

Out of the Darkness: A Sign

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[0:00] Take your Bibles, would you, this morning and open them to Isaiah chapter 7.

! Isaiah chapter 7, I'm going to read here in just a moment, verses 1 through 17. And included in that will be some passages elsewhere in Isaiah.

That will be our text for this morning, as we, this morning, start a series of messages on select prophecies of Isaiah.

And because of the season, of course, it's the Christmas season, these prophecies will be relative, of course, to the coming of Messiah. And that's what we celebrate this time of the year, the coming of Jesus, the Christ.

Our Messiah. We read as our scripture this morning out of Matthew chapter 1. And the prophecy that we're going to be looking at is quoted there.

[1:14] We read it a moment ago. And you know kind of the surroundings, what's going on here behind that text. Joseph, the betrothed of Mary, has discovered that Mary, his betrothed, is pregnant with child.

And they have not even married yet. Not officially, not completely. And he knows that the child is not his. And so he's very concerned, as you might expect.

And so God is gracious to come to Joseph in a dream. And the angel of the Lord speaks to Joseph and says, don't worry about it. Don't be concerned.

The child that is there in Mary is of the Holy Spirit. And then he quotes in the dream.

This passage we're going to be looking at in Isaiah chapter 7. And it's very familiar, isn't it? A virgin shall give birth. But do you know the background to that prophecy?

[2:28] What was taking place in the life of God's people when that prophecy was given? Do you know the whole story?

And that's what I want us to look at this morning. I think you'll be amazed as well as greatly encouraged. And so let me go ahead and read the text. Isaiah chapter 7, starting with verse 1.

Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezan, king of Syria, and Pekah, the son of Ramalia, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it.

And it was told to the house of David, saying, Syria's forces are deployed in Ephraim. So his heart, that is Ahaz's heart, and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.

Then the Lord said to Isaiah, Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shirjashub, your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool on the highway to the forest field.

[3:42] And say to him, Take heed, be quiet. Do not fear or be faint-hearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezan and Syria and the son of Ramalia.

Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Ramalia have plotted evil against you, saying, Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel.

Oh, Tabel. Yeah, that's right. Thus says the Lord God, It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezan.

Within sixty-five years, Ephraim will be broken, so that it will not be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Ramalia's son.

If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established. Moreover, the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God.

[4:54] Ask it either in the depth or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord. Then he said, Hear now, O house of David, is it a small thing for you to weary men, but

will you weary my God also?

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.

Curds and honey he shall 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 you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.

The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house, days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.

Now I'm going to stop right there with that text. And you're thinking, Well, what in the world does this have to do with anything about me or anything about Christmas? You say, Well, I certainly recognize the prophecy that is there, one that is quoted by the angel there in Matthew chapter 1 to Joseph.

[6 : 13] But what is all this about? Well, in order for us to understand this prophecy and the fulfillment of it, we need to understand what's going on around it, what's going on at the time in the life of God's people Israel.

It's a dark time. That we can, I think, see pretty clearly just from a casual reading of the text. These are dark days for God's people, specifically for the house of David or Judah, the southern kingdom. And it's a dark day, not unlike the darkness of our day today. But now for Ahaz, who's king of Judah, and for God's people then, as well as for God's people now, out of that darkness, the darkest of darkness, God gives a sign of His grace that will one day come into the world.

Now for us, that has already happened. It's already come into the world. And you know, God is so gracious to give us a heads up when He's about to do something and to give us a heads up according to His purposes and His promises.

Amos 3.7, for example, says, Indeed, the Lord God does nothing without revealing His counsel to His servants, the prophets. So we don't have to guess about it or wonder about it.

[7 : 45] God has already told us what He's going to do. In fact, in the New Testament, Peter reminds us, in Acts chapter 3, verse 18, he says, But what God predicted or foretold through the mouth of all the prophets, He has fulfilled.

