



SESSION 1

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

► ***The Point***

The birth of Jesus was no mere circumstance. It was planned by God.

► ***The Passage***

Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5

► ***The Bible Meets Life***

When I took my sons to their first NBA® game, it was a game between the Dallas Mavericks, who were having a great season, and one of the worst teams in the league. However, that night the Mavericks were not doing well. Their coach, Don Nelson, was fed up with the mediocre efforts of his players, so when he disagreed with a call the referee made, he stepped on the court and screamed at the ref. The ref gave Coach Nelson a technical foul, but he kept screaming. Nelson received his second technical foul and was kicked out of the game. In a post-game interview, a reporter asked Coach Nelson about the technical fouls. Smiling, he insinuated he did it on purpose to fire up his team. And it worked! The Mavericks won. Something that appeared “off the cuff” was actually planned all along!

Some “coincidences” are not coincidence at all. They were planned. The life and death of Jesus Christ were no mere afterthoughts of God; He planned them all along! The Old Testament is full of prophecies that point to the coming of Jesus Christ.

► ***The Setting***

Isaiah served as a prophet in Judah during the reigns of four kings: Uzziah (783-742 BC), Jotham (742-735 BC), Ahaz (735-715 BC), and Hezekiah (716-686 BC). Though Uzziah's reign was prosperous and mostly peaceful, later kings witnessed the seeds of danger arising as Assyria, under the leadership of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC), grew stronger and more influential. Isaiah recognized that God's people had sinned and were facing judgment from God, just like the Northern Kingdom, which had already fallen to Assyria in 722 BC. Isaiah preached that God would intervene and bring hope to His people.

What does the Bible say?

Ahaz (7:10)—King of Judah (735-716 BC) who practiced evil idolatry (see 2 Kings 16:2-3) and trusted in Assyria rather than God during times of difficulty. (See vv. 1-7; Isa. 7).

Sheol (7:11)—The place of the dead in the grave or in the underworld.

Immanuel (7:14)—Personal name meaning “God with us” that was attached to Isaiah’s prophecy.

The LORD of Armies (9:7)—Made up of two Hebrew words—Yahweh and armies. Often used to refer to the angelic multitude.

The stump of Jesse (11:1)—A reference to the line of David being cut down and yet being restored.

Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5

^{7:10} Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask for a sign from the LORD your God—it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.” ¹² But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the LORD.”

¹³ Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God?

¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.

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^{9:6} For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end.

He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.

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^{11:1} Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

³ His delight will be in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, he will not execute justice by what he hears with his ears, ⁴ but he will judge the poor righteously and execute justice for the oppressed of the land. He will strike the land with a scepter from his mouth, and he will kill the wicked with a command from his lips.

⁵ Righteousness will be a belt around his hips; faithfulness will be a belt around his waist.

GET INTO THE STUDY



5 minutes

Notes



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, either purchase or print baby announcement cards. The outside of the card should say, "It's a boy!" The inside of the card should have the verse Isaiah 7:14 printed on it. Put the cards in small envelopes. As class members arrive, give each member a card and direct him or her to open it.

Note: Sample cards are available online. You can find a link at our blog: BibleStudiesForLife.com/AdultExtra.

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 13 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): "When have you been surprised to find out a 'coincidence' was actually planned all along?" Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to "The Bible Meets Life" on page 14 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of seeing God's plan in history and in our lives by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

LEADER PACK: Display **Pack Item 1**, "The Full Picture of Christmas" poster, to introduce the major theme of this study, along with the special focus of each session.

GUIDE: Call attention to "The Point" on page 14 of the PSG: "The birth of Jesus was no mere circumstance. It was planned by God."

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking the Lord to help us see Christmas from the unique perspective of each of these individuals from the Bible, beginning with Isaiah. Thank God for these important prophecies that foretold of Jesus.

BIBLICAL
ILLUSTRATOR

Want to know about biblical culture, people, archaeology, and history? *Biblical Illustrator* has articles that tie to each session in this study at lifeway.com/BI.

