

Isaiah 7:1-8:15

Introduction

Throughout ch. 1-6, Isaiah is dealing with Israel's sin in very general terms, focusing on social injustice, but without clear historical references. In Chapters 7-12, suddenly we are immersed in history, with specific names and events.

The historical context is given in more detail in 2 Kings 15:37-16:8; 2 Chr 28:5-16.

1. 2 Kings 15:37, under Jotham, before Ahaz comes to the throne, Syria and Israel began to move against Judah, perhaps to unify the west against the growing Assyrian threat.
2. 2 Chr 28:5-15, Syria and Israel execute successful campaigns against the territory of Judah
3. 2 Kings 16:5, Isa 7:1, the alliance moves against Jerusalem, the capital city, while Syria successfully attacks to the south (2 Kings 16:6)
4. 2 Kings 16:7-8; 2 Chr 28:16, Ahaz appeals to Assyria for help.
5. 2 Chr 28:23; 2 Kings 16:10-15, Ahaz not only calls to Assyria for help, but adapts aspects of pagan religion.

Isa 7:1-8:15 rebukes Ahaz for this policy and urges him to trust the Lord, but to no avail.

Later in the book, Isaiah again directly counsels a king of Judah, in ch. 36-39. The two episodes invite close comparison with each other. We shall note points of contact as we study this episode, and then return to this chapter when we reach ch. 36. There, the king is Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz; Assyria is threatening Judah rather than Israel; and importantly, Hezekiah responds in faith rather than fear.

Thus the pervasive theme is, "Trust in the Lord, not in man."

7:1-8:15 is a chiasm:

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|---|---------|---------|
| Fear of Syria and Ephraim | 7:1-6 | 8:11-15 |
| Futility of Opposition to God's People | 7:7-9 | 8:5-10 |
| Birth of a Symbolic son | 7:10-16 | 8:1-4 |
| Coming Assyrian Invasion, linked to ch. 5 | 7:17-25 | |

7:1-6, Fear of Syria and Ephraim

7:1 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.--This verse situates us chronologically and politically.

- "Israel" here refers to the northern kingdom, which split off from Judah under Rehoboam the son of Solomon. Sometimes it is called "Ephraim," after the most prominent of the seceding

tribes.

- Syria is a pagan nation to the north of Israel. It was a foe to Israel throughout most of biblical history, but here it is allied with Israel against Judah.
- The date is about 735 BC. Pekah reigned only 736-730.
- It is usually understood that Syria and Israel are trying to form a coalition to stand against Assyria. Since Judah will not join them, they want to force Ahaz out and put in place a puppet king, Tabael (v. 6), who will collaborate with them.

This passage is repeated in 2 Kings 16:5. Similarly, most of Isa 36-39 is duplicated in 2 Kings 18:13-20:19. Since these passages all involve Isaiah, it is likely that they originated with the prophet and were copied by the historian.

It seems most straightforward to locate this after the initial successes of Syria and Ephraim against the countryside (2 Chr 28). They now move to attack the capital. It's not clear whether Ahaz has already sent his appeal to Assyria for help (in which case Isaiah is condemning that action), or whether he is contemplating it (in which case Isaiah is warning against it).

Note the lineage that Isaiah records for both Ahaz and Pekah. Ahaz is a scion of the Davidic dynasty. Only one family ever ruled in the south. Pekah's father, Remaliah, was not the previous king of the north. That king was Pekahiah, whom Pekah slew (2 Kings 15:25), and then took his throne. The pattern was not infrequent in the north; no less than eight different families held the throne. This contrast is the first of several indications we will see of the importance of dynastic succession.

2 And it was told the house of David, ... And his heart was moved—Note the identification of the king as “the house of David,” emphasizing again that he is the representative of the dynasty. This position is in jeopardy. 2 Chr 28:7 reports that in the course of the conflict,

Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, slew Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the governor of the house, and Elkanah *that was* next to the king.

These important people were apparently part of the army, suggesting that Maaseiah, not Hezekiah, would have been Ahaz's choice for his successor.

saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim.--Literally, “Syria is resting upon Ephraim.” They certainly were confederate, since they attack together in v. 1, but the meaning here may be more concrete: Syria had not returned all the way to Damascus after its earlier attacks, but was encamped in Ephraim, close to Jerusalem and perhaps regrouping for another attack.

And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.--We can perhaps understand their fear better after reading the history in 2 Chr 28. They have already suffered severe defeats. By God's grace and the intervention of Oded the prophet, the people captured by Ephraim were set free, but it was a narrow escape and the capture in the first place emphasized their vulnerability.

3 Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz,--In ch. 36-37, when the threat to Jerusalem is from the Assyrians rather than Syria and Ephraim, it is the king who sends to find Isaiah:

Isa 37:1-2 And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard *it*, that he rent his clothes, and

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covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD. 2 And he sent Eliakim, who *was* over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth, unto Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz.

Ahaz has no thought of seeking the Lord. His mind is full of his plan to take refuge with Assyria. But his fear shows that this plan is not bringing him great peace. It seems like a prudent step, but there are no guarantees in the affairs of men.

thou, and Shearjashub thy son,--Shearjashub means “a remnant shall return.” We have already noted Isaiah's interest in the doctrine of the remnant.

at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field;--Notably, this is where Hezekiah will meet the Assyrian envoys in 36:2. Conduits and pools were an important part of the defenses of an ancient city, providing water in case of siege. Perhaps Ahaz is inspecting his fortifications.

4 And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted—The heart of Isaiah's command is “Fear not.” Cf. 8:12, “neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.”

The world thinks of sin as fun, and of righteousness as dull and unpleasant. But in the face of Isaiah's command, worry is sin, and obedience brings peace of mind.

How we love our worries. We love to be all upset about things, clinging to expectations of doom like a security blanket. Note how the media feed our hunger for horror, reporting bad news.

God does not want us worried and fearful. In every area of life, Paul expresses his desire, “I would have you without carefulness” (1 Cor 7:32).

Why then do we cling to our sinful worry? Because abandoning it would require us to trust in the Lord and accept his word, and that would give up our autonomy. Compare our Lord's command,

Matt 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

The choice before Ahaz is:

- Submit yourself to the Lord and enjoy peace of mind, OR
- Maintain your independence of the Lord, and worry yourself to death.

for the two tails of these smoking firebrands,--A vivid image. A firebrand is stick pulled out of the fire, which might serve as a torch. These two torches once burned brightly, as 2 Chr 28 shows, but now they are only stumps, barely long enough to hold in the hand, and their bright flame is replaced by smoke as they smolder and flicker out.

for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.--Given the image of the smoldering torch, this phrase is almost satirical. The Lord is not impressed with their “fierce anger.”

5 Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, 6 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:--Here is their motive: replace Ahaz, David's descendant and representative of his dynasty, with a king of their own choosing, one whom they can manipulate.

Note the repeated emphasis on this dynastic tension:

- the reference to Pekah, who took his throne by coup rather than by descent, as “the son of Remaliah” (2 Kings 15:23), reminding Ahaz of how tenuous his hold on authority is
- describing Ahaz personally as “the house of David” in v. 2
- the death of Ahaz's favorite son Maaseiah in 2 Chr 28:7
- now the threat of being replaced by one not of the line

Understanding this dynastic threat is a key to understanding the verses to follow. Isaiah has discerned Ahaz's deep inner fear, and lays it out in the open.

