

ISA 7:1—9:7—THE GOD YOU CAN TRUST

INTRO: In 2 days it will be Christmas. So there is no better time than now to look at an important passage in the Bible—one that most people have heard of even if they are not Christians—the one that goes, “**for unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.**”

But before we get there, we need to ask ourselves something: Can we trust God? Last week, if you were here, you may recall that God in **Deut 6** and Jesus in **Luke 14** call for our unconditional fidelity. For many of us, that can be a scary thought. After all, I have my way of living (as Frank Sinatra sang, “I did it MY WAY”). I know what I want—and I don’t want somebody messing it up, or telling me what to do. And what’s in it for me, anyway?

Christians die at the same rate as everybody else. I presume they get cancer, are in car crashes, and have other bad things happen to them the same as everybody else. I don’t see that Christians are necessarily more wealthy, or smarter, or have any outward signs of God’s favor compared to anybody else. And they suffer loss and heartache just like anybody else. So why put my trust in a being I cannot see who, through this book or in some other way, might tell me to not do things I want to do, or tell me to do things I don’t want to do?

The prophet Isaiah dealt with this very issue. He was working and writing b/g in the year 740BC, but what he says is relevant to us, and helps us to deal with the questions of: Can I trust God? and Why should I do so?

O/S: What I want to do is three things: (1) Walk through the **Isa 7:1—9:7**. I’ll tell you the story and we’ll look at certain important parts of that passage (rather than reading the whole thing). (2) After we understand WHAT is going on, we will see WHY these things were prophesied. (3) Finally, we will consider what this series of events is telling us, and how it applies to our lives.

I. THE STORY: WHAT IS GOING ON

A. The threat from Syria and Israel

7:1-2 sets the scene: After King Solomon died, the nation of Israel split in 2: the southern kingdom was now called Judah, and the northern kingdom was called Israel. Ahaz is king of Judah. He learns that the nations of Syria (called Aram in some versions) and Israel are planning on invading Judah, and he is terrified. In **7:3-9** God sends Isaiah to Ahaz to tell him, “Don’t be afraid—they will not succeed and, in fact, within 65 years they themselves will be taken over. Trust God.”

7:10-11 [READ] Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, so in **7:14** God says [**READ 7:14, 16**]. This prophecy, as you may know, was quoted by Matthew as ultimately pointing to the birth of Jesus the Messiah. We’ll talk about that in a few minutes, but for now just be aware that it originally was given as a sign to reassure Ahaz that a young woman was going to give birth to a son and, before the boy is old enough to know the difference between right and wrong, the kings of Syria and Israel will be forsaken.

And, in fact, that happened. But there is a lot more going on here. So let’s look at this more deeply.

B. 2Kgs 16 tells us about the reign of King Ahaz. **2 Kgs 16:2-4** tells us that he did not follow the ways of the Lord; he sacrificed to other gods, and even made his own son “pass through the fire,” which indicates child sacrifice. **2 Kgs 16:5-9** tells us about the planned invasion of Judah by Syria and Israel that Isaiah was talking about. It tells us that Ahaz was intent on making an alliance with the nation of Assyria to ward off the danger from Israel and Syria, and even took silver and gold that were in the house of the Lord and sent it as a present to the King of Assyria, to win his favor.

That’s what was going on when God sent Isaiah to Ahaz. Now you need to know something about biblical prophecy: prophecy is not just “predicting the future.” The prophets primarily were interested in changing people’s behavior. Their basic message was, “Turn back to the Lord and He will bless you—but if you keep going your own way, he will bring judgment.” Prophecy is not fatalism. If people’s behavior changed, the promised judgment would not occur. We see that very clearly in the book of **Jonah** where Jonah’s message was simply “**In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed.**” Yet the king and people of Nineveh humbled themselves, and repented, and so God did NOT destroy Nineveh as prophesied.

Given that background, let’s take another look at what is going on back in Isaiah. God knows what Ahaz wants to do with Assyria. God knows that Ahaz really doesn’t trust or follow the Lord, but only trusts in power-politics. But God also knows what kind of a “friend” Assyria will turn out to be—so he is using Isaiah to warn Ahaz to try to turn him from the path he is on.

