

Intro

Times when conspiracy theories abound. Times when people are seeking supernatural revelation apart from the LORD. Times when national leaders forsake God. Times when the general population forsakes God. Times when international threats abound. I'm not talking about today. I'm talking about Isaiah's day.

We all experience a variety of fears. Maybe fear of a deadly virus. Fear of unexpected bills. Fear of relational conflict. Fear of history repeating itself.

What does God's word from 2,700 years ago have to say to our fears today? This morning we learn that...

BIG IDEA: Times of distress are opportunities for God to draw near

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

- we'll tour Isaiah 7-8 then make 3 applications
- faith in times of distress
- the king's rejection of God's help becomes a call to God's people

Interpretation

Timing

Ahaz is king of Judah (735 BC). Israel is divided between Northern Kingdom (10 tribes) and Southern Kingdom (Judah and Benjamin).

Assyrian threat is increasing so Rezin (Syria) and Pekah (Israel) have joined together. They plan to defeat Ahaz and replace him with Tabeel (7:6) to take Judah's land. Attack is imminent.

Messenger sent

God sends Isaiah with a message (7:4).

- *be careful* = decide wisely
- *be quiet* = be calm...be at peace...don't be disturbed
- *do not fear*
- *do not let your heart be faint* = all hope isn't lost

1) Their plan will fail (7:7)

2) Within 65 years Ephraim (= Israel) will be devastated as a people (7:8)

▪ By 670 BC Israel was unrecognizable because of Assyrian domination. Israel's inhabitants were taken captive and exported while foreigners were imported to the land in their place.

3) Call to faith

'If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.' – 7:9

Replace fear with faith. Act from faith not from fear.

Sign offered

The LORD offers Ahaz a sign (7:11), but Ahaz refuses the offer (7:12). Demanding that God show a sign is sinful (Matt 12:39). But when God offers a sign, turning it down is rejecting God's offer of help.

Ahaz fails to act in faith.

Sign given

- 1) A virgin will give birth to a son
- 2) The son's name will be Immanuel = "God with us"
- 3) Before the child is old enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land of Syria and Israel will be deserted

The child promised (maybe a son of Isaiah since his other children had significant names?) isn't identified. But the child had to be born in Ahaz's day since Syria fell in 732 BC and Israel fell in 722 BC.

2 Kings 16:6-9 reveals how Ahaz responded to his fear. Ahaz sent for help from the king of Assyria = seeking foreign help instead of the LORD. Failure to trust the LORD brought judgment through Assyria (7:17).

7:18-25 describe Assyria's destruction.

- 1) God will call enemies from Egypt to Assyria (7:18-19).
- 2) Razor = sign of humiliation or total destruction (7:20).
- 3) Small herds = small population (7:21-22).
- 4) Briers and thorns = the land once fertile is fruitless (7:23-25)

Summary

- 1) Imminent invasion brought Judah to fear.
- 2) The LORD offered assistance.
- 3) The LORD was rejected.
- 4) The place where Ahaz sought refuge, Assyria, became his destruction.

Maher-shalal-hash-baz

Then the LORD said to me, "Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, 'Belonging to Maher-shalal-hashbaz.'" ² And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me." ³ And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-shalal-hashbaz; ⁴ for before the boy knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria." – 8:1-4

- Maher-shalal-hash-baz means "the soil speeds, the prey hastens"
- 8:4 explains the meaning: before Isaiah's child can address his parents, Rezin and Pekah will fall.

Short-lived joy

The LORD spoke to me again: ⁶ "Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, ⁷ therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, ⁸ and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel." – 8:5-8

Judah rejoiced over Rezin and Pekah's defeat while refusing "the waters of Shiloah" = some form of God's help. Judah's rejection of God results in God bringing Assyria to Judah in judgment. The land destroyed belongs to Immanuel. Judah belongs to God so Immanuel is God himself. Immanuel's identity extends beyond the child born in Isaiah's day = dual fulfillment. A child in Isaiah's day. A child in the distant future who is God.

Nations rebuked

Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered; give ear, all you far countries; strap on your armor and be shattered; strap on your armor and be shattered. ¹⁰ Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for God is with us. – 8:9-10

Judah's defeat isn't the last word. The peoples addressed are "all you far countries." Their plans won't stand because God is with Judah. "God is with us" translates Immanuel. Immanuel's presence ensures Judah will stand. In the end, those whom God is with will triumph.

Two ways to live

For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: ¹² "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. ¹³ But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. ¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken." – 8:11-15

- 1) Identifying conspiracies or regarding God as holy
- 2) Fearing what others fear or fearing God
- 3) Offended by God or finding sanctuary in the LORD

▪ Maybe offended by God's demands or accusations of law-breaking.

- 4) Rock of stumbling = "a trap and a snare"

How is God a trap and a snare? Commands seen as burdensome and restrictive rather than liberating. The one who created humans knows humans best. He knows what helps. He knows what harms. **Can you see that God knows how we ought to live?** Warnings ignored and promises rejected leads to hardness. Stubborn hardness leads to looking in the wrong direction. Seeking help in the wrong places results in ruin. **Wrong response to God leads to ruin.**

Two ways to live continued

Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. ¹⁷ I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. ¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. ¹⁹ And

when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn. ²¹ They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. ²² And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. – 8:16-22

We skipped over Shear-jashub (7:3), meaning “a remnant shall return.” Isaiah’s disciples are this promised remnant. We’re seeing a division within Judah. Those who trust and follow the LORD. And those who don’t. Isaiah was told his message would be met with hardness (Isa 6:9-13). Here we learn that some responded to Isaiah’s message positively. Isaiah directs this exhortation to the believing remnant.