THE FULL PICTURE
OF CHRISTMAS

- ▶ ISAAH'S PROPHECY
Isaiah 7:10-14; 9:6-7; 11:1-5
- ▶ JOSEPH'S OBEDIENCE
Matthew 1:18-25
- ▶ MARY'S TRUST
Luke 1:26-38
- ▶ THE ANGELS' ANNOUNCEMENT
Luke 2:1-14
- ▶ SIMEON'S PROCLAMATION
Luke 2:25-35
- ▶ THE WISE MEN'S WORSHIP
Matthew 2:1-11

TIP: When helpful, use this "Notes" column to record additional discussion questions, concepts, and activities that connect the study content with your specific group.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Isaiah 7:10-14

¹⁰ Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹ "Ask for a sign from the LORD your God—it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven." ¹² But Ahaz replied, "I will not ask. I will not test the LORD." ¹³ Isaiah said, "Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? ¹⁴ Therefore, the LORD himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Isaiah 7:10-14 on page 15 of the PSG.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for these verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to help group members understand the immediate context of Isaiah's prophecy.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What are some ways God invites us to trust Him?

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 15 of the PSG: "What does God being Immanuel ('God with us') mean for us as believers?"

SUMMARIZE: Prophetic passages in Scripture can have multiple meanings: an immediate meaning for the initial hearers and an added meaning for future generations. Isaiah 7:14 has just such a double meaning. Highlight the main points from pages 15-16 of the PSG.

1. The prophecy was a word of comfort and hope to the original recipients of the prophecy. It's not clear who the woman and child were, but perhaps it was a child born in the king's house. The birth of this child was a reminder of God's prophecy and the comfort that "God is with us."
2. The second meaning involves a prediction of the future virgin birth of Christ. Matthew quoted this prophecy word for word as he gave an account of Christ's birth. "See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated 'God is with us'" (Matt. 1:23).

TRANSITION: The next verses demonstrate not only that God promised a son—Immanuel—would be born of a virgin, but He also promised a child would be born who is the mighty God.

Isaiah 7:10-14 Commentary

[Verses 10-11] Isaiah 7 takes place during the reign of Ahaz, who continually did evil in the sight of the Lord. (See 2 Kings 16:2.) The events occurred when two neighboring kingdoms joined together to attack Jerusalem. This resulted in great fear for Ahaz and the people of Judah. (See Isa. 7:2.) Isaiah met with Ahaz and tried to comfort him (see vv. 3-4), but Ahaz turned to Assyria, a much greater threat than either of the smaller kingdoms. The Lord spoke again with a message intended to bring hope and comfort. God invited Ahaz to ask for a sign He would be with the nation. The sign was to have two characteristics. First it had to be from **the Lord your God**. God encouraged Ahaz to request a sign that could only be explained by the power of the God of the Hebrews. Second, the sign could be **as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven**. This was a Hebraic way of saying from heaven to the place of the dead; nothing was out of bounds for the sign.

[Verses 12-13] Ahaz responded with false humility. He would not ask for a sign. Ahaz knew he didn't need to test God as the Israelites in the desert had done, but was he really sincere or had he already decided to trust Assyria rather than God? God had specifically asked Ahaz to request a sign; to do anything less would have been disobedience. Ahaz's false humility prevented him from obeying the Lord. Isaiah rebuked Ahaz with a question. By referring to the king as the **house of David**, Isaiah stressed both the promise of God's covenant with David (see 2 Sam. 7:11-17) and the recent failure of this king to stand competently and courageously in that line. The king's stubborn refusal to trust the Lord's protection tried the patience of men and of God. By using **my God**, Isaiah contrasted his calm belief in God's deliverance with Ahaz's frantic trust in Assyria. The problem was not refusing a sign but Ahaz's refusing the Lord who offered a sign. False humility does not fool the Lord.

[Verse 14] In spite of Ahaz's false humility, God would send a sign anyway. God would reveal His plan whether Ahaz was ready to receive that sign or not. The sign would begin with a **virgin**. The term usually referred to a young woman who was ready for marriage, and it was expected she would be pure until she married. Though some scholars argue this term could refer to a young woman without reference to her virginity, the Gospel accounts make it clear Jesus was born of a virgin. (See Luke 1:34; Matt. 1:20.) The angel clearly cited Jesus' birth as fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. (See v. 23.) This special child would be **Immanuel**, meaning "God with us," which would provide confirmation to doubters like Ahaz that God had not abandoned His people. Though Isaiah's prophecy may have had an immediate fulfillment through a special child in Ahaz's day, the ultimate fulfillment was in the birth of Jesus Christ. Old Testament prophecy often had a dual fulfillment, speaking to the current time but also reaching ahead to a special time in the future.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us, and the government will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ The dominion will be vast, and its prosperity will never end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now on and forever. The zeal of the LORD of Armies will accomplish this.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Isaiah 9:6-7 on page 16 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE: Isaiah used four terms to describe the Messiah.