So you don't have to wonder what God is up to, what God is going to do. His Word tells us. It's very clear in Scripture. And so you don't have to wonder whether or not you can believe God's Word or trust God's Word or count on God's promises, because in His Word He also gives us proofs of it. And it's all right there in Scripture. And so, contrary to what we might call the conventional wisdom of some Christians today, God has never required that we just follow Him and believe Him blindly. Did you know that? We don't have to have a blind faith. God has not called us to that. God never asks us to just take a leap out into the dark in that respect.

God has never asked anyone to believe anything that does not rest upon a solid foundation of His revealed truth.

[8 : 58] Factual revelation. As a matter of fact, that famous passage in Hebrews chapter 11 and verse 1, and it's describing faith, the Bible says faith is the substance, the substance of things hoped for.

You see, our faith rests upon the historical facts of the birth, the life, the death, the burial, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

All these are facts. And so this is the purpose of Isaiah chapter 7, Isaiah's prophecy here. God is going to do something that will change the world of man for all of time and all of eternity.

He is going to send His Son to redeem His people. He's going to do that. And centuries, centuries, dear people, before He does it, He gives a sign to prove it.

To prove it. And so, the burden of this message this morning, in the larger sense, is this. No matter how dark the darkness becomes around us, the sign of God's promise is sure.

[10 : 17] It always remains sure. And that's what we're going to see here in this text, where the prophecy is given. Now, let's see then, as this unfolds for us in this chapter, let's see, first of all, a serious problem.

That's where we need to begin. We need to begin in the immediate sense. What's going on there with God's people then, when Isaiah gives this prophecy? We need to see this serious problem.

Now, you might remember, if you are a student of the book of Isaiah, that in chapter 6, chapter 6 right before chapter 7, we have this very famous vision of Isaiah's.

And it happened the year King Uzziah dies, Isaiah tells us. And he has this incredible vision there when he goes into the temple that day.

And he has a vision of the Lord sitting upon the throne high and lifted up. And we know chapter 6, don't we? It's an interesting passage. But now, starting with chapter 7, Isaiah fast forwards some 20 years to the reign of Uzziah, Uzziah's grandson.

[11:34] His name is Ahaz. All right? Now, Uzziah, if you remember, was a good king. The Bible tells us that. Jotham, his son, was also a good king.

He, like his father, the Bible says, did that which was right in the sight of God. But now Ahaz, Jotham's son, Uzziah's grandson, is now on the throne of Judah, the southern kingdom.

And according to 2 Kings, chapter 16, verse 2, we have in the Kings, of course, the account of the kings of Israel and Judah. In chapter 16, verse 2 of 2 Kings, the Bible says that he, that is Ahaz, did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God, like his ancestor David, but walked in the way of the kings of Israel, or that is the northern kingdom.

Just to give you a bit of explanation here, we're in the times of the divided kingdom, where the children of Israel were divided into the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom is called Israel, named Israel, and the southern kingdom is Judah.

Judah. And Ahaz is the king of Judah. Now, how wicked was King Ahaz? Well, again, 2 Kings, chapter 16, verse 3, says that he made his son pass through the fire according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out from before the children of Israel.

[13:05] What does that mean, that he made his son pass through the fire? Well, it means that Ahaz was so wicked and so idolatrous that he sacrificed his own children as burnt offerings to a pagan god.

I tell you, this is darkness. Dark time for God's people. Ruled by a wicked, idolatrous king, King Ahaz.

But it gets worse. God's people are now, as we just read a moment ago, now faced with the threat of invasion. The Bible says in verse 1, here of chapter 7, that Rezin, king of Aram, that's another name for Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, again, that's the northern kingdom, ruled by a murderous Israeli general by the name of Pekah, these two are now allies.

They've come together, and as allies, they say that they're going to attack Jerusalem and to destroy Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.

And Ahaz, the king, is afraid. Rightly so. Because he's convinced that they are not only going to do it, but they will be able to do it.

[14:28] That they're going to be able to destroy him and Jerusalem and the nation of Judah. Now, separately, you should know, that both Syria and Israel separately tried to do this, but did not succeed.