Wait for God to act while hoping in God’s promises. Reject mediums and necromancers (8:19). Embrace God’s word that has been given (8:20). Because rejecting God’s word leads to distress and darkness.

Several applications emerge from Ahaz’s failure and Isaiah’s exhortation.

Application 1: Beware of misplaced fear

Ahaz was in a tight spot. Rezin and Pekah were conspiring to invade Judah. Evidently Judah’s military wasn’t strong enough to withstand an invasion. So Ahaz and Judah “*shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind*” (7:2). God told Ahaz “*be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint*” (7:4).

Later we hear God instructing Isaiah, “*Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread*” (8:12-13).

Don’t focus on conspiracy theories. At best these give way to misplaced focus. At worst these give way to unnecessary fears. Evidently conspiracy theories contributed to Judah’s fears. We’re told, don’t be afraid of what makes them afraid. What’s the alternative? Fear God. In the sense of regarding the LORD as holy. Meaning treasure God above all else. Like I treasured my ottoman. Regarding God as distinct, on a different level than us, a different sort of being, all-powerful, all-wise, flawless in character. Regarding God as the center of the universe. Fear in the sense of giving God the utmost reverence.

Fearing God paves the way for God becoming our sanctuary (8:14). As we regard God as the center of the universe and trust him, he acts on our behalf. He comes to our aid. He becomes our refuge. Our protection.

What I’m not saying. I’m not saying pretend difficult realities don’t exist when in fact they do.

What I’m saying is that when difficult realities exist, turn your fear from circumstance to God. Bring God into the equation. Put another way, fearful circumstances call for fearing God. Hope in an awesome God crushes fear.

Application 2: Beware of seeking help in wrong places

Outside help was necessary. The threat of invasion left Ahaz with three options. Give in to the threat and join forces with Rezin and Pekah. Or call on Assyria for help. Or call on God for help. Ahaz chose option two. He sought outside help. In the end the outside help backfired. Assyria devastated Judah. A picture of seeking help in the wrong places coming back to haunt him.

Why avoid mediums and necromancers? Because it's seeking sources other than God for guidance. God has chosen to guide us by preserving a written word for us. Only seek counsel from those whose guidance is derived from God's word. Going to mediums and necromancers is essentially placing our faith in sources other than God.

Acting as if the Bible isn't sufficient to guide. Acting as if the Bible isn't sufficient to bring spiritual life to our souls. Like turning to new age gurus or prosperity preachers or psychologists that operate with a worldview contrary to Scripture.

Some sources are spiritually helpful and others are destructive. Avoid destructive sources. Using drugs or alcohol or other substances to calm fears. Avoid unhelpful sources that don't help with the fear. Turning to food or entertainment or shopping to dull fears.

These sources don't work because they're not the remedy proscribed by the one who created us. God knows what plagues us. God knows what we need in our distress.

One place where God provides the help we need is the local church. Why the local church? Because it's the institution God established to ensure our spiritual good. Rejecting the local church is rejecting what God offers.

Point 3: Beware of rejecting the help God offers

God offered Ahaz a sign. Ahaz politely declined. God is often rejected politely. I'd rather get help from Assyria. I'd rather get help from a medium or necromancer. I'd rather dull myself with substances. I'd rather dull my pain with shopping or binge-watching or food. I'd rather solve this on my own. No blatant defiance. Just polite rejection. I'm not really interested God. No thank you.

We Christians do it too. We place our hope in things other than God. Our charisma. Our people skills. Our bank account. Our ingenuity. Believing we can fix ourselves.

In 8:17, Isaiah's disciples are supposed to wait on God while hoping in God. Trusting in God while we waiting for his help. Hoping in God himself. Hoping in truth promised.

The implication is that if Ahaz trusted in God, his fears would have subsided. **How is it that faith in God conquers real, tangible threats that are worthy of fear?**

First, attention is turned from crisis to God. The focus is no longer the threat. The focus is God. The awesome God who can't be thwarted. God is regarded as holy and feared, not the crisis.

Second, hope now exists when hope was previously absent. The crisis isn't the final word. God has given a promise. In the end, the nations will be shattered because God is with the remnant.

Third, there's guidance from God. A course of action to take in the present while we wait. Avoid conspiracy theories. Treasure God. Hope instead of fear. Walk in God's way.

Fourth, there's commitment from God. I will be your sanctuary. Your place of refuge. Your place of protection.

When the Holy Spirit applies truth to our hearts, the result is peace, ability to wait, and firm hope in times of crisis.

Matt 1:23

As Darryl read, Matthew sees the Immanuel promise fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the Immanuel whom the land of Judah belongs to. Jesus is the Immanuel present with the believing remnant.

"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." – Matt 1:21

Jesus was born of a virgin and he saves his people from their sins. His people being the believing remnant. Everyone who responds to Jesus with faith and repentance is rescued from their sins.

Jesus died in the place of sinners, securing pardon for all who believe. Rescue from what plagues us most: our sin.

Non-Christians

God knows what plagues you.

God is able to help you.

God calls you to trust him. To embrace him as holy.

Conclusion

Times of distress are opportunities for God to draw near.

Beware of misplaced fear.

Beware of seeking help in wrong places.

Beware of rejecting the help God offers.