- ▶ Since His name is “Wonderful,” then nothing will be dull about His reign! As Counselor, He has the wisdom to rule effectively.
- ▶ “Mighty” means impressive in power, strength, and size. The Messiah will have all the power to execute His wise plans.
- ▶ The title “Eternal Father” describes the Messiah’s relationship to time, not His relationship to the other Members of the Trinity.
- ▶ Jesus is the Son of the One true God. The Messiah will bring wholeness and general well being to individuals and to society.

DISCUSS: **Question #3** on page 18 of the PSG: **“Which of these names for Jesus is most meaningful to you right now?”**

DO: Direct group members to complete the activity “A Name Above All Names” on page 17 of the PSG to better understand these awesome names for Jesus.

Consider some of the names Isaiah used to describe Christ. Write a sentence beside each name describing how Jesus’ name fulfills Isaiah’s prophecy and has personal significance for you. [PSG lists six titles.]

TRANSITION: The next verses show us that God promised a descendent of David would judge with righteousness.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How have you seen Jesus reveal Himself as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, or Prince of Peace?

Isaiah 9:6-7 Commentary

[Verse 6] That this special child would be **born** is a clear reference to His humanity. His human nature seems normal at the beginning of this passage, but later words provide the shocking conclusion this child is also God. Isaiah emphasized the child would be born for us. He was sent for the people of God. The prophecy continued, **a son will be given to us**. While born by natural childbirth, He also was a gift of God. He was **born** and **given**.

The government would be on the shoulders of this child. Other kings had struggled to provide the peace and protection the nation desired. This child would provide lasting peace and lasting protection. This authority unfolded in four names. First, Isaiah called this child **Wonderful Counselor**. The first word described the ability to work supernatural signs. (See Ex. 3:20.) The emphasis with this name is the supernatural nature of His wisdom. God would demonstrate supernatural wisdom in His wonderful plan to redeem humanity. Second, Isaiah called Him **Mighty God**. He would be God Himself. Later this same name was used for God. (See Isa. 10:21.) Though many people were associated with God, no other person had God's name. Indeed, this child would be different than any other.

Third, Isaiah called the child **Eternal Father**. The fact Isaiah was predicting the child would be a Father—like a wise tribal leader—would not be so surprising except that it is coupled with **Eternal**. This child had a beginning on earth, but He always existed in eternity past. (See John 1:1.) No human ruler was spoken of as eternal, though the promise to David was that a coming ruler would establish his throne forever. (See 2 Sam. 7:16.) Jesus would come as a child and establish the throne of David forever. Finally, Isaiah referred to the child as **Prince of Peace**. Though peace included the absence of war, it meant so much more than that. It included the ideas of well being and prosperity, fulfillment, and hope. Through this child's reign, God's people would finally experience what they longed to have—freedom from their enemies and a sense of purpose. Jesus accomplished this peace. (See John 14:27; Rom. 5:1.)

[Verse 7] This verse emphasizes the work this child would perfectly accomplish. First, the child would have a dominion that Isaiah described as vast but His kingdom would be larger than one geopolitical country could contain. The Hebrew word expressing this vastness is often translated "increase." It had the idea of something that was multiplied, or many times bigger. The child's kingdom would be so large that none would have the authority to oppose it. Second, the child would establish a kingdom where its **prosperity will never end**. The Hebrew word used (*shalom*) means both prosperity and peace. In addition to peace from war or from enemies, it means completion or fulfillment in a total sense. *Shalom* included wholeness and unity, or perfect peace in every area. This child would not only conquer the enemies of His people, but He would also make them whole. The emphasis of this kingdom would be to establish and sustain the qualities of **justice and righteousness**.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Isaiah 11:1-5

¹ Then a shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of counsel and strength, a Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. ³ His delight will be in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, he will not execute justice by what he hears with his ears, ⁴ but he will judge the poor righteously and execute justice for the oppressed of the land. He will strike the land with a scepter from his mouth, and he will kill the wicked with a command from his lips. ⁵ Righteousness will be a belt around his hips; faithfulness will be a belt around his waist.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Isaiah 11:1-5 on page 19 of the PSG.

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 19 of the PSG: “How do we see Jesus fulfilling this prophecy in the gospels?”

SUMMARIZE: Isaiah showed us three significant characteristics of the Messiah.

