and be quiet, to fear not nor be fainthearted, because of the two kings who had linked their forces against him. In the sight of God they were but as two smoking firebrands soon to be extinguished. Their own wickedness and ungodliness was such that the Lord was about to deal with them in judgment; and, therefore, would not permit them to overcome Judah or subdue Jerusalem. It was in vain that they took counsel together against Ahaz and his people, and sought to make a breach in the defenses of Jerusalem. The Lord God declared that their counsel should not stand nor come to pass, but that within a definite period of sixty-five years Ephraim’s power would be utterly broken; they would be no longer a people, and Syria would be unable to help them against the king of Assyria, who, in God’s own time, was to carry the northern kingdom into captivity.

“Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings” (verses 10-16).

It was at this time that God gave, through Isaiah, a confirmation of the gospel message in the Garden of Eden. He had declared that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head. The “**Seed of the woman**” is a most significant expression and refers to the Virgin Birth of the Messiah. All others born into the world are definitely of the seed of the man, but the great Deliverer was to come only through the woman. Isaiah told Ahaz to ask for a sign from the Lord in order to confirm the Word the prophet had spoken. Ahaz refused to do this, and his words sound pious enough, “**I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.**” Actually, these were the words that came from an unbelieving heart; he was afraid to ask for a sign lest it should not come to pass. Isaiah then declared that God Himself should give a sign and of such a character that men would believe it impossible to come to pass. “**Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?**”

The pretended humility of Ahaz was hateful to God. He who is all-powerful might have given any sign that had been asked. Therefore, Isaiah went on to say, “**The Lord Himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel**” *Immanuel*, as we know, being interpreted, “**God with us.**” The virgin’s Son was to be “**God manifested in the flesh.**” It is only unbelief that would try to nullify the force of this passage by reading in place of “**virgin**” a “*young woman,*” and attempting to make that young woman to be the wife of the prophet, and the son born to be his son through her.

It is perfectly true that the word rendered virgin might also be rendered maiden, but every maiden is presumably a virgin - if not, something is radically wrong - so that the prophecy here clearly and definitely declared that an unmarried virgin should become a mother and the child should be named God with us. This is not to say, as Rome does, that the virgin Mary is herself the mother of God. She became the mother of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, but He who was thus born of her was God manifest in the flesh.

However, this sign was not to be fulfilled during the days of Ahaz nor yet for some time afterward, for the prophet immediately added, **“Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.”** Thus, before this child should come on the scene and grow up to years of maturity, not only the king of Israel but also the king of Judah would have ceased to reign, and the land would be left without a son of David sitting on the throne of Judah, or any representative sitting on the throne of Israel.

The expression **“butter and honey shall he eat”** is very striking, for it indicates the true humanity of the Child to be born of the virgin. In chapter nine we read of Him again and fuller details are given. While He was to be supernaturally conceived, He would have a real, physical body which would be nourished by proper food as in the case of others. Butter (curds) is the quintessence of animal food, and honey the quintessence of vegetable food. With such as these, therefore, the holy Child was to be nourished that He might grow from infancy to manhood in a normal way. When we turn to the New Testament records we do not read of some remarkably precocious child whose early activities were different from those of other little ones. **“He increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.”** Feeding upon the food provided, He grew from childhood to youth and from youth to manhood.

In the so-called Apocryphal Gospels many curious and weird legends are connected with the boy Jesus. From the very first He is pictured as acting in a supernatural way, even at His very birth taking three steps forward to the amazement of those attending upon His mother, and when playing with other boys He would work strange miracles that amazed them, though, on the other hand, if they failed to appreciate Him He is said to have visited judgment upon them. But this is not the Christ of God, but rather a creature of man’s unholy imagination. As babe, growing child, youth, and man, our Lord’s humanity was exactly like that of others, apart from sin. He was made in all things like unto His brethren that He might properly represent us before God as our Kinsman-Redeemer.

“The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father’s house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes. In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard.

“And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; and it shall come to pass, for the abundance of milk that they shall give he shall eat butter: for butter and honey shall every one eat that is left in the land. And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall even be for briers and thorns. With arrows and with bows shall men come thither; because all the land shall become briers and thorns. And on all hills that shall be digged with the mattock, there shall not come thither the fear of briers and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of lesser cattle” (verses 17-25).

Upon Ahaz and his people and his father’s house, God would bring distress and trouble through the coming into the land of the king of Assyria. In fact, Judah was to be the bone of contention between two great powers; Assyria on the east, and Egypt on the west. As they contemplated the increasing might of Assyria they turned desperately toward Egypt, hoping to find in that people an ally who would help to protect them from the eastern power; but they learned in the end that Egypt was a broken reed. Instead of becoming helpful she would herself turn against them.

As a result of the conflict that would ensue, the day was not far distant when famines and pestilence would sweep through the land. The great cities of Judah would fall; whereas, out of the country places those who remained would exist upon the produce of the soil, and even this in limited quantity, for thorns and briers would soon cover large districts where once had been flourishing industries, plantations, and vineyards. Nevertheless, God would still intervene to protect the poor of the flock and those who waited upon Him, so that in response to their toil the land would once more bear fruit instead of the thorns and briers, and oxen and sheep would again be raised in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of the people.

To some it might seem strange that the prophecy of the virgin’s Son, who was also, as we know elsewhere from Scripture, to come into the world as the Son of David, would be given in such an unexpected place, but we need to remember that God ever had Christ before Him and every king of Judah was the anointed of the Lord at that time. Our word “Messiah” simply means “*the Anointed*,” and therefore each of these kings was set by God to prefigure His own blessed Son, who was to come into the world in the fullness of time and be presented to the chosen nation as the anointed One in whom alone deliverance was to be found.

Many of these kings failed utterly to picture the Lord Himself. Their behavior shows that they were far removed in spirit from God’s thoughts for them. Ahaz had shown himself forgetful of the law of the Lord, and so in the hour of his distress he would not have the courage to count upon God or to expect help from Him. How natural then that under the circumstances God should speak of another king, a Son of David, who was to be born into the world supernaturally and in His own time would show who was the **“blessed and only Potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords.”**

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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