But now, together, as allies, Ahaz believes that they can do it. So Ahaz, along with the people of Judah, the people of the city, Ahaz, in particular, are terrified.

As Isaiah described it, they're like trees in a forest shaking in the wind. They're terrified. It's a dark time, you see. Dark time for God's people.

But it's about to get worse. Much worse. Because Ahaz is afraid, he's not trusting God, and because Ahaz is an unbeliever, he has rejected the one true God, Yahweh, Ahaz decides to call for help.

But he does not call upon the Lord, Yahweh, for help. Instead, he calls for help from Assyria. Not Syria, but Assyria.

[15:37] Don't get confused. They're two different nations. And Assyria, in these days, was the superpower. Kind of like the United States in our day.

It was a superpower. Now, in 2 Kings 16.7, you don't need to turn to it. Again, this is referring to the same time period. In 2 Kings 16.7, stupid Ahaz sends messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, I am your servant, and I am your son.

I think Ahaz is a little bit confused here, don't you think? Because Ahaz is not to be the servant of Tiglath-Pileser, the Syrians. He's to be the servant of God. And he's certainly not to be an obedient son of Tiglath-Pileser.

He is to be the obedient son of Yahweh God. But he says to this wicked king, march up and save us. He says, save us.

Save us from the king of Syria and save us from the king of Israel. Now, what's this? Tiglath-Pileser, the king of Assyria, is going to save God's people?

[16:52] May it never be. See, the darkness, the darkness that has come upon God's people. Ruled by a wicked king, led into wicked worship, idolatrous worship, where that includes human sacrifice.

Led by their king into a wicked kind of faith, a faith in pagans, not God, the one true God. Wicked alliances with pagans and pagan countries.

Can it get any worse for God's people? Actually, yes. Because little did Ahaz know, but Assyria had plans of their own.

They had ambitions of their own. They would indeed invade Syria and Israel, just as Ahaz had hoped. But they would also had aspirations to conquer Judah as well.

Ahaz didn't know it. But this was their plan to conquer Judah as well. Verse 17, God says, the time is coming. He said, days that have not come since the day that Ephraim, another name for Israel, departed from Judah since the divided kingdom days.

[18:11] Days coming that has never happened before. What's coming? According to Scripture, the king of Assyria is coming. The superpower of the day, his army, is coming.

And Isaiah said, Ahaz, the Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and upon your people and your father's house. That is, David.

The lineage of David. Assyria is coming. And we're not going to look at it, but in verse 18 and following, we have kind of an interesting description of this invasion that will one day come and did come eventually.

And the Bible, the prophet, describes the Assyrian army coming as like bees and like flies, suggesting that it will be a swarm that will come upon Jerusalem.

Dark days. Do you understand? Here's the serious problem. Here's the setting for this prophecy. Dark days for God's people. Idolatry in the land.

[19:18] Gross immorality in their country. Wicked politicians. The killing of innocent children. Fear of foreign attackers. Kind of sounds familiar, doesn't it?

The entire day. Now, here's the wonder of it. Out of that darkest of darkness, this place of fear, this place of panic, God gives them, and us, a sign.

An incredible sign. And it's a sign of His sovereign promise. That's the second thing I want you to see. And so, we're not only to see in the text a serious problem, darkness, the darkest of darkness, but also a sovereign promise.

A deliverance. A deliverance that God promises. And so, we have a promise for Ahaz if he will be faithful. And we have a promise here for you.

And for me. If we will be faithful. And it comes to us out of the darkness. Out of the darkness. This is interesting. In the fifth book of C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia, The Voyage of the Dawn Treader.

[20:37] I don't know if you've ever read the Chronicles. It's interesting. In this story, King Caspian and his crew, along with Edmund Lucy and Eustace, their useless cousin, have sailed to what is called the island where dreams come true.

As the story goes. And C.S. Lewis inserts there, we're talking here about night dreams, not day dreams. And it's a frightening place. Frightening place surrounded by a thick darkness.

