EBS5 Isa 7-8-lesson

**Lesson Five: Isaiah 7-8**

**Title: Signs of Hope amid Times of Fear**

**Objectives:**

1. The student can reflect on the issues of faithfulness and unfaithfulness
2. The student can explain the historical background to Isaiah’s encounter with Ahaz
3. The student can explain the issues that emerge around the birth of Immanuel

**Preparation:**

1. A Bible for each student
2. A handout or presentation of the historical background
3. A map showing Judah, North Israel and Syria as a background for the Syro-Ephraimite War.

**Theme:** Faithful Isaiah confronts unfaithful Ahaz during a time of fear and offers hope.

**Setting the stage**

1. Review
   1. Isaiah is most easily read as a book about the nature of God and how he relates to humankind.
      1. He is the father of his people, their physician, her husband, and the owner of the vineyard.
      2. He is the one to be exalted
      3. He is the holy one whose glory we can see
   2. In Isaiah 1-6 the prophet takes up three agendas:
      1. Oppression—Isaiah 1, 2:5-4:1 and 5 describe the reality of a Jerusalem that does not know God evidenced by the way the powerful oppress the powerless.
      2. Judgment—Isaiah 1, 3, 5, and 6 anticipate God’s judgment on the people as a means of refining them and restoring the faithfulness, righteousness and justice that God wanted and that was also characteristic of an earlier era.
      3. Hope—Isaiah 2:1-4 and 4:2-6 focus on what God will do with an obedience Jerusalem.
2. Historical Background—Instructors should read 2 Kings 15:32-16:20 and 2 Chron 27-28 as preparation for understanding the historical setting.
   1. International Situation
      1. Isaiah 7-8 takes place in the decades between 750 and 730 BC when Jotham and later his son, Ahaz, are on the throne.
      2. Two major political powers stand on either side of a group of small nations.
         1. The major power Assyria is to the northeast and major power Egypt is to the southwest.
         2. In between are the smaller nations of Judah, North Israel, Edom, Moab, Syria, Philistia, and others.
      3. Assyria asserts military pressure on the region striking fear into the peoples of the area.
      4. North Israel and Syria apparently form a coalition to resist Assyria and seek Judah to join that coalition. Both Jotham (2Kings 15:37) and Ahaz (Isaiah 7) resist.
      5. The unstable military situation leads to an outbreak of war with North Israel and Syria on one side and Judah on the other side. The war is often called the Syro-Ephraimite war of 734-32.
      6. Syria and North Israel attack Judah, kill many Judeans, take many prisoners of war, but despite laying siege to Jerusalem are unable to take the city.
   2. Jerusalem’s Situation
      1. Ahaz, filled with fear, sees only two choices:
         1. Join Syria and North Israel against Assyria
         2. Seek Assyria’s protection against Syria and North Israel
         3. He chooses the second option
      2. Isaiah, filled with faith, sees one additional choice: trust God.
      3. Isaiah makes his case with
         1. Ahaz—7:1-25
         2. People in Jerusalem—8:1-10
         3. His disciples—8:11-22
3. Preview
   1. 7:1-2—Crisis
   2. 7:3-6—Counsel
   3. 7:7-9—Confirmation
   4. 7:10-13—Call for decision
   5. 7:14-17—Consequences I
   6. 7:18-25—Consequences II
   7. 8:1-10—Consequences III
   8. 8:11-22—Colleagues
   9. Reflections on Immanuel