In **Isa 7:9** after just telling Ahaz that Israel will be broken to pieces w/i 65 years, God warns Ahaz through Isaiah “**If you will not believe, you surely shall not last**” (or, as the ESV puts it, “**If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all**”). That’s when he gives Ahaz the sign of the child who will be born, whose

name will be Immanuel, which means “**God is with us.**” He was telling Ahaz, “Turn from the way you are going. Trust God, not your political machinations. God is with you in this, and has even given you a sign.”

But then Isaiah goes on in Isa 7:17—8:22 to warn Ahaz of what will happen if he does NOT turn. 8:4-7 tells us that Assyria will, indeed, defeat both Israel and Syria. And we know from history that that happened. In 722BC Assyria took over the northern Kingdom of Israel and deported almost all the people. But most of **Isa 7-8** is telling Ahaz that Assyria will bring bigger problems to Judah than the threat posed by Israel and Syria. **7:17** says [READ]. **7:23** adds that the result will be economic catastrophe for Judah [READ]. **8:21-22** tells us that the land will be **hard-pressed and famished** and it will be a time of **gloom and anguish and darkness**.

And that would continue, b/c the b/g of **9:1** says that **in earlier or former times God brought the land of Zebulon and Naphtali into contempt**. What that is referring to is that when Assyria defeated Israel, it annexed the northern part of Israel near the Sea of Galilee, which had been the traditional area given to the tribes of Zebulon and Naphtali, to become part of Assyria.

II. WHY THESE THINGS WERE PROPHESED

A. Why is all that happening? Primarily b/c Ahaz and the people of Judah do NOT trust in God. You see, behind the things we see, behind the physical and geo-political and economic events of this world, lie *spiritual* forces. And ultimately, behind everything, is God.

B. This prophecy was intended for more than just Ahaz—it was intended for the entire nation and ultimately for us. How do we know that?

7:13-14 when He is going to give the sign, God addresses the entire House of David, not just Ahaz, and when it says that God will give “you” a sign, the “you” is plural, not singular. God is talking to the entire nation.

The bulk of ch. 8 tells us that all this was happening b/c the entire nation, not just Ahaz, was not trusting and obeying the Lord. **8:11** Isaiah says [READ **8:11**]. Then in **8:12-13** he explains **don’t fear what the people fear**—b/c they are only looking at the EXTERNAL political situation—instead **It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy, and He shall be your fear**. We know the people are not trusting the Lord, b/c **8:19** tells us that the people are consulting mediums and spiritists, not God.

Even the names here are prophetic. Particularly in Bible times, people’s names had meaning attached to them. That’s why the child would be called “Immanuel,” not George or Henry, b/c Immanuel means “God with us.” In **8:18** Isaiah says [READ **8:18**]. Now *Isaiah* means “YHWH is salvation.” His son *Shear-Jashub*, mentioned in **7:2** means “a remnant will return.” His other son *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*, mentioned in **8:1-3** means “swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.” Prophetically, these names are telling us that God is the only source of salvation. God is with His people, but only a small remnant of the nation was with Him. And as a result, God’s judgment was quickly coming.

What is the result of this lack of trust in God, but of pursuing their own ways? **8:21** tells us that “**when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God.**” Isn’t that just like us? When bad things happen to us, we say “How could a good God let that happen to me or to the person I care about?—If that’s the way God is, I won’t believe in Him” Yet, God never promised us a rose garden or smooth sailing. He did say, b/g with Adam and Eve, “life will be hard, and then you will die.” Think about it: Why does all the injustice and suffering that happens to *people we don’t know* not cause us to say “there is no God,” but as soon as something bad happens to US and people we love, THEN we say “No God could allow this.” Of course, that just shows that we really are not serious about God at all, but have this unstated belief that the world really revolves around ME and MY HAPPINESS.