7:7-9, Futility of Opposition to God's People

7 Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass.--Against Ahab's fear is the promise of God. Simply and unequivocally, God simply says, “No” to the armies from the north.

8 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. 9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.--It is God who rules in the affairs of men. He is the one who

Acts 17:26 hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

He reminds Ahaz that Syria has its territory and king, and Ephraim has its territory and king, and he is not going to permit them to take over Ahaz.

The reference to 65 years is curious, since Assyria conquered Samaria only about 12 years after this. But there is evidence (see Young's commentary) that Assyria left a vassal king in Samaria after this time, and the period may include that situation.

If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.--Here is the conclusion of the matter, expressed as a rhyming couplet: *im lo ta'aminu, ki lo tē'amēnu*. True peace and security come only through trusting in the Lord. In particular, נִפַּל Nifal is the verb used initially in 2 Sam 7:16 to promise the perpetuity of the Davidic line. This is yet another index of the dynastic emphasis of the chapter.

It is a refrain of the latter chapters of Isaiah that “there is no peace ... unto the wicked” (48:22; 57:21). That understanding is rooted in the interview with Ahaz. Sin and unbelief are not fun. They leave their adherents without a sure footing in an uncertain world, lonely and afraid. God wants us to trust in him, and from that trust to enjoy peace and a sense of security in the loving care of our heavenly Father.

7:10-16, Birth of a Symbolic Son

10 Moreover the LORD spake again unto Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask thee a sign of the LORD thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above.--God graciously invites Ahaz to ask for confirmation of this call to faith. Similarly, in ch. 38, Hezekiah asks for a sign (v. 22), and the Lord moves the shadow on the sundial backwards (v. 8).

How gracious of the Lord to say to Ahaz, “the LORD thy God.” Recall the Chronicler's assessment::

2 Chr 28:1-4 Ahaz *was* twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not *that which was* right in the sight of the LORD, like David his father: 2 For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. 3 Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. 4 He sacrificed also and burnt incense in the high places, and on the hills, and under every green tree.

His conduct shows that he has rejected the Lord. Yet the Lord invites him once more to turn to him, and to show his dependence by asking for a sign.

12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD.--Ahaz wants nothing to do with such a sign.

His refusal is phrased in pious terms. He refuses to “tempt the Lord.” The phrase is meant to recall Israel's experience in the wilderness (Exod 17:2), when they demanded that Moses give them water.

We might think that “tempting the Lord” is provoking him, tempting him to lash out in anger at us. But 17:7 shows the true import of their demand:

And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?

“Tempt” here simply means “test.” Many times God is said to test Israel, to know their hearts. Similarly, here their question reflected uncertainty as to whether or not the Lord was among them. In later years, this episode became a reminder of their sin, and God commanded them,

Deut 6:16 Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted *him* in Massah.

Ahaz piously recalls this episode. “Oh, no, I wouldn't think of putting God to the test. I don't have any question about his ability to protect us. Of course I'm trusting in him.”

There are two problems with his protest, problems that we often see with unbelievers who are confronted with the Scriptures. It is **dishonest**, and **ignorant**.

- It is **dishonest** because he is not in fact trusting in the Lord. He has already, or is about to, summon Assyria to deliver him from the threat from the north. So people often proclaim their faith loudly, while their actions show that they are not truly believing in the Lord.
- It is **ignorant** because the very episode to which he so piously alludes shows that there's nothing wrong with a sign. In response to the people's uncertainty, Moses smote the rock and gave them water miraculously. As here, the miracle was graciously offered by God. Ahaz is taking the biblical phrase out of context. If anything, Exod 17 should have encouraged him to look forward to the divine sign.

Why does Ahaz reject the invitation to ask a sign? Probably because, once the sign is given, he will have no excuse to continue his engagement with Assyria. Isaiah and his son, as well as any other members of the court who might be present, will witness his specification of the sign, and its performance, and he would be forced to change his behavior and acknowledge his error. He

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exemplifies the principle of John 3:19, “men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” His heart is hardened, and he rejects the offer of clear, inescapable revelation.

13 And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David;--Two shifts in v. 13 are important, compared with the previous context.

The first shift is from “he” to “ye.” In v. 2, “house of David” was used in parallel with “he” (singular, referring to Ahaz), using the title to describe him as its head and representative. Now it is used in parallel with “ye.” The shift is significant. Ahaz would naturally prize his position as the head of the house of David, and desire that his offspring should sit on his throne after him. But this hope is tenuous, as we saw in our study of v. 6.

- His son Maaseiah has already died in combat with the Ephraimites.
- The express objective of the Syrians and Ephraimites is to replace him with Tabael, v. 6.
- The example of Pekah, who usurped the throne of the northern kingdom, reminds him of the uncertainty of succession.
- The threat “ye shall not be established” in 7:9 echoes the dynastic promise of 2 Sam 7:16.

Now Isaiah, instead of addressing Ahaz as the house of David, addresses himself more widely. He bypasses the head, as though he were already irrelevant.

Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also?--Here is the second shift, from “thy God” in v. 11 to “my God.” By rejecting the gracious offer of a sign under cover of a hypocritical profession of faith, he has shown that he has no relation to the Lord.

Already in 1:14, God declared his impatience with false piety:

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*.

Not only is Ahaz an unbeliever, but he is also a hypocrite. Better far that he should have answered Isaiah, “I could care less about your God's signs. I want nothing to do with him. I will manage my affairs, and he will kindly stay out of the way.” That would at least be honest. But this false piety is a stench in God's nostrils.

There are few things worse than unrighteousness. But one thing that is worse is being unrighteous while pretending to be righteous for the sake of appearances. Let us be careful to guard against such hypocrisy—and if we are tempted by it, let us resolve to repent and cry out to God to produce the true fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;--This sign differs from that offered in v. 11 in two ways.

1. It is offered to the house of David as a group, no longer just to Ahaz.
2. In view of the previous verse, we may expect it to be a sign of judgment upon Ahaz, not just of deliverance for the nation.

Behold, a virgin shall conceive,--Matthew 1:18-23 cites this verse to explain the virgin birth of our Lord. But it has become commonplace among scholars to insist that this application is inexact. The

objection has three main reasons. First, it is argued that עלמה, the word here rendered “virgin,” doesn't really mean “virgin,” and that Isaiah would have used a different word, בתולה, if that is what he meant. Second, it is argued that an event still over 700 years in the future would be irrelevant to people of Isaiah's day. Third, it is argued that the miracle of a virgin birth is irrelevant to Ahaz; the sign depends only on the short time that remains until Syria and Ephraim are destroyed, a time measured here by the time necessary for a child to be conceived, born, and come to understanding.

All of these arguments are inaccurate.

First, the word. Actually, Hebrew has no word that means “virgin” in the strict sense of the English word. But every instance of עלמה in the OT refers to a woman assumed to be unmarried. The alternative word, בתולה, means simply a woman of marriageable age, without regard to whether or not she is married.¹ It is applied in Joel 1:8 and Job 31:1 to a married woman. One could also conclude this from Gen 24:16, which adds the phrase “whom no man had known” to clarify Rebekah's status, after she has been called by the other word. It appears that in fact “virgin” is a perfectly acceptable translation in our text, and the only word that is consistently used of virgins in the OT.

Second, it has been asked how dating the fall of Syria and Israel by a birth 700 years in the future could be any encouragement to Isaiah's hearers. The answer to this third objection is that they don't know that the birth is 700 years in the future (and Isaiah probably doesn't know this, either). The church has been urged to watchfulness by the return of Christ, which has waited for two millennia.