**Learning Experiences**

1. Survey the events of Isaiah 7-8 which seem to unfold in chronological order. After reading the passage, explain how the events fit together.
   1. 7:1-2—Crisis.
      1. The Syro-Ephraimite War creates a crisis in Jerusalem.
      2. Jerusalem is in a state of alarm much like America on Dec 7, 1941, or Nov 23, 1963, or September 11, 2001.
      3. Ahaz, trembling with fear, must decide a course of action
   2. 7:3-6—Counsel
      1. Isaiah, unfretted by the fear, offers direction
      2. His counsel takes the form of a salvation oracle with four imperatives:
         1. Take heed
         2. Be quiet
         3. Do not fear
         4. Do not let your heart faint
      3. His counsel reveals that God knows about the international situation and is firmly in control
      4. He refers to the rulers that Ahaz so fears as “burned out kings”
   3. 7:7-9—Confirmation
      1. Fear. The events which Ahaz so fears will not take place
      2. Faith. In one of the most significant faith texts in the OT, Isaiah makes two statements about faith:
         1. He calls Ahaz to be faithful. Ahaz is not. Twice 2 Chron 28: 19, 22 refers to the faithlessness of Ahaz.
         2. He indicates that Jerusalem’s stability depends on faith. Ahaz need only take heed, be quiet, put aside his fear, let not his heart faint, but embrace God in faith.
   4. 7:10-13—Call for decision
      1. Isaiah tells Ahaz to ask for a sign to indicate that he is a man of faith.
      2. Hiding behind beliefs/doctrine (see Dt 6:16) he refuses to believe/trust.
   5. 7:14-17—Consequences I
      1. Isaiah reveals the result of God’s plan to Ahaz
      2. Isaiah announces the sign of Immanuel
         1. Through the boy’s name, God reveals that he will be with the people
         2. In the midst of crisis the boy’s name affirms hope.
      3. Isaiah repeats the announcement of 7:7-9 that Syria and North Israel will quickly cease to be a threat and what Ahaz fears will not take place.
      4. Isaiah then makes a crucial announcement: The plan Ahaz has chosen (to ally with Assyria) will end with Assyria invading and conquering Jerusalem and Judah.
   6. 7:18-25—Consequences II
      1. Isaiah reveals the results of Ahaz’ plan to Ahaz
      2. Ahaz seeks help from Assyria (2Kings 16:7). Assyria responds by destroying Syria (2Kings 16:9), North Israel (2Kings17) and attacking Judah (2Ch 28:19-21).
   7. 8:1-10—Consequences III
      1. After his private consultations with Ahaz (ch 7), Isaiah goes public in three ways.
      2. 8:1-4—Announcement One
         1. His press conference takes two forms:
            1. A sign
            2. A son
         2. Maher-shalal-hash-baz means “the spoil speed, the prey hastens” or as John Watts shortens it “Hang on.” The name means that Assyria will soon defeat Syria and North Israel and take away the spoil of those nations. Hang on, the threat you fear will soon be over.
      3. 8:5-8—Announcement Two
         1. Isaiah uses water to make his second announcement.
         2. Isaiah spoke to King Ahaz next to the upper pool (7:3)
         3. Now Isaiah uses a water metaphor in which he compares trusting God to the refreshing local water source called Shiloah and God’s work through Assyria to the flood prone waters of the Euphrates River.
         4. Assyria will rise out of its banks first flooding Syria and North Israel (now the third time he has announced these events—7:7-9; 7:16-17) and even overflowing into Judah (the fifth time he has announced the results of Ahaz’ alliance with Assyria: 7:18-19; 20; 21-22; 23-25).
         5. These events are associated with Immanuel
      4. 8:9-10—Announcement Three
         1. Jerusalem was a capital city and no doubt had refugees and ambassadors from the surrounding nations that were also fearful of Assyria.
         2. Isaiah announces that they do well to be dismayed because God has decreed their destruction. The reasons for that destruction will be given in full in Isaiah13-23.
         3. These events are associated with Immanuel, which in some versions is not translated as a name but as “God is with us.”
   8. 8:11-22—Colleagues
      1. Isaiah addresses his colleagues with two messages
         1. 8:11-15—Calm in the midst of trouble
            1. Jerusalem (“this people”) is in a panic, but God’s people (“let him be your fear” is said to the faithful) need only focus on God in difficult times.
            2. Isaiah tells the people not to fear the rumors (“conspiracy”) but to focus on fearing God.
            3. Despite Isaiah’s preaching, many will stumble (6:9-13)
         2. 8:16-22—Command to trust God
            1. Isaiah contrasts two sources of information

God’s word. He advises his disciples to copy down his spoken messages and seal them in a jar (see pictures of the jars that held the much later Qumran scrolls at [www.rc.net/wcc/israel/qumran.htm](http://www.rc.net/wcc/israel/qumran.htm))

Pagan sources of information. Isaiah has already pointed out these false sources of information (2:6) but now asserts their worthlessness. Why consult the dead (many mediums killed animals and predicted the future from the entrails) when one could consult the living God through Isaiah?

