

Isaiah Chapters 7-8 John Karmelich

Title: When and why God gets tough on us!

Most of us have experienced moments when life feels like it's falling apart, and we ask God why is this happening to me? To state the obvious, for Christians all we can do is pray for guidance and then make the best decisions we can with the situation at hand. In these chapters God announces horrible disasters that are about to fall on the Israelites where many will die. The natural question is, if these (and us) are God's people, why would He allow this to happen? First, we must remember we will all live forever. I need to emphasize that no one knows how long we get to live. As far as tough times, we must pray for wisdom to make the best decisions we can and use our lives to glorify Him! God allows horrible things to happen due to allowing free will. Since He knows all things, He allows things to occur which get us to focus on Him through such trials. It's a tough thing to think about but it's also a reality of life! Here in these chapters, we get some good news mixed in with tragedies! It reminds us God is still there, and His plans will go forward despite life's tragedies! With that said, let me summarize these chapters, as to show how they'll apply to our lives today!

Remember at this moment in history, Israel was split into two kingdoms. Both existed when Isaiah was writing this part of the book! Realize Isaiah correctly stated both kingdoms will fall. These chapters do give us the exact year the Northern Kingdom will fall. (More proof God knows all things). Later in the book Isaiah discusses who will conquer the Southern Kingdom, and that entity (Babylon) was in effect, a big "nothing" when Isaiah lived. Anyway, Chapter 7 opens with the politics of the day, discussing the Northern Kingdom and the Syrians talking about conquering the Southern Kingdom to have an alliance against the threat of the moment, a growing Assyrian Empire. (Separate entity from Syria). God says in effect both those entities will fall to the Assyrians (occurred 65 years later). Isaiah then announces that the Assyrians won't conquer the Southern Kingdom. The central character in this story besides Isaiah is the king of that Southern Kingdom. Isaiah said that king needs to trust God and ask for a sign to prove He's God! When the king refused, God though Isaiah gave him a sign anyway! Realize bible prophecy most often works in patterns. That just means there's a shorter-term fulfillment to validate the prophet, and a significant fulfillment much later. The prophecy came true in the life of that king and announces the birth of Jesus in the longer term. Let me continue:

Obviously, there's more to the story. The important thing is not to be an expert on Middle East history in about 700 BC. The issue is about trusting God through the tough moments of our lives. In short, the kingdom of Judah (where Jerusalem is based) was going through a rough time and losing men and loss of part of its land to others. The big threat then was a growing empire called the Assyrians (a dead city in Iraq today). They were conquering Syria (just east of Israel). The Northern Israel Kingdom wanted to join the Southern Kingdom to stand up to the Assyrian threat. My goal is not to make us experts on ancient Middle East politics, but to explain why Isaiah included this story. In short, it teaches how we are to deal with our relationship with God and others around us!

The basic story of Chapter 7 is Isaiah meets the Southern King and announces what "nothings" both of those other kings were (Syria, Northern Israel) are in God's eyes! Isaiah states that in 65 years from the prediction he made, the Northern Kingdom and Syria will cease to exist! That Assyrian Empire wiped out both! Verse 9 is where Isaiah tells the Southern Israel king, unless you are trusting in God, you are doomed as much as the Northern Kingdom was!

The underlying point is God calls specific people to be a witness for Him. When we fail to do that, we will suffer and can see our lives cut short for failing to use our lives as He desires! We see God pleads with this king (through Isaiah) to change his ways. The main reason God did not wipe out the Southern Kingdom was His promise to King David (lived centuries earlier) that his descendants would rule there for a long time. For the Israel king to trust God more, Isaiah asks him to ask God for a sign that "He's serious"! That leads me back to the text:

God's sign is often quoted on Christian Christmas cards. It's about the virgin giving birth to Immanuel, which means God is with us. Obviously, the sign had some sort of short-term fulfillment as the Syrians and the Northern Kingdom didn't conquer Jerusalem. There is debate about whether the word "virgin" is the correct translation. Realize three centuries before Jesus was born, Jewish scholars made a Greek Old Testament translation, and the Greek word used definitely means virgin! That translation was 300 years before Jesus (+/-) and roughly 400 years after Isaiah was written. The point is God's keeping His word as we realize there is often more than one fulfillment when it comes to Bible predictions.

Realize God isn't done condemning the King of the Southern Kingdom. God says in effect, "You didn't believe me so your kingdom and people will suffer great loss even though the kingdom won't die!" The text at the end of Chapter 7 describes "starving" living conditions, but the nation will survive! Next, we get of all things, the names of Isaiah's two sons. Both are long names that are prophetic. I felt sorry for those two kids growing up with those long names!

Meanwhile God's not done condemning the Israelites for ignoring Him. Chapter 8 discusses the fall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrian Empire that again occurred 65 years after Isaiah wrote this! You may recall in the last lesson God told Isaiah he was to preach but the people wouldn't listen! That's the underlying point of the last half of Chapter 8! For example, Isaiah discusses the fact the Israelites went to talk to the spirits of dead people (séance)! The point is why consult dead people when God wants to tell us the truth of how we desire we act (His laws)? The Israelites in the Southern Kingdom suffered a lot (lost life, horrible conditions) because they refused to live as God desires. The last half of Chapter 8 is a big lesson on the dangers of not living as God desires!

I can just hear you saying, "Too bad for them. I go to church and try to live my life as God desires!" It is not me who fits this scenario, why should I care? The obvious answer is about being a witness to the world around us. Christianity is never meant to be an exclusive club. God calls us (Christians) to be a witness to others. Therefore, the issue isn't history! It's about living as He desires. Of course, we're not perfect and we all mess up. The question is are we living as He desires and doing our utmost to live as a witness for Him? That's a key underlying lesson not only of these chapters, but of the Bible!

I realize a lot of Isaiah is condemning the Israelites for their sins. I also realize all too well that most of my audience is devout Christians! The reason Isaiah (and God) are constantly "pounding the pulpit" on this topic is God knows how easily we wander away from using our lives to glorify Him. It is easy for us to be a good witness for Jesus when we're around other Christians or God's on our mind. The reason for all this emphasis is again we easily wander away from His will, just as the Israelites did here. With a long time away from God we too can easily end up like the Israelites in these chapters. That is what's the underlying point here as we use our lives as a living witness for Him! Oh, and since God hinted on the birth of Jesus in Chapter 7, let's just say we get a bigger hint in Chapter 9 in the next lesson!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links below. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for

you reading this. The rest of this email is links to questions you may have. If you're new here, you're always welcome to e-mail me. Thanks again for reading this!

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That's it. Hope you enjoy it. Don't forget to fire up a prayer prior to your reading.