Third, some suggest that the notion of a virgin birth is inappropriate to the context, which focuses on the child's age, not paternity. The prophecy does emphasize the time factor: before the child reaches the age of moral awareness, Syria and Israel will be conquered. But we have seen a repeated emphasis on Ahaz's dynastic interests in this passage and its historical context.

He personifies the “house of David” in v. 2. That house is founded on God's promise of an eternal dynasty: “thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam 7:16). Isaiah will shortly describe a child ruler whose name is “the mighty God, the everlasting Father” (9:6), truly “God with us,” one who fulfills the promise to David, “I will be his father, and he shall be my son” (2 Sam 7:14). Ahaz might hope that this powerful ruler would arise out of his line.

But Ahaz has reason to fear for the security of his throne:

- His son Maaseiah has been killed in battle with Ephraim, 2 Chr 28:7.
- The objective of Syria and Israel is to dethrone him and replace him with Tabeal, v. 6.
- His adversary Pekah, king of Israel, is repeatedly called the “son of Remaliah,” a usurper and not the son of the previous king Pekahiah. No such patronymic is given the king of Syria. This title reminds Ahaz not to presume on his royal position. He, too, can be removed.
- In language echoing the promise of 2 Sam 7:16, Isa 7:9 warns, “ye shall not be established.”

The Immanuel prophecy is uttered as a sign of judgment, after Ahaz has hypocritically refused to ask for a sign. It marks the end of Ahaz's dynastic hopes. Ahaz will not live in the promised king. It is a virgin who will bear this God-child. He will have no human father, and in particular, he will not be the

1 G. Wenham, “*B^ETŪLĀH*, 'A Girl of Marriageable Age.’” *Vetus Testamentum* 22:3 (1972), 326-348.

son of Ahaz. That line will end.

So the emphasis on a virgin makes sense not only in the context of Matthew, but also in Isaiah.

In the light of this interpretation, what is the significance of the promise to us?

The virgin birth is presented as evidence of Ahaz's impotence. Though he is descended from David, to whom the promise of the Messianic king was given, he will not contribute to the coming of that king. But the judgment is not on him alone. No man will father this child. No man can father him. All of us, in our own strength, are no better than wicked Ahaz, no more worthy than he of siring the Messiah. The virgin birth of our Lord is one more token of our inability to contribute to our own salvation, and our utter dependence on God's free, unconditional grace. As Isaiah will state in 59:16,

And he saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.

and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.--The name of the child is "Immanuel," which means "God is with us." The name recalls the promise of 2 Sam 7 that the king is to be God's son. When Israel insisted that Samuel make them a king (1 Sam 8:5), God told Samuel, "they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam 8:7). The title "Immanuel" asserts that the reign of the future messianic king will restore the Lord to the throne of Israel. He will be "God with us," God dwelling among his people.

It is commonly objected that in fact our Lord was called "Jesus," not "Immanuel." In fact, in Matthew, the angel commands Joseph to name Mary's child "Jesus," "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, 23 ... they shall call his name Emmanuel" (Matt 1:22-23).

We should first recognize that while "Jesus" and "Immanuel" are distinct names, their meaning overlaps. Immanuel emphasizes God's presence with his people, while Jesus (Joshua, "Jehovah is salvation") emphasizes his function. He cannot save his people if he is not with them, and his presence with them would be terrifying if he did not come to save. The two are intertwined.

Recognize as well that it was not unusual for people, and kings in particular, to have multiple names.

- Uzziah, the king under whom Isaiah's ministry began, is also called Azariah (compare 2 Chr 26:1 with 2 Kings 15:1). The two names are used promiscuously (cf. 2 Kings 15:13).
- Solomon is another example (2 Sam 12:24, 25). David gave him the name "Solomon," derived from שלום "peace." but Nathan the prophet called him "Jedidiah" "beloved of YHWH." It is a divinely appointed title that describes him, just as Immanuel describes our Savior, and like Immanuel, it is never used in narrative.

Interestingly, the Revelation indicates that both believers (2:17) and the Lord Jesus (19:12) have special "secret" names, used not to address them, but to characterize them.

15 Butter and honey shall he eat,--As 7:21, 22 show, this is a desert diet, resorted to by migrant people like the Bedouin, those who cannot grow crops. A cow or goat can eat all sorts of rough vegetation and turn it into milk from which one can make thickened milk (yogurt), and honey is gathered from wild bees. These are choice foods indeed. Abraham, who lived in tents, served it to his heavenly guests (Gen 18:8). But for a people accustomed to live in villages and farm the fields, they are usually supplements to other food (1 Sam 17:17, 18; 2 Sam 17:28-29). Even Jacob, a shepherd like his

father and grandfather, valued other things beyond honey (Gen 43:11). At the high-water mark of Israelite society, under Solomon (1 Kings 4:25),

Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

Grain, wine, and oil (Deut 7:13), not butter and honey, are the marks of a peaceful society. The time before the destruction of Syria and Ephraim will not be one of abundance for Judah, but one of impoverishment, when their settled way of life is disrupted and they are forced into a migratory lifestyle, living off of the land.

The reference of the prophecy in our Lord's life would be to the migration of the holy family to Egypt to escape Herod. Their settled life was disrupted, and they had to live on the road.

that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.--The conjunction should be read as temporal rather than indicating a purpose: "until he knows." The desolation will not last longer than it takes a child to reach moral discernment. This is amplified in the next verse:

16 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.--Here is the temporal aspect of the promise, the fall of both Samaria and Ephraim.

7:17-25, The Coming Assyrian Invasion

We will see as we progress that this section falls at the center of a chiasm that extends from 7:1 through 8:15. In addition, at a higher level, the **highlighted** words and phrases show links to ch. 5. The events described here are a fulfillment of that parable of judgment.

Structurally, the section begins with a summary of the coming event, followed by three paragraphs describing characteristics of "that day."

Spiritually, this is a very sober section, emphasizing the judgment that is to fall. It may encourage us as we study it to consider Isaiah. As the Lord revealed these things to him, his responsibility as a messenger was to deliver the message. How did he keep from becoming depressed and discouraged? Only by clinging to the Lord, and trusting that the Lord would be with him, whatever the circumstances. So we, in the midst of a civilization that denies the Lord and is rushing headlong into judgment, must keep our eyes on the Lord.

17, Statement of the Event

17 The LORD shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house,--Isaiah continues to play on Ahaz's dynastic interests. God is going to deal not only with Ahaz, but also with his dynasty.

days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah;--The promise is of exceptional days, unlike any that Judah has experienced since the North seceded. At this point, the nature of these days is ambiguous. Ahaz might think something good is at hand. He has just been told (v. 16) that Syria and Ephraim will lose their power. Perhaps the kingdom will return to Judah.

even the king of Assyria.--Isaiah dramatically resolves the ambiguity. The days in question are not uniquely good, but uniquely bad. God will send Immanuel, the divine Son of God, for those who trust in him. But Ahaz refused that sign so that he could ask for the king of Assyria, and the king of Assyria he shall have.

Assyria's coming will differ from Ahaz's plans, in two ways.