Isaiah knew that whole way of looking at life is illogical, unreasonable, and wrong. So in **8:17** Isaiah concludes, **I will wait for the Lord who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will look eagerly for Him**. That should have been Ahaz’s response, and that should have been the nation’s response. But it was not. As we look at social, political, and economic events in our own day—and at our own lives—we need to ask ourselves: “Are we as individuals and as a nation acting more like Ahaz or more like Isaiah?”

We need to understand something. Everything that happens is part of a vast, overall plan of God that is designed—among other things—to test us, to test our faith, and to help us to see His hand and to turn toward Him. As we do that, He uses the circumstances in our lives, particularly the bad ones, to grow us up, and make us more like Himself, which is why He created us in the first place.

Which leads us back to our question: Can I trust God? The answer to that question is seen in the end of this whole passage **Isa 9:1-7** [READ].

PROP: What this is telling us is that all of these things—the political and economic crises, and the crises in our own lives—are parts of a grand overall plan in which God deals with the ROOT problem, not just of Judah, but of all of us. B/c these 7 verses in chapter 9 are a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah—Jesus Christ.

III. GOD'S GRAND PLAN AND HOW IT RELATES TO US

A. The prophecy in 7:14 of the birth of Immanuel, and the promise of Messiah in 9:1-7 are related: they are ultimately talking about the same person: Jesus. OT prophecies are very interesting. Often, a prophecy is directed to one thing, but acts as a foreshadow of something else. For example, in the book of **Daniel** Daniel prophesied about something called the “abomination of desolation.” The context of Daniel is referring to something that happened in 167BC when the ruler outlawed Judaism and sacrificed a pig on the altar in the temple in Jerusalem. Yet in **Matt 24** Jesus picked up on that same prophecy and applied it to what the Romans would do in AD 70 when they destroyed the Jerusalem and the Temple.

So here, in **7:14** it is true that a child was born, and before he grew up, Israel and Syria were defeated, and the threat posed by them to Judah vanished. But something very interesting occurred.

The word “virgin” in the Hebrew of the original prophecy means a young, unmarried, sexually mature woman. When the OT was translated into Greek about 250BC, the translators used the word that clearly means a virgin—one who had never had sex. And in **Matt 1:20-23** Matthew quotes that Greek translation and says **[READ]**. God is showing us that Isaiah’s prophecy was deeper and more profound than even Isaiah realized. It was a foreshadow pointing forward to a unique birth, when a true virgin, the Virgin Mary, would give birth to a Son, Jesus Christ. And that Son truly would be “God with us.” B/c He would be God Himself come to earth.

Once Jesus came, the NT writers realized that this entire prophecy ultimately concerned Jesus. Matthew, Luke, Paul, and Peter all apply different portions of **Isa 8:12-18** to Jesus.

B. To see how encompassing Isaiah’s prophecy is, let’s look again at Isa 9. READ 9:1 [b/g with “in earlier times”]. The land was in contempt from the time of Ahaz. But then Jesus came. And where did He begin His public ministry? In Galilee of the Gentiles. And in **Matt 4** Matthew quotes **Isa 9:1-2** and tells us that Jesus’ ministry b/g where it did in order **“to fulfill what was spoke through Isaiah the prophet.”**

But it does more than that. It tells us something about God—we can know what God is like by looking at Jesus. Jesus cares about all kinds of people—Jew and Gentile alike. And He demonstrated that by not by b/g His public ministry among the bigshots or even among His own people, the Jews, but in Galilee which was dominated by Gentiles and people who were considered “outsiders.”

Isa 9:6-7 shows that the prophecy was really all about Jesus—God come to earth—b/c it calls the child, **“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”** And in **9:6-7** where it says **“the gov’t will be on His shoulders”** and He will be **“on the throne of David and over His kingdom,”** on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 Peter pointed out that God had sworn to David to seat one of his descendants on his throne, and then continued said the prophecy given to David really **“looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”** Peter then concluded by saying **[READ Acts 2:36]** Jesus is reigning now from heaven. He is the fulfillment. No one else.

