

Immanuel and Two Sons of David **Matt. 1:18-25 & Isaiah 7:10-17**

Introduction

A fine wine means more to someone who has tasted and studied wines for decades than to someone who has only been tasting wines for a couple years. Both can know that what is in front of them is an excellent sample, but the experienced person appreciates the subtleties and the glory of what's in front of him much more so than the novice.

As a people, we are novices at tasting the gospel in the OT. And the Christmas season is one of the times of the year that the OT prophecies are quoted in high doses. In this passage, Matthew sets a little piece of gospel prophecy in front of his readers, and you are invited to grow in your knowledge, appreciation, and love of the glory of the gospel by studying it. Matthew was likely writing first to a very Jewish audience, and good Jews knew their Scriptures (the OT). While we know that this prophecy is truly speaking of Jesus (because Scripture tells us), we also miss some of the glory of the fulfillment of the prophecy when we are unfamiliar with where it came from. After all, the entirety of Scripture is God-breathed and is profitable to make the man of God complete for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Matthew teaches us how to study Jesus by looking at the OT. In this case, he wants us to see the stories of two sons of David.

King Ahaz

The prophecy Matthew quotes comes out of Isaiah 7. The events surrounding Isaiah 7 occur not long before the final end of the northern kingdom of Israel. The prophecies in this chapter are given to Ahaz, King of Judah, who is the father of King Hezekiah. It is during Hezekiah's reign in Judah that the northern kingdom is carried away by Assyria (2 Kings 18:9-12). Ahaz was a very wicked king (2 Kings 16, 2 Chron. 28).

At the time of Isaiah 7, Judah is being attacked by an alliance of Israel and Syria (vs. 1-2, cf. 2 Kings 16:5-6 and 2 Chron. 28:5-8). Pekah (King of Israel, a.k.a. Remaliah's son) and Rezin (King of Syria) desired to set up a king in Judah (v. 6) who was more favorable to them, presumably in helping them resist the growing power of Assyria. The Lord sends his prophet Isaiah to tell Ahaz not to fear the threat of Pekah and Rezin (v. 4), because their plans will fail (vs. 7-9). Will he believe (v. 9)? It seems he did not, so the Lord offers a sign (vv. 10-11). Ahaz responds with a show of pious dignity (v. 12). Ahaz certainly was not concerned about testing the Lord. Ahaz rejects God's offer because he had rejected Jehovah God. He had given himself to worshipping other gods and had turned to the king of Assyria for protection against the threat of Israel and Syria (2 Kings 16:17; 2 Chron. 28:16).

By addressing "the house of David," the Lord highlights the apostasy of Ahaz. David had been a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22; 1 Sam. 13:14). The Lord was with David and promised to establish his house and kingdom forever through a Son of David (2 Sam. 7:8-16), who we know is Jesus (Acts 13:22ff). But instead of keeping covenant with God, Ahaz promoted wickedness and idolatry in every single city of Judah (2 Chron. 28:25). The house of David had become a mockery and provoked the Lord to anger. In turning to Assyria and in rejecting God's offer, Ahaz did test the Lord (Is. 7:13). He was on the throne of David, but he refused to trust in the Lord's promise to preserve the throne of David and to believe that the Lord was with him (cf. Ex. 17:7). Ahaz trusted political savvy and alliances instead of the Lord, and he reaped the harvest in spades.

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The Immanuel Prophecy

In response to Ahaz's rejection and false piety, the Lord responds that He will indeed give a sign to the house of David. "A virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel..." (vs. 14-17). Three things are clear in this prophecy. First, the child will be brought up in poverty (compare v. 15 with v. 22). Second, before he reaches an age of discretion, God's prophecy to deal with Syria and Israel will be fulfilled. Third, the Lord will scourge Judah by means of Assyria. This prophecy is a prophecy of hope for the faithful house of David ("God with us") and at the same time of judgment on the unfaithful house of David. The prophecy is in part fulfilled in Isaiah 8 with the birth of Isaiah's son. And not many years will go by until both Syria and Israel are demolished by Assyria.

Matthew shows that the prophecy really is fulfilled, though, in David's Son, Jesus. He truly was born of a virgin into poverty. Jesus inherits the throne of David, which thanks to men like Ahaz had come to nothing – the descendant of David was a poor carpenter. But in Jesus, the throne of David is finally and ultimately established. The Son of David does sit on the highest throne and rules all the nations and will forever. This Immanuel prophecy is about God coming to be with His people in fulfillment of His covenant to David.

Joseph

Matthew makes a point of identifying Joseph as the son of David. He provides a genealogy tracing from Abraham to David, through the captivity of Israel in Babylon, all the way to Joseph. Then, the angel addresses Joseph as "son of David." Consider the contrast here between the two sons of David in these stories. Both Ahaz and Joseph find themselves in a crisis situation. Ahaz, a faithless and idolatrous son of David, rejects God and His words. Joseph, a faithful and just son of David, seeks to cling to God's words. It is as he seeks to act in obedience to God's law that the angel comes to him. Then, having been given a sign by God, Joseph again obeys the words of God, trusting in Him through the uncertainty and, possibly, criticism of those who knew him.

God With Us

God is faithful to His promises. He proved this ultimately by taking on flesh and coming to the world to save it. God is with us. This Son is also the Messiah, God's Anointed, who saved His people from their sins. God must be with us (Immanuel) before He can save us (Jesus). There is no other way for us to be saved. God must intervene. And He did.

So what does it mean that God is with us? It means that God took on flesh to save His people. And so, if you are one of His sheep, you have nothing to fear. Your fears can all be taken to Him and laid at the feet of Jesus, because He is the Great Shepherd. He came to lead the world back to the Father, including you, and He will complete the work that He has begun (Phil. 1:6). You will and do encounter fears, but as believers you know what do with them. You could wallow in them and be swept away. Or you could turn to other powers, like Ahaz to Assyria, and destroy the gifts God has given you. Or you can turn like Joseph to the word of God, believe His promises, and obediently walk in faith. This Christmas season, remember that God is with you and that He has saved you. Trust Him for everything. Merry Christmas!