First, it will not be for his benefit. Chronicles records,

2 Chr 28:20-21 And Tilgathpilneser king of Assyria came unto him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not. 21 For Ahaz took away a portion *out* of the house of the LORD, and *out* of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave *it* unto the king of Assyria: **but he helped him not.**

The second contrast is that Ahaz's invitation is not the real reason for Assyria's coming. It is not Ahaz, but “the Lord” who “shall bring” this king upon the land.

18-20, Two Images: Insects and Razor

In the first of three expansions on this promise of the invasion, Isaiah develops two graphic images of what will happen: insect swarms, and a barber.

18 And it shall come to pass in that day,--We first encountered this phrase, “in that day,” in 2:11, 17, 20. There it referred to “the day of the Lord,” when “the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted.” Here the immediate reference is to the Assyrian invasion described in v. 17. But that invasion itself is an anticipation of the eschatological day of the Lord, when the Lord “will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle” (Zech 14:2). The events in the Middle East during the past two weeks (Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza) may be a prelude to that gathering, as the world focuses its attention on Israel.

that the LORD shall hiss—An allusion to the interpretation of the parable of ch. 5, in v. 26:

And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will **hiss** unto them from the end of the earth: and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly:

Ahaz sent an envoy with great riches and carefully planned words to request Assyria's aid against the northern coalition. The Lord is so far above the nations of the world, that he has only to whistle to summon them. To him, they are no more than a slave or a dog.

Now we learn what these nations are:

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.--These two kingdoms dominated the last 150 years of the divided kingdom. “Assyria” here represents not only the empire headed at Nineveh, which conquered Samaria, but also the succeeding power at Babylon. Even as late as the Persians, the king of the dominant empire was still called the “king of Assyria,” Ezra 6:22. The great empires centered on the river valleys of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates bounced the nation back and forth between them.

- Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria harassed the northern kingdom. His son Shalmanezar began the siege of Samaria, which was completed by Sargon II, and Sargon's son Sennacherib besieged

Jerusalem in the time of Hezekiah.

- Pharaoh Necho of Egypt killed Josiah at Megiddo (2 Chr 35), and set up his son Eliakim as King Jehoiakim, replacing the peoples' choice of Jehoahaz (2 Chr 36).
- Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took Jehoiakim captive to Babylon, and later his successor Jehoiachin, appointing Zedekiah as king. He later laid siege to the city and destroyed it.

19 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.--One feature of an insect swarm is its ubiquity. No part of the country is so remote that it cannot attack there. They will blanket the land.

20 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,--Note two changes from the image of the insect invasion.

1. Egypt has dropped out. After the battle of Carchemish between Egypt and Babylon in 622 BC, Egypt was no longer a force to be reckoned with. This suggests that this part of the prophecy focuses on the fate of Judah.
2. The insects annoy people where they live, but the razor removes them from their land. Judah was harassed by Assyria and Egypt during the seventh century, but ultimately taken into captivity by Babylon, the heir to Assyria.

the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard.--The literal message is that the nation will be depopulated, the people taken into captivity. But the imagery is chosen to emphasize the humiliation of the conquest.

Shaving **the head** is a sign of mourning:

Isa 22:12-13 And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to **baldness**, and to girding with sackcloth: 13 And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die.

Jer 16:6 Both the great and the small shall die in this land: they shall not be buried, neither shall *men* lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor **make themselves bald** for them:

Eze 7:16-18 But they that escape of them shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity. 17 All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak *as* water. 18 They shall also gird *themselves* with sackcloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame *shall be* upon all faces, and **baldness** upon all their heads.

Amos 8:10 And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and **baldness** upon every head; and I will make it as the mourning of an only *son*, and the end thereof as a bitter day.

The **beard** is a sign of maturity. The Hebrew word for “elder” literally means “bearded one.” To be shaven is to appear immature and foolish. Thus when Hanun the king of Ammon wished to insult David's messengers (2 Sam 10), he shaved off half their beards.

The **hair of the feet** is the most vivid and repulsive image of all, describing the pubic hair.

Thus, in the most vivid language imaginable, Isaiah tells how the Assyrian invasion will humble and

humiliate the land, and lead to widespread mourning.

21-22, Poverty

The second description of “that day” emphasizes the economic dislocation caused by the coming invasion.

21 And it shall come to pass in that day, that a man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep;-- We know how large the flocks of a prosperous family could be. Before his affliction, Job (1:3) had seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses,

The flocks of Nabal in 1 Sam 25:2 are comparable:

he had three thousand sheep, and a thousand goats:

In comparison, one cow and two sheep is hardly a respectable flock for a family. It's not even enough to breed the cow. The verb “nourish” has the sense of “preserve alive”: these few animals are all that a man will be able to keep alive after the judgment falls.

22 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.--Mercifully, the Lord will see to it that these few animals will be productive enough to support “every one that is left in the land,” but this will be a reduced population. It is important to recognize that “butter and honey” is not the regular diet for a sedentary agricultural people. Their villages and fields have been destroyed, and they are reduced to the diet of a migrant people, like the modern Bedouin.

23-25, The Vineyard Destroyed

In this third description of “that day,” the echoes of ch. 5 burst out on every hand, reminding us that this disaster is a divine judgment on a fruitless people.

23 And it shall come to pass in that day, that every place shall be, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings,--Previously, this land was a carefully cultivated vineyard, bringing us directly back to the imagery of ch. 5. A “silverling” is usually identified as a shekel, about 11 grams of silver, or \$4 at today's exchange rate. Historical comparisons (see Alexander) suggest that this would be a high price for a single vine, but recall that the vineyard was planted “with the choicest vine” (5:2).

it shall even be for briers and thorns.--Fulfilling the threat of 5:6, “there shall come up briers and thorns.”

24 With arrows and with bows shall men come thither;--As predicted in 5:28, “Whose arrows *are* sharp, and all their bows bent.”

because all the land shall become briers and thorns.--Again the destiny of 5:6. Some suggest that 24a refers to the citizens, who only dare to enter the wild territory with weapons to protect themselves from lions and bears. But in the light of the parallels with ch. 5, we should understand the second clause as giving the divine motive for the first. God has purposed that the land shall become desolate, and that purpose is the reason that the enemy will come with its weapons.

25 And on all hills that shall be digged with the mattock,--The cultivation in view is on the hills, the place of choice for vines (grains being sown in the valleys). "Shall be" is better understood here not as future but as habitual, "all hills that are customarily digged." This is the cultivation that a vineyard needs, but that it is forbidden in 5:6, "And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged," leading to the growth of the "briars and thorns."

there shall not come thither the fear of briers and thorns:--Rather than taking the verb as 3fs with "fear" as subject, it is smoother and more in keeping with the context to understand "fear" as adverbial accusative and the verb as 2fs, "thou shalt not come thither for fear of briers and thorns." The wild plants that grow up while the land is under siege are so thick that the farmer hesitates to try to reclaim them for productive agriculture.

but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of lesser cattle.--Their only use is as grazing land for beasts. Thus is fulfilled 5:5, "And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; *and* break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down."

Ahaz thinks that he is inviting Assyria to come and help him. In fact, the Lord is sending Assyria to begin the desolation of his vineyard threatened in ch. 5.

8:1-4, Birth of a Symbolic Son

7:17-25, with its echoes of the vineyard parable, is the center section of a chiasm, and marks the correspondence of this entire structure (7:1-8:15) to ch. 5. Now we begin to climb out of the chiasm. The section immediately before the center section dealt with the birth of a symbolic son; so does the immediately following section.