- ▶ **He rules by the Spirit of the LORD.** The Spirit of the LORD came upon David when he was anointed king. (See 1 Sam. 16:13.) In the same way, God’s Spirit would rest on His Messiah.
- ▶ **He judges rightly.** The Messiah would not judge by what He sees and hears. These are typical ways for a king to gain information to help him lead, but the future Messiah would know all.
- ▶ **He wears a belt of righteousness.** When a man prepared for action, he tied up his loose garments with a belt. The belt held everything in place; in a similar sense, the Messiah’s righteousness holds all Messiah’s other qualities.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

What insights do you glean from these verses about the Spirit of God?

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 19 of the PSG: “What role can our group play in carrying out the mission of Jesus laid out in this passage?”

GUIDE: Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “The birth of Jesus was no mere circumstance. It was planned by God.”

Isaiah 11:1-5 Commentary

[Verses 1-2] In chapter 10, Isaiah spoke of how God would chop off the branches of the great trees of Assyria. (See v. 33). At some point, the tree of Jesse, who was the father of David, would experience a similar fate as only **the stump** remained. David's family line would be in apparent jeopardy. However, a **shoot** would grow from **the stump of Jesse**. A **branch** would arise from the **roots** of the stump and **bear fruit**. Though God's people would face judgment and be cut down, He was not finished with them. A descendant of David would arise and have perfect access to the **Spirit of the Lord**. This included **wisdom and understanding**. His **knowledge** would be perfect, causing Him to make right judicial decisions. He would have access to **counsel and strength**. This ruler would have the power and might to carry out His decisions. A person who knows what to do but is unable to implement those rulings is impotent as a ruler. This descendant of David would also have access to **knowledge** and **fear of the Lord**. He would have access into the mind and heart of God in a previously unknown way.

[Verses 3-4] Unlike previous rulers, this Davidic descendant would not rule by what he **sees with his eyes** or **what he hears with his ears**. He has a greater source of justice and righteousness than his own senses. This ruler rather took **delight** in the Lord. The Hebrew literally meant to smell an odor, associated with the delight someone might experience in smelling a favorite food. Like the smell of one's favorite food, the descendant of David loved the fear of the Lord, which Proverbs describes as the beginning of wisdom. (See Prov. 9:10.) His justice would not be based on human observation and estimation but on the principles outlined by the Lord. Under His leadership, **justice** would come to several groups of people. **The poor** would no longer suffer injustice because of their poverty. They would have righteous judgments even if they had no wealth to offer. **The oppressed** would not lack justice because they had no social standing. The messianic ruler would provide justice for those who could not provide it for themselves. Conversely, **the wicked** of the land would be slain by the **scepter from his mouth** and **a command from his lips**. The wicked, who were apparently in positions of power to oppress others, would face judgment from this ruler of David's line. Justice would be meted out to all.

[Verse 5] The reign of David's descendant would bring **righteousness** and **faithfulness**. The former word referred to conformity to an ethical or moral standard. The root of the word meant to be straight. David's future ruler would establish right morals and actions in the community of God's people. The second word was a reference to the idea of firmness or certainty. It was a reference to the stability of the reign of the Messiah. These two qualities would be like the **belt** that held one's clothing in place. In Isaiah's day the kings lacked righteousness and stability, but the future ruler, Jesus, would provide what had been lacking.

Previous *Biblical Illustrator* articles "The Anticipated Deliverer" (Winter 2016-2017), "In the Days of Ahaz" (Fall 2006), "Meaning of 'A Branch From His Roots'" (Fall 1995) and "Interpreting Messianic Passages" (Fall 1993) relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: Bible Studies for Life.



Notes

- ▶ **Praise.** God has intricately planned the glory of salvation. Praise God for providing salvation to you. Thank Him for putting His perfect plan in place so long ago to save you.
 - ▶ **Give.** Many people have never heard the name of Jesus. Your church likely has a special offering to help take the message of the Messiah to the nations. Give to this special missions offering and invest in the lives of others who need Christ.
 - ▶ **Share.** Ask God for the opportunity to share the good news of the Messiah with someone this week. God will supply the wisdom, compassion, courage, and words if you will be sensitive and obedient to Him.

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 20 of the PSG:

There are certainly plenty of coincidences in life, but Christ's coming wasn't one of them. Neither is the offer He makes to you to receive His free gift of salvation.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Father for sending us His Son. Ask Him to help group members share this prophetic message with others during the Christmas season.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at
BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra