

Four kings, three kids, two rivers

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Date: 11 March 2018

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[0:00] Please can we turn together to Isaiah chapter 7. We're going to take a look this morning at the sweep of these chapters.

! Let's pray. Lord, you have said that your word is trustworthy, that if we meditate on your word, we will be like trees planted by streams of water, that we won't wither and we will bear fruit in due season.

And we pray that you would fulfil that promise as individuals and as a church, as we look to you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Amen. Today's challenge.

Today's crisis. How to deal with it. How to face life with loss.

[1:21] With disappointment. How to cope in this life with failure.

Or indeed to cope with success. How to plan for the future which we don't know.

These are real tests of faith. They're real tests of faith because they ask, what do we believe in? What do we trust? Who do we trust? This is shown in these crisis points. They are real life tests of faith.

And for a Christian person, faith is what their Christian life is. It is a life of faith. The Apostle Paul says, we walk by faith and not by sight.

[2:29] There is no other way to live the Christian life. And in Isaiah chapters 7, 8, 9, we see a very specific crunch for this in the spiritual life of God's people, as we shall see.

Now, if you've been following through the series on Isaiah, you'll know that the first few chapters have a huge amount to say about sin versus holiness.

The judgment of God versus the extreme promises of what he will do to forgive people, change people, bring them safe home.

This chapter and this section is about faith. And we need both of those aspects, all of those aspects. This previous chapters were sort of, had a fairly general scope.

But this is one particular nitty-gritty situation. A decision made in the course of a few minutes of conversation, which changes the future.

[3:39] Excuse me. So it's spelled out in the real world of space and time, of history and geography. And if you want to try and remember what it was that he said this morning, I've got this one crisis, four kings, three kids, two rivers.

So you might remember 4, 3, 2. What were they? Four kings, three kids, two rivers. I hope that will make some sort of sense as we go along. So let's look at the specific historical and geographical context.

Right at the beginning of the book of Isaiah, we're told that he ministered over quite a long period, actually. He covered the reign of several kings, the vision that Judah, concerning Judah and Jerusalem, that Isaiah, son of Amos, saw during the reigns of Isaiah, Jotham, Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Here's the geography of it. Mediterranean, Cyprus, River Nile, and Jerusalem is about there. Here's some of the detail.

Now, so there's Jerusalem, God's headquarters. In the chapters that we've read, this would be the city of King Ahaz, who is one of the chief people in the story.

[4:56] It is the city which belongs to the king, who is the descendant of King David. So the line of David, the royal household of David, is very important to this story.

That's Egypt. The people were rescued from Egypt, and politically and militarily at this time, Egypt is a major player. And as you can, as you will see, Jerusalem's caught in the middle.

This is Assyria. I'm not very good at dates and history, but I can tell you the name of the new emperor of Assyria, Tiglath Pileser III.

Thinking of naming children? You're going to get lots of suggestions today. This was, so he's the emperor, and he's decided that he doesn't like Assyria to be a small little country.

He wants to expand. And that's what he has in mind. This changes all the politics of the area. So there's Jerusalem, and we now look at the, yeah, they want to expand, so I've got some arrows to show expansion.

[6:01] Please notice the river. I think this is the river Euphrates. That is very important. The capital Nineveh is on that river. So Assyrian Empire to do with that particular river.

That comes into the story in due course. We also need to know that God's people, God's kingdom here, had already split into two.

And the northern kingdom is headed up by King Pekah, son of Remaliah. And he comes into the story.

And then north of that is what we would nowadays call Syria. In those days was it called Aram. And the king of Aram, capital city Damascus, the king is Rezin.

So that's the geography of this. And it becomes a crisis. So let's look at what it says. Isaiah 7, When Ahaz, son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, king Rezin of Aram.

[7:07] Should I flick back to this one? Look at the, king Rezin of Aram, and Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it.

Now the house of David, notice that, which royal family we're talking about, was told, this is this slide, there's Jerusalem, and there's the king, this is one of the kings of Syria, and there's the king of the northern kingdom, Pekah, son of Remaliah.