8:1 Moreover the LORD said unto me, Take thee a great roll,--or "tablet." The point is its large size, so that it will be visible to passers-by.

and write in it with a man's pen—That is, in a script that people will be able to understand, not some esoteric writing.

concerning Mahershalalhashbaz.--The name means, "swift is booty, speedy is prey." Isaiah is to inscribe these words in legible characters on a large tablet for public display. This couplet will become the name of Isaiah's son in v. 3, but at this point it is just a cryptic message. One is reminded of the writing on the wall, "mene mene tekel upharsin," by which God announced judgment on Belteshazzar in Dan 5. In both cases the syntax is very terse, and the message is one of judgment. There, the interpretation followed the appearance of the legend. Here, the legend summarizes what Isaiah has already said in 7:17-25. The land will be ravished, and the invasion will come speedily.

2 And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record,—The verb is clearly imperfect in Hebrew, not preterite (which would require an 'a' vowel under the *waw*), "and I will take unto me." This requires us to understand the subject as the Lord from v. 1. When Isaiah has recorded the message, God will ensure that prominent men, who command respect from the population, see the message. The intent is that when this comes to pass, these men will be able to attest that God warned of it years in advance.

Uriah the priest,--We meet him in the historical books in 2 Kings 16:10-16 (where his name is spelled

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“Urijah” in the AV, though the Hebrew is identical). After Ahaz summoned Assyria, and after Assyria conquered Damascus, Ahaz went to Damascus to congratulate TP3. There he saw an altar that caught his fancy, and he sent orders back to Jerusalem to have one made after the same pattern. Uriah, apparently the high priest, is named as the one who implemented his plan. Note his qualifications as a witness: as high priest, he is a prominent person whose word will be respected; as one of Ahaz's cronies, he can hardly be expected to be collaborating with Isaiah.

and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.--This may be the man named as Hezekiah's maternal grandfather, the father-in-law of Ahaz, in 2 Kings 18:2,

His mother's name also *was* Abi, the daughter of Zachariah.

Again, such a person would be prominent, and not suspect of being partial to Isaiah.

The fact that both of these people would not naturally be sympathetic to Isaiah explains why it is God who will call them as witnesses. He will compel them, in spite of their natural aversion, to pay attention to the placard that Isaiah will write.

3 And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son.--The symbolism around this son has numerous parallels with the Immanuel prophecy, and these parallels have led some people to identify the two. Thus it is useful to note the contrasts that accompany the parallels, as summarized in the table.

The first is here. In 7:14, the child's symbolism is declared before he is conceived, and that conception is by a virgin. Here, in the normal course of life, Isaiah has a son. Only after the boy is born is the birth made symbolic.

| Immanuel, 7:14-16 | Maher Shalal Hash Baz, 8:3-4 | Contrast |
|---|---|--|
| 14 therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, | 3 And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. | Birth after vs. before sign announced. |
| and shall call his name Immanuel. | Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Mahershalalhashbaz. | Mother vs. father gives the name Name declared before vs. after birth Name is positive vs. negative in content |
| 15 Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. | | Desolation of Judah not mentioned with MSHB |
| 16 For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, | 4 For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, | Criterion: know good and evil (adolescence) vs. be able to say “mama, daddy” (~1 year) |
| the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings. | the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria. | Event: overthrow of monarchy vs. spoiling of the country. |

Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Mahershalalhashbaz.--The usual custom in the OT is for the mother to name the children (see Notes). In fact, this is what happens with Immanuel. The father gives the name only under exceptional circumstances, for example, when Jacob disapproves of the name that Rachel gives Benjamin (Gen 35:18). Here and in Hosea 1, the father, who is also a prophet, is commanded to give the child a name as part of a divine oracle.

The names are also very different. The name of Immanuel is from the perspective of his people, who rejoice that “God is with us.” The name of Isaiah's son is from the perspective of the invader, who comes to pillage the enemy.

4 For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother,--A third distinction with the Immanuel prophecy is in the point in the child's development that serves as a marker for the fall of the northern coalition. It is not the knowledge of good and evil, which develops during adolescence, but the ability to say “mama, dada,” which is about one year of age.

There is nothing in this prophecy corresponding to 7:15, the impoverished circumstances in which the child grows. Judah is not threatened in the time frame of the MSHB prophecy, though it is within the time frame of the Immanuel prophecy.

the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.--The nature of the judgment on the northern coalition is also different. Within one year, Assyria will be carrying away spoil from its raids on the north. The Immanuel prophecy envisions a more remote judgment, in which the kings are removed.

In sum, the end of the threat from the northern coalition is marked by two symbolic births, one of Immanuel, the other of Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Both assure the reader that the end of the opposition is near at hand, measured by events in the life of a young child.

8:5-10, Futility of Opposition to God's People

Now we come one level further out in the chiasm around 7:17-25, the fulfillment of the vineyard parable. 7:7-9 declared God's sovereign will with regard to the opposition posed by Syria and Ephraim. Now the present section spells out the judgment that is about to fall on them, and in the process, the impact on Judah.

This section consists of two paragraphs, each with two halves. The first half of each paragraph describes the coming destruction of the northern coalition. The second half of each promises Judah that she shall be spared. Each paragraph ends by grounding this confidence in a reference to Immanuel.

The first paragraph is built around the image of two different rivers, the quiet stream of Shiloah and the great Euphrates. It describes the judgment that will fall on the northern coalition and its overflow effects on Judah. The second is a series of five paired warnings, addressed first of all to the “people” of the northern coalition, but also extended to “ye of far countries,” who would later threaten Judah. Judah will be delivered from both sets of adversaries, those near and those far.

| | 8:5-8 | 8:9-10 |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| Judgment on Syria and Ephraim | 6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; 7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, <i>even</i> the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: | 9 Associate yourselves, O ye people , and ye shall be broken in pieces; ... : gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. 10 Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: |
| Deliverance of Judah | 8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach <i>even</i> to the neck; and the | and give ear, all ye of far countries |

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|----------------------------|
| | stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, | |
| Reference to Immanuel | O Immanuel. | for God <i>is</i> with us. |

8:5-8, The Two Rivers

The first paragraph is built around the metaphor of two rivers, Shiloah and the Euphrates.

5 The LORD spake also unto me again, saying, 6 Forasmuch as this people—Which people? Judah, or Israel? In light of the rest of the verse, it seems most natural to apply the reproaches to Israel.

refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly,--Most likely Shiloah refers to the overflow from the spring Gihon at the foot of the temple mount. Solomon was crowned at this spring (1 Kings 1:33). The Lord is focusing his attention on Ephraim, which rejected Davidic rule at the time of the division of the kingdom. Syria may also be included, in the reference for according to 2 Sam 8 David subjugated them, so their independence demonstrates their rejection of the authority of his house.

and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son;--Instead, they are following a pagan king (Rezin) and a murderer and usurper (Pekah).

7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory:--As Jerusalem is associated with the quiet stream that flows from Gihon, the king of Assyria is associated with “the river.” In the OT, this phrase *simplicter* often refers to the Euphrates (cf. Gen 31:21; 1 Kings 4:24; 14:15; Deut 11:24).

and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks:--The Euphrates, like the Mississippi, the Nile, and most large rivers, floods annually. This flooding is used as a metaphor for the uncontrollable nature of the king of Assyria. Ahaz is calling him to come help, but he will not restrict himself to that mission, any more than the Euphrates constrains itself to its channel in flood time.

8 And he shall pass through Judah;--On our reading of v. 5, this is supplemental to v. 7. “In addition to this devastation of the north, he shall reach to Judah.” Here is the reality corresponding to the flooding: he will go beyond Ephraim and come to Judah.

he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck;--Judah is depicted as a man submerged in the water up to his neck. The flood will all but submerge him.

and the stretching out of his wings—In Hebrew, “wing” often has the meaning “extremity.” Isaiah is still using the image of a river, whose extremities will spread all the way to Judah.

shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.--The inundation will be widespread, but will not change the ultimate ownership of the land. Title to it will remain in the one called Immanuel, “God with us,” introduced in 7:14.

This child holds the title to the land. Surely this goes beyond MSHB, and even beyond any son of Ahaz, and makes the messianic reference clear.

This verse may be important in modern discussions of Israel's right to the land. Sometimes we assume that because God promised the land to Abraham, modern unbelieving Israel has title to it. Paul explicitly warns against identifying the apostate nation with the seed of promise:

Rom 9:6-8 For they *are* not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7 Neither, because they are the seed

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of Abraham, *are they* all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. 8 That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

In Gal 3:16, Paul focuses the recipients of the promise even further:

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.

And John bears testimony to this in his prolog (1:11),

He came unto his own place, and they that were his own received him not.

Isaiah here anticipates Paul by over 700 years. The heir of the land under the promises of the Abrahamic covenant is not modern Israel, but the Messiah. One day, when Israel shall turn to the Lord, they will enjoy the land under his rule. But until then, the true owner of the land is Immanuel.

8:9-10, *The Paired Commands*

The next section is marked by pairs of commands. In each case, the first command is an ironic invitation to sin, while the second describes the judgment to follow, as though the sheriff were to say to the bad guys, “set foot in Dodge again, and die.” The meaning is clearly, “If you do A, you will experience B.” We have

- one such pair
- a command to the nations to hear
- four more pairs,
- and the basis for the warnings.

It seems best to understand the first pair as a summary that is amplified in the following four pairs.

Note in addition the contrast between “ye people,” integral to the first pair, and the added command to “ye of far countries.” As we will see, this contrast corresponds to the distinction between the destruction of Ephraim and the sparing of Judah in the first paragraph of this section.

9 Associate yourselves,--There are at least three different Hebrew roots from which this imperative has been derived, and some of them have multiple meanings. See notes for survey of actual forms of this type. Orthographically, the most likely derivation is from עעו. One of the possible meanings is “Be evil,” and this fits very well with the notion of the first pair as a summary. “Do your worst. Go ahead and be evil.” The details of this evil are spelled out in the following pairs.

O ye people,--The warning here is first of all addressed to “this people” of v. 6, Ephraim.

and ye shall be broken in pieces;--This threat, repeated three times in v. 9, may refer either to physical breaking or to being made ashamed.

and give ear, all ye of far countries:--Isaiah may be recalling the threat of 5:26, “he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far.” God will bring judgment by means of the far countries, but in the end those countries themselves will be judged.

gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces.--The first two detailed pairs are the same. To “gird oneself” is to gather up the loose garments that one usually wears and tuck them into the belt, so that one can move freely in combat. Cf. the phrase, “gird up your loins.” First, he envisions the adversary as mustering his troops, with individuals preparing for combat.

10 Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought;--Now the nations plan their attack. God promises that their detailed plans will have no effect.

speak the word, and it shall not stand:--Finally they give the order to attack, but to no avail. Note the correspondence with 7:7, the matching member of the chiasm on the other side, “it shall not stand.”

for God is with us.--He returns to the name given the promised child, this time embedding it syntactically in a way that demands that we translate it.

The notion that God is present with his people is a pervasive characteristic of the OT faith, starting with the patriarchs. It sets this faith apart from other ANE religions, which do not talk about the deity being with his people. They also do not have the clear picture of God's overwhelming sovereignty. Thus the God of the Bible is both farther from his creatures and closer to them than man-made deities. He is not contingent on their actions, and yet deigns to be with them. This assurance is all that they need, even in times of deepest trial.

- In the days of the patriarchs, the Philistines acknowledged to Abraham, “God *is* with thee in all that thou doest” (Gen 21:22).
- God promised Isaac, “I will be with thee” (Gen 26:3), and Jacob, “Behold, I am with thee” (28:15).
- When Joseph was sold into Egypt, “the Lord was with Joseph” (39:5).
- After the wilderness wandering, Moses reminded Israel, “these forty years the LORD thy God *hath been* with thee; thou hast lacked nothing” (Deut 2:7).
- After the death of Moses, God promised Joshua, “As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee”(Josh 1:5).
- The Psalmist acknowledged, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me” (Ps 23:4), and insisted, “The LORD of hosts *is* with us; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge” (Ps 46:7, 11).
- We have heard Isaiah's emphasis on this truth, one that he will continue to emphasize, “Fear not, I am with thee” (41:10; 43:5).
- When the Lord Jesus commissions his disciples, he reassures them, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).
- Paul, facing trial and execution, proclaimed, “The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (2 Tim 4:17).

So we, whatever threats we face, should encourage ourselves with this great overwhelming truth, that the Lord, the sovereign creator of the earth, is with us, and will care for us.

8:11-15, Threat: the SyroEphraimite Confederacy

The final element of the chiasm returns to the threat of the attack from the north and the command not to fear that we saw in 7:1-6.

11 For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand,--Cf. Ezek 3:14,

So the spirit lifted me up, and took me away, and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; but the hand of the LORD was strong upon me.

Cf. Ezek 1:3,

The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.

The Lord did not casually speak these words to Isaiah. His hand was heavy on the prophet, commanding his submission.

and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying,--Note that the Lord is the speaker of what follows. The instruction “not [to] walk in the way of this people” is spelled out in v. 12. Hold onto this observation.

12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all *them* to whom this people shall say, A confederacy;--A clear return to the theme of 7:1-2, though the exact Hebrew word is different (there the verb נָהַה, here the noun קִשָּׁר).

קִשָּׁר usually refers to a treasonous connection (2 Chr 23:13). So some see this as a reference to accusations that Isaiah and his disciples (8:16) are traitors for not supporting the royal approach, an accusation also leveled against Amos (7:10) and Jeremiah. But in 7:1-6, the intent of the alliance was to depose Ahaz and replace him with Tabeal. This was certainly treason on the part of Ephraim, and arguably on the part of Syria, whom David had subdued in 2 Sam 8.

neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid.--Here is another clear link to the first member of the chiasm, the observation of the people's fear in 7:2 and the extended command not to fear in 7:4.

13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself;--Note first of all that, though the Lord is speaking, he does not say, “Sanctify me.” He speaks of “the Lord of hosts” in the third person, as someone distinct. This kind of shift becomes more common in the later prophets. The parade example is Zech 12:10,

they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for *his* only son

There is a messianic overtone here, and the verses that follow are applied in the NT to the Messiah. This is the Immanuel, the “God with us,” of whom the prophet has been speaking.

The specific action that they are to take with regard to the Messiah is to sanctify him. To sanctify something is to set it apart, to keep it distinct. We sanctify the Lord when we set him apart by our actions.

The phrase comes from Num 20:12 and the derivative 27:14, where it describes the sin of Moses and Aaron at the water of Meribah, when Moses smote the rock.

Num 20:12 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to

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sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.