A darkness that you could almost feel. Kind of imagine that, can't you? And the Dawn Treader has sailed into that darkness where one's worst nightmares come true.

And they're trapped there. They can't find their way out. And they're there in that darkness where their night dreams come to life. They come true, at least in their minds.

And they sail and they're sailing and sailing and around and around and they cannot find their way out of this darkness. And Lucy whispers a prayer to Aslan.

[21:46] And of course in the Chronicles Aslan represents Jesus. And suddenly out in the darkness they see a point of light and it appears to be coming closer to them and it suddenly looks kind of like the shape of a cross and then it takes shape and it's a bird, a large bird.

It's an albatross. And it flies towards them and then it circles around their heads and the albatross whispers in Lucy's ear courage, courage, dear heart.

And then it begins to fly off into the distance and so they turn the boat around and they follow the albatross and soon, as C.S. Lewis described it, they shot out into the sunlight and were in the warm blue world again.

And all at once everybody realized that there was nothing to be afraid of and never had been. They'd come out of the darkness into the light. Now, dear people, that is what this passage in Isaiah is intending to do for us.

It was intended to do this for the people of Judah. And it does this for us. In Isaiah chapter 7 we discover a series of signs and they point to a sovereign promise of God.

[23 : 15] And this is a promise of deliverance to all those who will believe, all those who will trust him. A deliverance out of the darkest of darkness.

So let's look at these promises. God tells Isaiah to meet with King Ahaz and say to him, verse 4, take heed or calm down.

Really what he's saying to him. Be quiet. Do not fear or be faint-hearted. This is what God says to Isaiah.

What God said to Ahaz rather, through Isaiah. Take heart. Do not fear. And why should he not fear? Well, because Isaiah says, though Syria and Israel have, verse 5, plotted evil against you to destroy you, God says, verse 7, it shall not stand.

That is, it won't happen. It will not come to pass. Now, see, very clearly, this is God's sovereign promise to Ahaz and all of Judah.

[24 : 35] it. Now, the question is, what has that to do with us today? And that is a good question because the historical facts here seem far removed from anything that would matter to us today.

Now, wait a minute. What God promises to Ahaz has everything to do with us today. You say, well, how so?

Well, Ahaz is king of Judah, right? I've already explained that. He's king of Judah. And Ahaz is king there in the city of Jerusalem.

That's the holy city. And Ahaz is of the house of David. That is, he is of the lineage of David from which will come another king one day.

a king of the house and lineage of David, the lion of Judah.

[25 : 41] That's Jesus. Jesus. Jesus the Christ. Now, folks, do you understand what is at stake here in Isaiah 7? Syria and Israel, the northern kingdom, are threatening to annihilate the house of David.

The real danger here is the possible ending of the lineage of David from which will one day come, was one day to come, the Messiah.

That's the real danger here. Now, the good news is, God is not going to allow that. God is not going to allow anyone to come in and to destroy, to end, to annihilate the lineage of David from which his Messiah would come.

Not these smoldering firebrands, Israel and Syria. Not even the superpower of the day, Assyria, with all of their might.

God says it will not happen. It will not come to pass. This is God's sovereign promise. promise. Now, it's incredible how God reveals this promise.

[26 : 58] And Ahaz didn't see it. He didn't get it. And it all begins in verse 3 with the name of Isaiah's son. Would you look at the text? The Bible says there in verse 3, the Lord said to Isaiah, go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shirjashub, your son.

That's an unusual name, isn't it? Shirjashub. But the name is a sign. We don't have to speculate about that because Isaiah himself tells us that in Isaiah chapter 8 and verse 18, where Isaiah said, here I am with the children the Lord has given me to be signs, to be signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts.

And so, his name is a sign. And obviously, the sign is found in the meaning of the name. And Shirjashub in the Hebrew means a remnant will return or shall return.

A remnant shall return. So, to whom is the promise given? To Ahaz? Not really, because Ahaz has rejected the one true God.