Now, the house of David was told, Aram has allied itself with Ephraim. So Syria and the northern kingdom.

And the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest, shaken by the wind.

So I suppose at this distance, we find it difficult to realise, how scared they were by this.

So there's King Ahaz, and there's his people. I'm trying to make them look scared. I was trying to make them shake like trees in the wind, but I didn't really have a lot of success with that. But there they are. And we need to appreciate the dread that this news gave them.

[8:20] They were really petrified by the idea that their two nearest neighbours were ganging up on them, as stated. There is a deep dread, a deep fear.

I don't know whether you've experienced a deep dread or a deep fear. When you wake up in the morning and realise you've got an exam, but you've completely forgotten to revise for it. Or if you have a very horrible medical procedure coming up, you might be really frightened by that.

Some horrible thing coming up at work. Just imagine. And this is what they're feeling like. A deep, deep dread. And into this situation, well, the question is how they're going to react, you see.

How are they going to respond under this pressure? So let's keep some of that same picture. And into this situation, verse 3, the Lord says to Isaiah, you go out, you and your son, Shear, Yashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool on the road to the washerman's field.

So let's put Isaiah, let's give him a child to go with him, a kid. So I'll use kid to alliterate with king. But as a child, as a kid. And this kid, this child, is named Shear, Yashub.

[9:47] If you're thinking of a child's name, there's a good one.

Influenza is another good name for a child, I always think. Shear, Yashub means a remnant will return. It's a very interesting name to give a child.

Is it a happy name or a sad name? Is it a threatening name or a comforting name? It's both, isn't it? Because it says a remnant will return. That's good news. The fact that there has to be a remnant is bad news.

This is saying there's going to be such a, you will no longer be in a position of security. There will be an attack. There will be people taken away.

A remnant will return. That's the name of this child. A remnant will return. And please notice the water here. I think this water is representing military preparations because Jerusalem was a strongly fortified city.

The weak spot was the water supply. If you could interrupt the water supply then when they were besieged they wouldn't last very long. So the kings would always be inspecting the security of the water supply.

[10:57] That's where they go. The end of the aqueduct at the upper pool. And Isaiah says to there's a king Ahaz and his trembling people feeling themselves under pressure.

And this is what he says. Be careful. Keep calm. Don't be afraid. It's really a call to faith. Be careful. Be calm. Don't be afraid. Why? These enemies poised to attack us. This is awful. And then he gives these words of reasoning for this.

Don't lose heart because of these two smouldering stubs of firewood. You may remember from last week we had fire.

We had a whole lot of fire in the previous chapter and it was the fire surrounding God. That's really strong fire. Here he says really you're not going to be you have the Lord on your side and we've got these two little sort of fag ends of fire.

[12:06] You're not going to be afraid of them are you? Two smouldering stumps of firewood. The fierce anger of Rezin and the son of Remaliah. And what they've done is they are planning your ruin.

They're saying let us invade Judah let us tear it apart divide it among ourselves and what we want to do is forget the son of David forget the line of David we want the son of Tabaal to be king over it. Tabaal has a rather interesting name apparently it means God is good you think well what can be wrong with that? Well there's a lot wrong with it isn't it because that's the wrong king.

The king that God wants to reign in his city is the son of David he will sit on David's throne and their plan contrary to God's plan is to push the son of Tabaal onto the throne.

And this is what the sovereign Lord says verse 7 it will it's not going to happen God's not going to let that happen this is what the sovereign Lord says sovereign Lord meaning the master sovereign meaning master the Lord who's in charge of everything this is what this God excuse me says he says this plan won't stand up it will not place take place it will not happen and he says this is the reason for it just look at who's involved compare the kings compare the powers that we're talking about compare the the cities that we're talking about just think of it the head of Aram is Damascus that's the head city and the the king who's in charge of that is Rezin okay that's them and the the head of Ephraim verse 9 is Samaria and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son who actually was an upstart he wasn't supposed to be king he'd taken over from somebody else he'd done a coup d'etat he says this is what this is what you've got set against you and if we fill in the blanks and say and he says 65 years they're they're going to perish if you fill in the blanks who are you

[14:43] Ahaz you are in Judah the city of Judah is Jerusalem and the king of Jerusalem is David now just stack that up by faith don't just look and see the tanks on the border look at it from the point of view of what God is purposing what God is planning this is his city this is his royal line believe it be careful keep calm don't be afraid read the situation with the eyes of faith and then we get this statement which is very difficult to translate into English but if you don't stand firm in your faith you will not stand at all there's a pun on the word for firm which we have brought over into English with the word amen meaning it's firm that's what the word we say when we say amen and he says if you're not amen if you're not firm you won't be amended you won't be confirmed and he said this is the stark reality of life with God if you don't trust him you've got nothing if you're not going to live trusting God you're not going to live at all it's absolutely fundamental to his kingdom and it's absolutely fundamental to our lives if we're

Christians if we don't live by faith we're not living the spiritual life at all and that I mean it's fine to say isn't it we could have a creed of things that we believe and we could tick them off as statements of doctrine but the rubber hits the road in real life do you really trust the Lord for today do you really trust the Lord for the current crisis and the plans that you make are they made according to seeing

things by faith if you don't stand firm in faith you won't stand firm at all let's follow I'm just going to take you through fairly quickly actually the main story that's all I want to try and do this morning the Lord spoke again to Ahaz verse 10 he says ask the Lord God for a sign and he's basically saying God is so keen on you trusting him in this matter it is so important that God will move heaven and earth to get you to that point of trusting him ask for a sign be it in the deepest depths or in the highest heights and Ahaz says I won't put God to that trouble I won't put him to the test it's actually a very spiritual sounding answer because it's one of the things we're not supposed to do!

we're not supposed to Syria it's in 2 Kings 16 verse 7 let me just quote it to you and you're going to say I can't believe he did that but he did I can't believe that he went to Assyria that big expanding power to get help but he did this is 2 Kings 16 verse 17 Ahaz sent messengers say to Tiglath Pileser king of Assyria I'm your servant come up of the king of Aram and the king of Israel who were attacking me and Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria and the king of Assyria complied by attacking Damascus and capturing it and he deported its inhabitants and put King Rezin into death and then King Ahaz went to Damascus and really went over to the other side you can't believe he would do that but that's what he did coming back to this interview here Isaiah says look you're the house of David verse 13 here now you house of David is it not enough to try the patience of men will you try the patience of my God also God will give you a sign but it won't be a sign of your choosing and it won't be a sign that you will find particularly easy to grasp do you remember last time that

[19:52] Isaiah's ministry was said to be one in which he would tell people stuff show people stuff but they wouldn't understand it remember that and this sign is a little bit like!

okay I get the words but what does it mean it is an air of mystery about it the Lord himself will give you a sign and here's another kid another child this child is named Emmanuel which the meaning is God with us therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign the virgin will be with child will give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel the context doesn't push a huge amount of emphasis on the virginity of the mother the word could easily mean woman of marriageable age or something like that it doesn't press that button particularly hard although when it's picked up in the New Testament Matthew does doesn't he says ah there's a fullness about the meaning of this but it's not particularly pressed at this point but it's rather mysterious let's have the conception of this child Emmanuel which means God with us and let's look at the statements about him so he's going to eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right now how far distant is that difficult to tell us by the time he is old enough to something or other the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste so by the time the conceived child grows up to be a little boy those two dreaded kings will be gone and what will happen next ah you see if you don't stand by faith you don't stand at all look at the mysteries of the way God works you put your trust in the king of Assyria that was so foolish that was so foolish and the king that you put your trust in will actually turn out to be your downfall the

Lord will bring on you verse 17 you and your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah the king of Assyria will be brought attacking you and it's put in terms of the Lord whistling he will whistle for bees and flies from Egypt bees from the land of Assyria so I can't do this where people go like that but you can imagine it and the Lord just brings them they're at the Lord's command he whistles and these enemies come as a sort of infestation and verse 20 the Lord will use a razor higher from beyond the river notice the river there the king of Assyria he'll shave your head the hair of your legs take off your beard also so there's a trim which becomes a humiliation no it isn't just a nice haircut like Johannes has but it's just a sort of just taking away all your the dignity of having any hair at all in that day verse 21 a man will keep alive a young cow and two goats and because of the abundance of the milk he will have curds to eat all who remain in the land will eat curds and honey sounds quite nice

I quite like that curds and honey would you like curds and honey but the strange thing is it's there not because of a fully functioning economy that's all you've got it's all they manage!

[23:47] it's and the fertile land becomes desolate in that day every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels there's only going to be briar and thorns well you can have curds and

honey but that's all you can have so he says there will be infestation humiliation desolation that's what's going to happen if you follow this course if you don't stand by faith if you engage the king of Assyria to be your chum he will come down and be your enemy he will be your downfall let's go to chapter 8 so we've got another child now take a large scroll and write on it with ordinary pen maha shallal hashbaz so here's another possible child's name maha shallal hashbaz I think I've put this in here somewhere but I maybe I haven't maha shallal hashbaz means the quick to the plunder swift to the spoil do you know

I've probably got these slides in the wrong order so we'll probably find this I'll have to say this all over again in a minute that's a name isn't it swift quick to the plunder swift to the spoil saying that an enemy will come remove all your wealth and you won't get much warning because it's going to be quick I really hope the child had another name as well for when he went to school and they called the name on the register a point is made that's the name of this child and I've lost a slide with this child too there's a before before he knows verse three before he knows how to say my father or my mother the wealth of

Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria so you sort of wonder is this two names the same child is Emmanuel the same as because both of them before something these two kings will be gone there's a little bit of a mystery there it isn't quite solved in this and the commentary that goes with it says in verse six you had the opportunity to trust in the river that the Lord gave you but instead you put your eggs in the basket of the great mighty river Assyria because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloh and rejoices over Rezin the king of and the son of Remaliah the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty flood waters of the river the king of Assyria with all his pomp it will overflow its channels run over its banks sweep on into

Judah swirling over it reaching up to the neck of your land Emmanuel so let's see how much of this I've got he brings the the Lord will bring the Assyrian flood into your land O Emmanuel so that river will flood and flood and flood until it more or less takes over certainly flood the northern kingdom and threaten the southern kingdom moving on to verse I didn't tackle verses 12 to 15 where God is the rock that either saves people or over which they stumble but moving on to verse 16 it says bind up the testimony seal up the law among my disciples I will wait for the Lord who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob I will put I notice

I will put my trust in him here I am and the children the Lord has given me we are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty who dwells on Mount Zion so here's this little family group Isaiah Mrs.

[28:20] Isaiah the testimony where he's written all this down the law and the testimony where he's written down these promises these statements and the various children I and the children the Lord has given me and they form together a little sort of new Israel they form a new community of faith King Ahaz doesn't want to belong to this community so Isaiah has his family his disciples verse 16 maybe that's his kids or maybe kids plus extended family but he says that's us we're signs and symbols from the Lord our names tell you something you should never forget our names tell you you need to trust in the Lord that there's a penalty for not trusting in the Lord that there's grace even for unbelievers because a remnant will return there's room to come back but there's one child whose name stands forever this

Emmanuel child the God with with us child that's the sort of remnant group the faith group and we contrast with them Ahaz and the people whose hearts are shaken as the trees are shaken in the wind and to them I think this is where verse 22 applies they will look towards the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom and they will be thrust into utter darkness so for this group who have had the promises of God the offers of God to prove that to them and they've said no for them the future is this darkness of which it speaks rather frighteningly nevertheless that's not the end of the story let's think about this Emmanuel child and then we get the great chapter 9 it was the northern kingdom that was first attacked by

Assyria and it will be the northern kingdom that first sees the light the people walking in darkness chapter 9 verse 2 have seen a great light on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned!