One aspect of Moses' sin is in smiting the rock, rather than simply speaking to it as the Lord commanded. But this does not appear to be in view in Num 20:12, for two reasons.

1. The people did not know the details of the Lord's command to Moses, so the smiting did not fail to sanctify the Lord.
2. It was Moses alone who smote the rock, not Moses and Aaron. Yet Aaron is said to have failed to sanctify the Lord before Israel.

The failure to sanctify the Lord is more likely in what Moses said when he smote the rock:

Num 20:10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?

Note the “We.” Instead of giving God the glory and setting him apart as the power that produced the water, they took that glory to themselves. They sought to attract to themselves as men the honor that belonged only to God.

If God were not “with us,” there would be no need to sanctify him. If he never intervened in our world, there would be no danger of confusing what we do with what he does—but then we would be completely on our own. He *is* with us, but does not relinquish his sovereign deity by being with us, and he demands that we recognize him as God. By claiming God's action as their own, Moses and Aaron were effectively denying God's active presence with them.

God warns Isaiah and his peers not to fall into the same trap. But how would they do that? He goes on to clarify.

and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.--Fear is an honor that belongs to God alone. Like worship, it must not be offered to creatures. “Fear” and “dread” are the noun forms of the two verbs in 12b, tying the section together. “Do not fear their fear ... sanctify the Lord ... let him be your fear.”

The same association of sanctifying the Lord with reserving our fear for him appears again in 29:23,

Isa 29:22-23 Therefore thus saith the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. [That is, he shall no longer fear circumstances.] 23 But when he seeth his children, the work of mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel.

When we fear someone, we are acknowledging their power over us, and our obligation to defer to them. But ultimately, only God has this power over us, and he has promised to protect his people from all other threats:

Isa 54:15-17 Behold, they shall surely gather together, *but* not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. 16 Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire, and that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. 17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue

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that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness *is* of me, saith the LORD.

This, then, is the theological foundation for the command in 7:4, “Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted.” It's not just that God is going to deal with this particular threat. It is that he alone is worthy of our fear.

The logic here is the prototype for our Lord's teaching in Matt 10:28,

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

In this light, it is noteworthy that Peter distinguishes our attitude toward God and the magistrate:

1 Pet 2:17 Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

He goes on to quote this passage in support of this teaching:

1 Pet 3:14-15 be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts:

The only case in which we are to fear civil rulers is when we do wrong, and recognize them as God's agents to punish evil,

Rom 13:4 But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for [the magistrate] beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil.

Let's pause for a moment to reflect on the allusion to the water from the rock. This allusion is an interesting example of our sixth Bible study principle, “Find the Bible's comments on itself.” Recall from 7:12 that Ahaz alluded to Exodus 17, the first episode of water from the rock, when he refused to tempt the Lord. Now the Lord alludes to Num 20, the second episode, in warning the nation to sanctify the Lord. The two episodes go together in Israel's history. Num 20:13 refers to the second as “the waters of Meribah” (strife), but Exod 17:7 already refers to the first as “Massah [tempting] and Meribah,” and Deut 33:8 links them together,

Deut 33:8 And of Levi he said, *Let* thy Thummim and thy Urim *be* with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, *and with* whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah;

as does Psa 95:8,

Harden not your heart, as in the provocation [Meribah], *and as in* the day of temptation [Massah] in the wilderness:

The two allusions bring us back to Israel's circumstances at those two episodes. In both cases, the congregation of Israel found themselves in the desert with no water, a circumstance even more dire than the political situation facing Jerusalem in 734 BC. The allusion reminds us that God can work miracles when the situation seems bleakest. He did it in the days when the nation was founded, coming out of Egypt, not once but twice. He can surely care for them now. But they must beware of two sins that can beset us in such circumstances.

- They must not *tempt* the Lord by questioning whether he is truly among us. Ahaz insisted that he did not doubt, but in fact he did not believe, and he was not established.

Isaiah 7-8a

- They must *sanctify* the Lord, allowing him to set himself apart, not claiming credit for the solution ourselves or giving others the fear that he alone deserves.

14 And he shall be for a sanctuary;--The Lord continues to refer to “the LORD of Hosts” in the third person. Messiah is still in focus.

The indicatives of this verse are parallel to the commands of v. 13. v.13 sets “sanctify the Lord” beside fear and dread; 14f pairs “he shall become a sanctuary” with specific threats that the Lord poses.

| | 13, Command | 14-15, Indicative | |
|-----------------|---|--|---|
| Holiness | Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; | And he shall be for a sanctuary; | |
| Threat | and <i>let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.</i> | but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, | And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, |
| | | for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. | and be snared, and be taken. |

Compare the vision of ch. 6. The sanctuary is a terrifying place, yet a place of cleansing for those who repent. Because God is with us, we can find forgiveness.

but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.--If we do not receive his forgiveness, his presence means that we will come under judgment. We need to consider two things about these verses: their internal structure, and their use in the NT.

Internal Structure:

The parallels in these verses call out two distinct groups of people (the houses of Israel, the inhabitants of Jerusalem), and two distinct threats (a rock over which one stumbles, a trap that snares someone).

The two threats are of different character. A rock is passive, and causes harm only because the one who trips doesn't have his eyes open. The focus is not on someone's deliberately putting it there.² A snare is deliberately put in place by a hunter to trap someone. “Gin” is a bird trap, probably a thin net. “Snare” is another kind of trap, perhaps made of wood.

To “both the houses of Israel,” the nation in its entirety (Judah and Ephraim), the Lord is a stumblingblock. They are blind to him, and through their own blindness they run into him, stumble, and are broken. Had they heeded the clear revelation he gave them, they would have been saved. And if he had not been “with us” at all, they would also have had no problem. But when God is with us, and we ignore him, we are sure to stumble.

“The inhabitants of Jerusalem” are in a privileged position. These include the leaders, enjoying constant access to the priests at the temple, the custodians of divine revelation. This added revelation makes them even more culpable. From Solomon, who turned to idols, to Rehoboam, whose youthful folly led to the division of the kingdom, and down to Ahaz, who now invites Assyria to invade the land, their sin has angered God. If he were not “with us,” they would not have to worry about what he thinks. But he is with them, and in his wrath he now deliberately hunts them with gins and snares. There may

² Though see Lev 19:14; Jer 6:21; Ezek 3:20; and Ezek often (14:3, 4, 7) speaks of a person putting the stumblingblock of his own iniquity before his face.

Isaiah 7-8a

be an anticipation here of the coming captivity: he traps them to remove them from the land, just as we sometimes have to trap a pesky raccoon or squirrel to remove it from our house.

Use in the NT:

v. 14, together with Ps 118:22 and Isa 28:16, is quoted twice in the NT with direct reference to our Lord. The quotations confirm the messianic implications of the context, and make clear the paradox between the sanctuary and the threat.

| Psalm 118:22 | Isaiah 8:14 | Isaiah 28:16 | Romans 9:33 | 1 Peter 2:7-8 |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, | As it is written, | |
| | | Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, | Behold, I lay in Sion | |
| | And he shall be for a sanctuary; | a tried stone, a precious corner <i>stone</i> , a sure foundation: | | 7 Unto you therefore which believe <i>he is precious</i> : |
| The stone <i>which</i> the builders refused is become the head <i>stone</i> of the corner. | | | | but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, |
| | but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, | | a stumblingstone and rock of offence: | 8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, <i>even to them</i> which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. |
| | | he that believeth shall not make haste. | and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. | |

First, compare Rom 9:33 with Isa 8:14 and 28:16. The frame of the verse clearly comes from 28:16, but instead of the beautiful references to the building of the temple (the “sanctuary”) in 28:16, Paul inserts the threat of the stumblingstone from 8:14.