* + - * 1. The book of Isaiah functions within history. Isaiah critiques the contemporary culture by pointing out the coming consequences of the community’s action. His predictions are sealed. When the events occur just as he said, his sealed words will reveal the authority of his God.

1. Reflections on Immanuel
   1. The name Immanuel occurs three times in this section of Isaiah (7:14; 8:8, 10).
   2. The name “God with us” also occurs in the New Testament
      1. According to Mt 1:23 the fulfillment of the Isaiah7:14 comes with the birth of Jesus Christ to the virgin Mary.
      2. Jn 1:14 indicates that Jesus was the Word come in human flesh. Jesus is the fullness of God here with us.
   3. Isaiah7:14 raises many issues which have been oft-discussed including these:
      1. In speaking of the birth of Immanuel, does Isaiah speak only of Jesus or does he refer to a child born during the crisis and then also in a fuller way of the birth of Jesus?
         1. Edward Young (*The Book of Isaiah*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) is among many who believe that the prophecy can only refer to the virgin Mary giving birth to Jesus and that no child named Immanuel was born in Isaiah’s day.
         2. John T. Willis, “The Meaning of Isaiah 7:14 and its Application in Matthew 1:23,” *Restoration Quarterly* 21 (1978) 1-17 is among those who believe that a child was born to a young woman in Isaiah’s day as the first fulfillment and the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary is the ultimate fulfillment.
      2. If a child was born in Isaiah’s day, there has been discussion about the identity of the woman (Isaiah’s wife, Ahaz’ wife, an unknown woman) and the child (an otherwise unknown child, another name of Maher-shalal-hash-baz or Hezekiah the son of Ahaz).
      3. The meaning of the curds and honey is also widely discussed. Some believe that it refers to him eating good food (Gen 18:8; Dt 32:13-14) or wild food because of the destruction.

**Continuities:**

1. Isaiah1-6 contrasts the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem with the faithfulness of Isaiah. Isaiah7-8 contrasts the faithfulness of Isaiah with the faithlessness of Ahaz. Reflect on how the book of Isaiah is unfolding and what message is being taught.
2. The texts in 2Kings, 2Ch and Isaiah7 all describe Ahaz as a bad king, yet God extends an offer of grace to him through the prophet Isaiah. Is this a surprise? Does God often offer grace to those who have refused him?
3. After being told to preach to people who see but don’t see and hear but don’t hear (Isaiah6:9f), Isaiah confronts Ahaz who sees but does not see. How do Isaiah 6 and 7 connect on this point? How does Isaiah’s response to a person who sees but does not see compare with contemporary responses to the same kind of resistant people?
4. Ahaz had three choices before him but only saw two. He could join North Israel and Syria. He could rely on Assyria. He could trust God. Ahaz chose the one that was ultimately the greatest threat. Are faith choices always this difficult? Is the decision to trust God often hard to see?
5. Isaiah makes the issues of faith public not private. Faith is lived out in the real world. Ahaz’ response to the international issues before him is a matter of faith. Why has faith become a private matter in our society? Can faith ever be public?
6. Ahaz’ lack of faith did not negate God’s Davidic promise. In fact, God persists in this promise and Jesus now occupies the Davidic throne. Does lack of faith ever negate a promise of God?
7. Faith cannot be reduced to doctrines such as “do not test God” but must include trusting one’s security to God. Why does it seem that some who demand adherence to right doctrine often are unwilling to personally submit in trust to God?
8. How does it encourage people to know that God is with them?