You know how Matthew takes this verse! He says the fulfillment rural teacher started teaching people around the sea of Galilee walking up and down there saying to a fisherman come follow me and I will make you fishers of men and he says that's the fulfillment of this that the king will start his reign up there in that place and he goes on to talk about the child that is born this is a distant future for to us a child is born to us a son is given and he will be the real thing he will be the fullest fulfillment of all these promises concerning the son of David for us to us a child is born to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders and this king will be wonderful counsellor mighty god everlasting father prince of peace of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end!

and he will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and notice forever this is the forever king that those other kings fail to be and in case you're not sure whether anybody's got enough oomph to make it happen it says the zeal of the lord almighty will accomplish this you get that bit god says don't i'm not going to let anything stand in my way on this not even the sin of my people but this king will reign the zeal of the lord almighty will accomplish this he will reign he will have a kingdom he will have a people he will have a!

[33:09] and i will make sure it happens it might not happen the way you thought it would happen but i will make sure it happens and who could have guessed reading this how long term that promise would be because we're still waiting for the full fulfillment of it aren't we still waiting for the time when the lord!

Jesus comes and puts every wrong right and enters into the glory of his kingdom in that sense that's the picture that these chapters are set against and that particular crisis that Ahaz faced should be seen in the context of the whole thing God has his purposes this is what his purpose is to bring his son to reign and his glory will cover the earth he'll be the king of kings his kingdom will be the one thing that matters the one thing that lasts the one thing that in the end is worth everything he says faith sees that picture and responds to the immediate crisis in the context of that big picture so here we have we had the four kings and you can count them up the two king of

Assyria king of Assyria two northern kings Ahaz that's four kings the three kids which were Shalal Mahash Shalal Hashbaz Shia Jashub and Emmanuel and the two rivers the gently flowing river which they rejected and the mighty river Assyria which actually ended up overwhelming them there's the picture of it and we have this little group I and the children the Lord has given me this little sort of remnant group family group that stick to the word that Isaiah has been given by the Lord New Testament would see Christians as being participants in that it will quote that and say that's the group that you need to belong to in this world if you're going to see the future kingdom and that little group is looking forward to the son of David the forever king and his global cosmic kingdom and here's how it played out in this particular issue in the life of

Ahaz Ahaz was of the house of David he was part of the big purpose for Emmanuel Emmanuel turns out to be the Lord Jesus he was called on to trust the Lord for the particular part of that purpose at that time he feared he failed he made plans but there were plans made without faith there were plans just looking at where is the power where is the wealth Assyria my obvious candidate he looked to the power of the world that was a failure of faith it was actually his undoing because if we trust in this world as if it were God it will disappoint us sooner or later and more or less bitterly that was his plan it was not what God wanted him to do we ourselves are part of this same purpose our framework is the same as the framework that he was in we are looking for the son of

David Jesus to reign forever in his global cosmic kingdom and we too are to make our decisions and plan our plans in the light of that we too are called to trust in the Lord for the particular part of the purpose that is going on now if you've come along not a Christian this bit is a sort of in house appeal really Christian people have signed up to living by faith and Christian people that's what it is if you don't stand in faith you don't stand at all that's how we live from one day to the next from one moment to the next that's what we must do and I ask Christian people how are you planning how do you form your plans in fear like Ahaz in unbelief in dependence on the powers of this world that is a

failure if you do that

[38:01] I could put it again this which community do we belong to it's important which community we belong to Isaiah invited Ahaz to belong to the community of faith but he said no in effect that same invitation is made through the Lord Jesus to everybody come and be part of the community of faith put yourself in the place of people who venture their lives trusting in the son of David Jesus who venture their lives putting their lives into his hand to steer them through all the crises of this world which community which river do you drink from we could ask it like that and let's just come back to this categorical statement if we don't stand firm in faith that is faith in

God faith in Jesus Christ we don't stand at all let's be people of faith and let's close by singing together a song about putting our faith in the God who is worthy of trusting in it's 46 B God