He's an unbeliever. He didn't even understand the sign. The name of Isaiah's son tells us that the promise is given to the remnant. The remnant.

[28 : 20] And who are they? Well, in the immediate sense, they are certain ones among the children of Israel. Select ones, chosen ones among the children of Israel.

The faithful ones who are established, he says. But in the larger sense, this remnant represents the faithful of all the ages.

That's why God gave this prophecy that appears again in Matthew chapter one, because the real focus here is not, certainly not Ahaz, and not the entirety of Judah or even Israel combined, but the remnant, the faithful of all the ages.

The people to whom God gave this promise were certain ones living then and now, who, in verse nine, believe and are established. We get that by way of implication.

Verse nine says, if you will not believe, surely you shall not be established. The implication being, if you believe, you will be established. And so to whom is the promise given then?

[29 : 29] To you. To me. To the remnant. The faithful. Those who believe. That is, those who stand firm in their faith.

And are established. Riched. That is, those who are saved. But what is the promise? It's given to the faithful of all the ages, but what is the promise?

Well, look at what God says next. And this is rich. Verse three, the Lord said to Isaiah, go out with your son, Shirjashub, and meet Ahaz, where?

At the end of the aqueduct. Some of you might have a translation that says, come do it. But it's an aqueduct. That's what the word conduit means in the Hebrew.

It's an aqueduct. Water flows through an aqueduct. It was the aqueduct that would bring water to Jerusalem, the city of Jerusalem. And Isaiah, with his son, was to meet Ahaz at the end of it, end of the aqueduct.

[30 : 34] Now, that's the most important part of it, isn't it? Because that's where you're able to get the water. All right? The life-sustaining water comes at the end of the aqueduct.

But let's go on. We're going to put all this together. Verse 3, Isaiah was to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct in the upper pool, of the upper pool. Now, watch this. In the Hebrew, the word pool has a dual meaning.

And it's translated blessing in a number of other places in the Bible. Blessing. But it's not just any pool where Isaiah is to meet Ahaz.

It is the upper pool. Now, the word upper also has a dual meaning. And it is often translated most high.

And it is often in reference to God. In Genesis chapter 14, verse 18, for example, when Abraham meets with the king of Salem, Melchizedek, the Bible says that he is called, as Melchizedek is called, the priest to God most high.

[31 : 42] That's the same word. It's translated upper here. Now, here is the sovereign promise of God that's going to ultimately culminate in a tremendous prophecy.

The aqueduct represents the house of David the house of David. And it is at the end of the aqueduct, the end of the house of David, that the life-giving water, the living water, will be provided. And who is it that comes at the end of the aqueduct? The house of David. It's Jesus. It's Jesus. Of the house and lineage of David.

And Jesus, you see, is the upper pool at the end of the aqueduct. He is the blessing of the Most High God who has come to us through the house of David.

And He is, the Bible says, the highway. Verse 3, Isaiah, go to the upper pool by the highway. Jesus, this blessing, the blessing of the Most High God, is the highway.

[32 : 58] He is the way. And He's the way to where? Well, Isaiah tells us, verse 3, to the fuller's field. Now, the fuller's field was just simply one of Jerusalem's laundromats.

That's where the ladies would go and wash the clothes. And this was the place, then, of washing. A place of cleansing. And Jesus is the way to cleansing.

Now, what an amazing prophecy given through name signs and word signs and place signs. This is God's sovereign promise. God worked all this out for those who have eyes to see it and hearts to trust it.

God says, no darkness, no evil will overcome my plan to send a Savior to the world and I will preserve a remnant among my people who have stayed firm in their faith.

The house of David will not be destroyed. My Messiah cannot be stopped, not by Syria, not by Israel, not by Assyria. It will not happen.

[34 : 06] It will not take place. In fact, 20 years later, Assyria would indeed besiege the city of Jerusalem with, get this, 200,000 soldiers, like bees and flies, swarming around the city of Jerusalem.

