

“Through the Bible in a Year with Pastor Don and the FBC Family”
August 4, 2016

Isaiah 7:1–8:22. Promise of the Virgin Birth of the Messiah.

Luke 2:22–52. Jesus is named.

Job 2:11–13. Job’s friends.

COMMENTS:

Isaiah 7:1–8:22. Because the Virgin Birth has been so viciously attacked by critics on the one hand, and so inaccurately defended on the other, I am going to spend a bit more time on some technical details on this prophecy than usual. Since **Isaiah 7:13-14** requires an immediate sign to King Ahaz, many Evangelicals have taken this verse to be an example of “double fulfillment,” which states that *one* prophecy may have more than one fulfillment. Accordingly, they teach that this verse predicts a sign for King Ahaz and the sign in Matthew 1:22-23 for the birth of Jesus. I do not believe that the theory of double fulfillment is valid anywhere in Scripture. If it were true, then there would be no need for the virgin birth. A better, more realistic, hermeneutic is “double reference.” This is the view that one “block” of Scripture can deal with one person which is followed by another “block” that deals with different person, place, and times—without making any clear distinction between the two blocks or indicating that there is a gap of time between the two blocks. We often see in Scripture where one prophecy is followed by another without mentioning the intervening time, which could be for thousands of years. In sum, double fulfillment states that one prophecy can have two fulfillments whereas double reference states that one piece of Scripture actually contains two prophecies, each having its own fulfillment. The point is that Isaiah 7:13-17 contains two quite separate prophecies with different purposes, and having different fulfillments at different times. Another controversial issue is the meaning of the Hebrew word for “the virgin” (הַעַלְמָה) in **7:14** (which is translated “young woman” in the New Jerusalem Bible): many allege that the word really does not mean “virgin.” However, that claim is false and will not stand the test of a hermeneutic of realism. Let us take a look at the three words used in the Bible for a young woman:

1. *Na'a'rah* (נַעֲרָה). This word means “damsel” and can refer to either a virgin (1 Kings 1:2) or a non-virgin (Ruth 2:6)
2. *Betulah* (בְּתוּלָה). This word is commonly considered to mean a virgin, *exclusively*. It is argued that if Isaiah had really meant to say a *virgin*, then he would have used this word. It is true that this word is often used to mean *virgin*, but not always: in Joel 1:8 it is used in reference to a widow; in Gen. 24:16 the word does not exclusively mean “virgin” for the writer adds “had never known a man” in order to clarify what he meant; also in Judges 21:12 the phrase “had not known a man” is added since *Betulah* in itself did not necessarily carry that meaning.

3. *Almah* (עַלְמָה). This word means “a virgin” a “young virgin” or a “virgin of marriageable age.” This word is used 7x in the Hebrew Bible and not once is it used to describe a married woman; this point is not even debated (Gen 24:43; Ex. 2:8; Psa. 68:25; Song 1:3; 6:8; Prov. 30:18-19). Since *Almah* in all of these verses mean “virgin,” on what basis would there be to make Isa. 7:14 the only exception? Moreover, since everyone agrees that *Almah* means an unmarried woman, if the woman in Isaiah 7:14 were a non-virgin, then God would be promising a sign involving fornication or illegitimacy. Besides the problem of God using such a sinful sign, what would be so unusual about an illegitimate baby that could possibly constitute a miraculous sign?

Moreover, as far as the ancient Jewish writers, there was no argument about Isaiah 7:14 predicting a virgin birth. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament made about 200 B.C.—200 years before the issue of Jesus’ Messiahship ever arose. The Jews who made this translation lived much closer to the times of Isaiah than we do, and they translated Isaiah 7:14 using the Greek work *parthenos*, which very clearly and exclusively means a virgin. There can, therefore, be no doubt that the unique event which God is promising as a sign, is the miraculous conception of a son by a girl who is still a virgin. Now let us look at the two prophecies (double reference—not double fulfillment)!

In Isaiah 7:3-12 God offers Ahaz, an apostate who is aligning himself with his enemy the Assyrian empire, a sign to encourage him not to trust in Assyria. However, Ahaz does not want the sign—lest it come to past that he be forced to abandon his alliance with Assyria! In response, God turns to the House of David in Isaiah 7:13. This is clear in the Hebrew, but not in the English, for the “you” is singular in the Hebrew when Ahaz is being addressed and “you” is in the plural when the House of David is in mind (verses 13-14). So, the sign in verses 13-14 is not for just Ahaz, it is for the House of David. It may be helpful to note the two different recipients, the singular (**S**) and plural (**P**) “you” in these blocks of Scripture:

Isaiah 7:9 The head of Ephraim is Samaria, And the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If you [**S**] will not believe, Surely you [**S**] shall not be established." 10 Moreover the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, 11 "Ask a sign for yourself [**S**] from the LORD your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above." 12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" 13 Then he said, "Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you [**P**] to weary men, but will you [**P**] weary my God also? 14 "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you [**P**] a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. 15 "Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 "For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you [**S**] dread will be forsaken by both her kings. 17 "The LORD will bring the king of Assyria upon you [**S**] and your people and your father's house-- days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah."

Moreover, the Hebrew word for “behold” (הִנֵּה) in **7:14** is used with the present participle, and every time we find this combination, it refers to a future event. This means that the conception and birth are future. This is not referring to a pregnant woman about to give birth. Additionally, the text says “*the*” Virgin (not “*a*” virgin as per the NASB). When one finds this

construction, he needs to look for the antecedent of the definite article. Since it is not in the immediate context, one must apply the principle of previous reference, something that was in common knowledge among the people. This, of course, takes us back to Genesis 3:15, the first mention of the Seed of the *Woman*. The bottom line here is that God is promising that the House of David cannot be deposed or lose its identity until the birth of a virgin-born Son. Historically, this means that the Messiah would be born prior to the destruction of the Temple and its genealogical records in 70 A.D.

Now that we see the long range prophecy is about the virgin birth of the Messiah, what about the *other reference* to Ahaz in the same context? To be sure, an event 700 years in the future would have little significance to him. In **verses 17-19** we have the *second sign*, which is specifically for Ahaz. The “you” in verse 16 is singular, meaning Ahaz. Before Isaiah’s son is old enough to make moral distinctions between right and wrong, the kings of Israel and Syria will be deposed and their threat removed. This was fulfilled within three years. Isaiah again uses the definite article before the term “boy.” This time there is another boy mentioned in the context: Isaiah’s son. The boy of **verse 16** cannot be the son of **verse 1**; rather, it refers back to Isaiah’s son in **verse 3**. Why else was Isaiah commanded to take him?

In sum King Ahaz, the King of Judah, is under threat of attack. This threat is not only to him personally but to the whole House of David. God tells Ahaz, through Isaiah, to be unafraid. Two reasons are given, that is, two signs which guarantee God’s promise of security. The first in **verses 13-14** is that no attempt to destroy the House of David would succeed until the birth of a virgin-born son. The term “virgin” is required by the word and context. The second sign is in **verses 15-16** and is for Ahaz to the effect that the attack upon him by Israel and Syria will not succeed; before Isaiah’s son, Shear-Jashub, reaches an age of moral maturity, the two enemy kinds will cease to exist.

Luke 2:22–52. Jesus’ birth is followed by three ceremonies. He is circumcised and given His name when He is eight days old. Jesus is the Greek word for the Hebrew Joshua and means ‘The Lord Saves’. Because Jesus is the first-born son, his parents make the special offering of five shekels to mark his redemption. This is a link with the Passover when the first-born sons of the Hebrew families were all spared from death. Finally, there is a ceremony of purification for Mary after the mess and stress of childbirth. She offers a humble sacrifice of doves or pigeons. We can see that the family of the humanity of Jesus Christ lived according to God’s Word, as did all true followers of the Lord, **Luke 2:39**, *So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.* In **2:25-40** we meet Simeon and Anna, both who recognize Jesus as the Promised Messiah. An old man, Simeon, declares that Jesus will be ‘*a light to ... the Gentiles*’. He wisely warns Mary of the conflict and pain that lie ahead. Anna is a venerable widow, steeped in prayer. She proclaims the wonderful news to all who will listen. Luke is showing that senior, devout, temple-centred Jews are among the first to realize that Jesus is the fulfilment of all their hopes. **2:41-52** records the boy Jesus: His parents lose him in Jerusalem—and eventually find him in the temple. When Mary reproaches her teenage son for causing them such worry, Jesus answers that it was quite obvious where He would be. He was in his Father’s house. As Jesus enters adult life (for Jewish boys this is at the age of twelve or thirteen), he is already calling God his Father.

Job 2:11–13. As Job sits on an ash heap—bereft of his family and covered in sores—Job is visited by three friends. Each of them tries to help him understand why he is suffering so terribly. They all say things that are true and right—but they don't apply to Job! Even today we speak of 'Job's comforters'—people who come alongside us, and think they are being helpful, but leave us feeling rather worse. Job is already thinking deeply about his situation. He is experiencing acute pain in his mind, body and spirit. However, his friends explain the suffering, it is he who is having to endure it. To their credit, the three friends begin by sitting with Job in silence, day and night, for a week. Their silent company and sympathy is probably the best thing they can offer him—certainly better than the words that are to come. What Job needed was love and comfort, not critics of his spiritual life or personal sermonizing.

Romans 11:36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Pastor Don