C. It is the fulfillment of this prophecy in Jesus that shows us that the ROOT of our problem is not bad political or military or economic choices or other conditions. Those things are all simply the outward results of a deeper, fundamental, and inner problem—the problem of sin. We are all born with it. It is a power within all of us. It warps and corrupts everything about us. It warps how we think; it warps our desires; our emotions; how we speak; and how we act. It warps how groups, and whole nations act. It is the fundamental problem of humanity. *And we can’t eliminate it or change it ourselves.*

In God’s grand, overall plan, He knew that if that fundamental problem was going to be dealt with, He would have to do it. And the way He did it was by sending His Son, born of a virgin, to live the life we should have lived, and die the death that we should have died—and pay the penalty for sin that we should otherwise have to pay (but can’t)—so that if we believe, and repent, and turn to Him, He will forgive us, and give us new life—eternal life—and come to live inside of us, and b/g changing us from the inside-out to b/g making us the kind of loving people He designed us to be.

D. So, can we trust God? Absolutely we can trust God. How does this passage show us that?

1. God is sovereign. We all live for something. But nothing we live or—your family, your friends, knows the future—and neither do you. Only God does—b/c God has written the script. One prophecy in Isaiah was fulfilled w/i 65 years, and the other in about 740 years. That shows us that God knows both the short-term and the long-term. The prophecies in Isaiah also show us that WE are part of God’s overall plan—whether we acknowledge it or not.

So why not attach yourself—consciously and deliberately—to the one who knows you better than you know yourself? This is vital, b/c God’s script for our life does not end when we die or even when this world ends. It goes on forever, and so will we—in one of two places. And how we are connected with Jesus Christ—

and that alone—will determine where and how we will spend our eternity.

2. But we also know that we can trust God b/c He has PROVEN Himself to be trustworthy. He has shown us what He is like in the person of Jesus. Jesus shows us the character of God. He shows us that God is love. Jesus' whole life as a man on this planet was one of giving, of serving, of love, of sacrifice. So what do you have to fear?

He was willing to go to the cross for you. He was willing to separated from the Father—something that never had occurred in all of eternity—so that we could come close to the Father. As a result of what Jesus has done, the Bible tells us that **nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.** But that love and security and life is not found anywhere else, except in Jesus.

Since God was willing to go to those lengths FOR YOU, does it make any sense to say—when bad things happen—“He doesn't care about me or my circumstances?” Remember: Isaiah's prophecies were based on hard times: real-world events and circumstances. They were all part of God's plan. So don't you think that He knows YOUR circumstances—the circumstances surrounding your health, your relationships, your finances, and all the other things going on in your life? Of course He does.

But He doesn't just know your situation, Jesus told us that, when we turn to Him, He turns to us in an even more powerful way. He comes to live inside us in the person of the HS. And He said, **I will never leave you or forsake you.** He will be active in you. He will guide you and speak to you—through prayer, through the Bible, through His people, and through the events of your life. He uses everything that happens to us to grow us up, to mold our characters so that we will be more like Him, so that we will achieve wholeness.

Are you trusting Him in the particular circumstances of your life? There may be some specific area in your life that you know you have been hanging onto, like Ahaz did—that you have to give over to Him and change. Do it. Hang onto *Him*, and He will do for you and through you what you could never do yourself.

CONCL: You know the old song: “He's got the whole world in His hands.” Today's prophecy demonstrates the truth of that. But it does more: it shows us that we *can* trust Him. We can *trust* Him. We can trust *Him*. B/c the way in which he has the whole world in His hands shows us that He is orchestrating things in a way that takes care of our root problem and leads to our own ultimate good.

We may not see or understand why the things that happen to us happen. But these prophecies—and their fulfillment in Christ—show us that even though we may not understand, we can accept that God cares; that everything is a part of His plan; and that His plan is grounded in love: love for us and love for the whole world.

Let this Christmas be the time when we consciously and deliberately draw closer to Him in all areas of our lives, and look forward to what He will begin doing through us as we trust Him.