

“Sign Language” Isaiah 7:10-25

Context: Isaiah declares God’s impending deliverance or destruction of Ahaz, contingent upon his willingness to entrust Judah’s security to God’s care. Ahaz was told not to fear being conquered by Syria and Ephraim because their plan would never come to pass. He only needed to believe and trust in God’s promised deliverance. Ahaz was warned that without belief neither he nor the kingdom of Judah would last. Our passage today considers God’s offer of a sign for Ahaz to strengthen his weak faith. It also reveals the coming judgment against Ahaz because he turned down God’s sign, turned away from God, and chose to trust in the power of Assyria for deliverance instead.

1. High signs – Isaiah 7:10-16

God appeals to Ahaz’ will to fortify his faith by experiencing a spectacular sign of his choice. With the misuse of Scripture and phony piety, Ahaz declines God’s offer. Isaiah, making a personal claim on God, rebukes Ahaz for truly testing Him with false reverence. In light of his faithlessness, God promises to presence Himself through a virgin birth. The promised birth and the disappearance of Syria and Ephraim come long after the death of Ahaz, because he remained unfaithful.

2. Low signs – Isaiah 7:17-25

The following verses give detail to the punishment that follows the rejections of God by Ahaz and Judah. The prophet pictures Assyria and Egypt as inhabiting Judah in swarms. Depilation is used to portray both the humiliation and exile of Judah. The filling of the Promised Land with briars and thorns depicts the curse of sin, even as from the beginning. The memory of milk and honey still remains, but it remains without the sustenance of daily bread. Such is the sign that Ahaz received instead of the blessing for which he could have asked.

Study questions:

- The word *alma*, translated either as “virgin” or “young woman,” has provoked much dispute theologically and thus linguistically. A primary reason is that no account of a virgin giving birth is found as a sign at the time of Ahaz; thus a non-virgin young single woman is suggested as the translation. As a **Bible study method**, study the two Hebrew words in Isaiah translated as “virgin.” Search out specific Old Testament verses that might clarify the uses of both terms (cf. Isaiah 62:5 cp Genesis 24:43). How does the LXX translate *alma* in Isaiah 7:14? How are both words translated throughout the Old Testament? What might the development of Immanuel’s identity have to do with this text? How is the word translated in Matthew 1:23? Note the context. Which do you think is the better translation, “virgin” or “young woman?” Give the reasons for your choice.
- Our doctrinal statement professes that Jesus was “conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary...being sinless in nature” (see footnotes 8 & 11 addressing ‘**On Jesus**’ in our **doctrinal statement** under **what we believe** at www.gracepointfellowship.org). Why is the virgin birth an important aspect of Jesus Christ’s sinless nature?
- If God promised the virgin birth as a sign to Ahaz, why did it occur centuries after the death of Ahaz?

Transformation exercise:

Meditate on Isaiah 7:14. Read the following promises of God and ask yourself if you believe and act upon them or are prone to neglect them for more ‘promising’ opportunities that the world has to offer (Ephesians 1:13ff; 3:6; Hebrews 6:13-20; 12:25ff; 2 Peter 1:4ff; 1 John 2:24-29). Rejoice or repent as necessary.