1 Pet 2:7-8 combines 8:14 with Ps 118:22. This time, the outer frame comes from 8:14. Isaiah's “sanctuary” becomes the “precious” Messiah in 1 Pet 2:7. Then he inserts the part from the Psalm about the builders' rejection, and comes back to 8:14 for the stumblingstone. Peter makes explicit the difference in our attitude that distinguishes the two views. He is a precious sanctuary to those who believe, but a terrible threat to those who are disobedient.

Unbelievers sometimes bring up unhappiness in the world as evidence that God is not with us. They presume that God must be unfailingly loving and kind. But these verses present a much richer, more nuanced view of our Lord. He is indeed a sanctuary, yet he is also a fearful judge. He is with us, but he brings with him his standards of holiness. When we meet him in the sanctuary, as Isaiah did, we must first face our fear, before we can be assured of his forgiveness. But if we will truly fear him, we will be set free from all fear of men.

Notes

Who names a child?

It is the mother who names Immanuel in 7:14. Does this emphasize the unique nature of the birth? Who usually names children?

The survey below shows that the father rarely names the child. This happens for only 10 children in the OT:

- Abraham names Ishmael and Isaac.
- Jacob overrules Rachel's name for Benjamin
- Job names the three daughters born to him after his trials
- Isaiah and his contemporary Hosea name four of their children on explicit divine command, as part of an oracle.

The last four are clearly exceptional (due to the divine command), as is the case of Jacob (the mother, as a matter of course, has already named the child, and Jacob steps in only because he does not like the name). The children named by Job and Abraham are of unusual significance, given the trials through which their fathers have passed, and in Ishmael's case (Gen 16:15), Abram is responding to the Lord's instruction through Hagar (v. 11).

Seven other uses of the 3ms for “call his name” are clearly indefinite.

Women name thirteen children, only twice (Hagar and the virgin of Isa 7:14) under divine command. The others are unremarkable, and appear to show the usual custom.

A group, apparently including the midwives, name two others.

Indefinite use of 3ms

Gen 25:26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called [3ms, indefinite? cf. v. 25] Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them.

Gen 25:30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red *pottage*; for I *am* faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

Gen 27:36 And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?

Gen 29:34 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called [3ms, but probably indefinite, cf. vv. 32, 33] Levi.

Gen 38:29 And it came to pass, as he drew back his hand, that, behold, his brother came out: and she said, How hast thou broken forth? *this breach be* upon thee: therefore his name was called Pharez.

Gen 38:30 And afterward came out his brother, that had the scarlet thread upon his hand: and his name was called Zarah.

Isa 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

The Father

Gen 16:15 And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. (But note 16:11, where Hagar is instructed to name the child; Abram is acting on her instruction.)

Gen 21:3 And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

Gen 35:18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

Job 42:14 And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Kerenhappuch.

Isa 8:3 And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Mahershalalhashbaz.

Hos 1:4 And the LORD said unto him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little *while*, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel.

Hos 1:6 And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And *God* said unto him, Call her name Loruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away.

Hos 1:9 Then said *God*, Call his name Loammi: for ye *are* not my people, and I will not be your *God*.

The Mother

Gen 16:11 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou *art* with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction.

Gen 19:37 And the firstborn bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same *is* the father of the Moabites unto this day.

Gen 19:38 And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same *is* the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.

Gen 29:32 And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.

Gen 29:33 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I *was* hated, he hath therefore given me this *son* also: and she called his name Simeon.

Gen 29:35 And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.

Gen 30:6 And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan.

Gen 30:8 And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali.

Gen 30:18 And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar.

Gen 35:18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

Exo 2:10 And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.

1 Chr 4:9 And Jabez was more honourable than his brethren: and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bare him with sorrow.

1 Chr 7:16 And Maachah the wife of Machir bare a son, and she called his name Peresh; and the name of his brother was Sheresh; and his sons *were* Ulam and Rakem.

Other

Gen 25:25 And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

Ruth 4:17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.

8:6

On the construct of the noun מְשׁוּשׁ “joy” with the preposition אֵת, see Jouon-Muraoka 129n.

The parallelism between a noun and the finite verb מָאֵס in the first half of the verse is awkward. Current opinion favors reading מְשׁוּשׁ as a homophone for מָסַס Qal inf “to melt,” which would allow “this people” to be Judah. But the parallelism would still be awkward.

Implications for structure: vv. 9-10 still match 7:7-9. Perhaps vv. 6-8 correspond to the “butter and honey” of 7:15 and the conditions of 7:17.

The imperative form CōCû (8:10)

Here is a BW query to retrieve these forms:

וַיִּשְׁעוּ וַיִּשְׁעוּ וַיִּשְׁעוּ

With what kind of root are such forms usually associated in the OT?

BW finds 101 such forms in the OT. Of these, the qal imperatives represent the following types of roots:

Hollow, בּוּא: fourteen times. This would support a derivation from ריע "cry out," but this verb is not attested in the Qal.

Pe-nun, נגש: four times (plus two with *sewa* instead of *holem*)

Geminate

- Usually, with *dagesh* showing doubling: גלל twice, דמם three times, שמם once, כתת once, סבב three times, חתת three times, סלל six times, בזז twice.
- But weak consonants reject doubling: שעע: once (Isa 29:9, good match for ארר); רעע once (and another with *holem waw* instead of *holem*; no *dagesh* on *resh*)

There are no lamedh-he verbs of this form, ruling out AV's רעה.

From the other direction, there are 57 qal imperative mp's from roots of the form אאה or אעה, and none of them uses the form CōCû (except for Isa 8:9, which is parsed from רעה). All use *sewa* as their medial vowel. The vast majority are from ראה, but note שעה Isa 22:4; and רעה Gen 29:7.

The best fit appears to be רעע.

“God is With Us”

The usual preposition, as here, is עִם:

Gen 21:22 And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God *is* with thee in all that thou doest:

Gen 26:3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; (Isaac)

Gen 26:24 And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I *am* the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I *am* with (אִתְּךָ) thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.

Gen 28:15 And, behold, I *am* with thee, and will keep thee in all *places* whither thou goest, (Jacob)

Gen 31:3 And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.

Gen 31:5 And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it *is* not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me.

Deut 2:7 For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God *hath been* with thee; thou hast lacked nothing.

Josh 1:5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

2 Chr 13:12 And, behold, God himself *is* with us for *our* captain, and his priests with sounding trumpets to cry alarm against you. (Abijah)

Psa 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Psa 46:7, 11 The LORD of hosts *is* with us; the God of Jacob *is* our refuge. Selah.

Isa 41:10 Fear thou not; for I *am* with thee: be not dismayed; for I *am* thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Deut 20:1 When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, *and* a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the LORD thy God *is* with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.

But in the Joseph story (Gen 39:2, 3, 21, 23; Isa 43:5), we find אִתְּךָ. What is the significance of the change? Compare also Gen 26:3 (עִם) with 24 (אִתְּךָ). So far I have not been able to distinguish the two. Preuss in TDOT has what appears to be a fairly complete catalog of both forms, but also cannot find a distinction.