**Additional Study:** Use this material if the class spends more than one week on Isaiah 7-8.

1. The two names mentioned in Isaiah 7:3-6 carry a message.
   1. Isaiah’s son is Shearjashub whose name means “a remnant will return.” The message of his name summarizes the commission given to Isaiah in chapter 6. The people will not listen, they will be destroyed, but God will preserve the faithful. Isaiah 7-8 shows the truth conveyed in the young man’s name.
   2. Tabeel is a person unknown from history, but is perhaps a local anti-Ahaz leader or perhaps a puppet leader imported from the north. His name means “good for nothing.” Isaiah aims to show that the real threat is not Tabeel, Pekah or Resin, but Ahaz’s own lack of faith and God’s decision to send Assyria to punish Jerusalem
2. The Numbers in 7:7-9
   1. In short order Syria and North Israel will not exist. Shortly after this announcement Assyria conquered both Syria and North Israel.
   2. The Assyrian obliteration of North Israel took some time and was finally concluded with a massive resettlement in 670 by the Assyrian ruler Esarhaddon. From the prediction in Isaiah 7 which took place in about 735 BC it was 65 years until 670.
3. There are four “in that day” predictions in 7:18-25 which all echo the same events
   1. The attack is explained twice:
      1. 7:18-19—Assyria and Egypt (Egypt will be pesky like a fly, but do no real damage while Assyria will be as deadly as a bee) will invade and attack Judah
      2. 7:20—Assyria will shave the people (conquering nations typically shaved their captives) or the land (shaving the people is a metaphor for despoiling Judah).
   2. The result of the invasion is explained twice
      1. 7:21-22—Conditons will deteriorate to the point that the few people who remain will survive on the products of young cattle and a few sheep
      2. 7:23-25—Agriculture will be disrupted due to the Assyrian invasion.
4. Consider the links between 8:11-22 and earlier parts of Isaiah
   1. The enemy will not stumble (5:13) but Judah will (8:14)
   2. Judah will be thirsty (5:13; 8:21)
   3. Judah rejects the Word of God (5:24; 8:6, 12-13, 19)
   4. Darkness is on the horizon (5:30; 8:22)
   5. God is holy (5:16; 6:1f; 8:13)
   6. Fear (5:12, 19, 25; 7:2, 4, 25; 8:8, 12)
5. Reflections on Immanuel
   1. The message of the name Immanuel occurs frequently in the Old Testament.
      1. In the background of this passage is the promise of God that a Davidic king would always be on the throne of Judah.
         1. God first promises to be with David in 2 Sam 7. This covenant with David was unconditional. Nathan, speaking for God, said, “Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you.” The theme of the remarkable words in 2 Sam 7 is “God is with us.”
         2. When David transfers the kingship to Solomon he uses these same words: “may he be with Solomon” (1 Kings1:37).
         3. The same promise is given to Jeroboam as he leads the northern tribes in rebellion (1 Kings 11:37)
         4. In the psalm that celebrates the Davidic covenant, the phrase “be with him” occurs twice (Psa 89:21, 24).
      2. Beyond the Davidic covenant, God regularly promised to be with his people.
         1. God promises to be with Isaac (Gen 26:2-3, 24), Moses (Ex 3; 12), Joshua (Dt 31:8), Israel (Josh 1:17; 1Kings8:57), North Israel (Am 5:14), Jeremiah (Jer 1:19), and post exilic Jerusalem (Zech 8:23).
         2. Isaiah himself repeatedly tells the people in Babylonian captivity of God’s promise to be with them (Isaiah 41:10; 43:2, 5)
         3. When Boaz greets his farm workers, he reminds them of God’s promise to be with them (Ruth 2:4).
   2. After Jesus fully completes God’s promise to be with us, the message of God’s promise continues to be repeated in the NT. As Jesus prepared for his ascension, he promised “I will be with you always” (Mt 28:20). The same promise is found in Jn 17:24; Rm 15:33; 2Cor13:11 and in many other NT texts. Strikingly, the Bible’s last verse states, “The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen” (Rev 22:21).
   3. What happens in Isaiah 7 and Mt 1 is part of a large complex of promises throughout the Bible of God being with his people. For more reflection on the “divine with” see Harold Shank, “God on Our Side of the Street,” In *Listening to His Heartbeat.* Joplin: College Press, 2009.