And from where was a threat issued in regard to this attack, this is interesting, because the king of Assyria is going to send a messenger to king Hezekiah, then king of Judah, and tell him, warn him that the attack is coming, we're going to destroy you.

And where does he make this announcement? It's interesting, in Isaiah 36 and verse 2, then the king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh with a great army from Lachish to king Hezekiah at Jerusalem and he stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool on the highway to the fuller's field.

Very same place. And we could read on into chapter 38 and we would discover that 200,000 Assyrians gathered to destroy the house of David.

But God's promise was sure and by the end of the day, the Bible says, 185,000 Assyrians lay dead in the fields without even shooting one arrow.

[35 : 36] And they lay dead there, destroyed, the Bible says, by the angel of the Lord. Isn't that interesting? Out of the darkness, the darkest of darkness for Judah, a sign is given.

And there is in the world today a serious problem. A darkness, a spiritual darkness, and it's getting darker every day, isn't it?

But God has a solution, a deliverance. It's a sovereign promise. Because out of the darkness, out of the house of David, will come, and for us has come, the blessing of the Most High God, and He is the way, the only way to cleansing, and He is the way, the only way to God, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Incredible. Now, let me ask you something. Can you trust that promise? Can you? Many of us in this room have trusted that promise.

And how can we trust it? How can someone trust it? How can someone come to the place and say, will this work for me? It will work because God has given a sure proof of it.

[37 : 02] This is the third and final thing I want you to see here. A sure proof. Now, let's put this together and get this. This is incredible. This is what's behind this incredible prophecy that the angel quoted there for Joseph in his dream.

A serious problem exists, darkness. And it is remedied by a sovereign promise, deliverance.

A sovereign promise that you and I can trust with our life and with our eternity because of a sure proof. A sure proof. God gives a sure proof of it.

Verse 10, look at it, says, Moreover, the Lord spoke again to Ahaz saying, Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God.

God's already said what's going to happen. Now, he says to Ahaz, ask for a sign. Ask for some proof. You want proof? He's saying to Ahaz, you want proof that my promise is sure?

[38 : 11] Ask for a sign. Ask anything you'd like. That's what he's saying. In verse 11, he says, ask it either in the depth or in the height above. That is, Ahaz, do you want something from the height of heaven?

Or do you want something from the depth of hell? And you know, I believe Ahaz could have asked for any sign he wanted. Anything. Just ask it. You name it, Ahaz.

But instead, what did unbelieving Ahaz say? Verse 12, I will not ask. That sounds very religious, very spiritual, but really it's a heart of an unbeliever.

I'm not going to ask for a sign. Nor will I test the Lord. I mean, there's just a bunch of hooey, a bunch of poppycock. I'm not going to ask for anything.

And so God, in effect, says, okay, then I will give a sign that will be for the whole world.

[39 : 16] Not just your world now, Ahaz, living today, but for all of time. I'll give you a sign. So that the world may know that my promise is sure.

That is, I will give you a sign so great, so huge, so incredible, that if you don't believe in my promise then, then there's no hope for you.

And that's what God is saying to people still today. And what is the sign? Verse 14, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel, God with us.

There's the proof that God's promise of deliverance is sure. You count on it.

His Messiah who will come, you can believe in him. Here's the proof. Worked for Joseph. Joseph had doubts.

[40 : 29] Joseph didn't know. And God, through his angel, quotes this verse, and never again did Joseph have another question. It's true.

See, out of the darkness, God is gracious to give a sign. Out of the dark days of the Old Testament, a sign is given to the world.

A virgin shall conceive and give birth. and then on into the New Testament, out of the dark days of the New Testament, a son is actually given.

And Mary laid him in a manger where there was no room for him in the inn. And dear people, out of the darkness of our present times, a Savior is given.

A Savior is given. His name is Jesus. Do you know him? Have you trusted him?

[41 : 37] Is he your Savior? Savior? Savior? Savior?? Thank you.