

'Look! The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call his name Immanuel.'

God's salvation involves a Saviour miraculously conceived

• *Almah – unmarried girl (virgin)*

• *Bethulah – young woman (married/unmarried)*

• *A virgin with child – a staggering miracle*

God's salvation involves a Saviour who is divine

• *The threat to Judah will have gone before the child is old enough to reject sour food*

• *Assyria will come looking for territory to conquer*

God's salvation involves a Saviour miraculously conceived. We may digress to consider a technicality. It is often said that in Isaiah 7:14 '*almah* means 'young woman', and that the word for 'virgin' is *bethulah* (not used here). Actually the evidence points to a different conclusion

Consider usage. The word occurs nine times. 1 Chronicles 15:20 (*Alamoth*) the title of Psalm 46 (*Alamoth*), Psalm 68:25 and Song of Songs 1:3 tell us nothing relevant. In Proverbs 30:19 romantic attachment to a single unmarried girl is surely in mind. Song of Songs 6:8 shows that the word means 'virgin' (what category is left after you have mentioned married women and concubines?). Exodus 2:8 gives us the picture of a small girl, a few years older than newborn Moses, hiding in the bushes. Genesis 24:43 refers to an unmarried girl. Such evidence as we have in these verses shows '*almah* means 'virgin'. A study of *bethulah* reveals it is not (as sometimes asserted) a technical word for 'virgin'. The word that would imply a 'virgin conception' is in fact the one Isaiah uses – '*almah*.

Consider the Ugaritic evidence. Ugaritic is a language closely related to Hebrew. In the legend of King Keret (in Ugaritic), when the king's bride-to-be is introduced she is *glmt* (related to Hebrew '*almah*'). After she is married she is *btlt* (related to Hebrew *bethulah*). From whichever angle you come at it, '*almah* has a narrower meaning and should be translated 'virgin', but *bethulah* has a wider meaning which may refer to a young unmarried girl but does not automatically carry this connotation in the way that '*almah* does. The '*almah* is presumed to be virgin. The *bethulah* is a young woman, without telling us in itself whether she is married or not married. There is no known case in the biblical period of '*almah* being used of a married woman.

Consider the flow of thought. To say 'A woman will have a baby' is hardly 'a sign . . . in the deepest depths or in the highest heights'. We have been led to expect a staggering miracle. 'The virgin will be with child' is what is required, because it is to be a sign of such a magnitude.

God's salvation involves a Saviour who is divine. The child's name will be Immanuel ('God with us'). In the light of the greatness of the sign offered, and the way in which he owns the land in 8:8, and in the light of the child called 'the mighty God' in 9:6, the word must be taken very seriously. The miracle-child is divine.

¹⁵He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the sour and choose the good.'

Curds (sour milk) and honey are the food of destitute people. Before the child is old enough to tell the difference between sour and sweet foods, the threat to Judah will have gone.

¹⁶But before the boy knows enough to reject the sour and choose the good, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

¹⁷Yahweh will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah. He will bring the king of Assyria.'

Ahaz's choice of looking to Assyria is disastrous. Assyria will come to Ahaz's land not seeking to help Ahaz but looking for another territory to conquer.

• *Isaiah warns Ahaz against unbelief*

Isaiah warns Ahaz against the consequences of unbelief. If he does not trust God and stay away from dependence on Assyria, then Assyria will come into his life as a judgement, and the land of Judah will be ruined for centuries.

God's salvation is to be received by faith

God's salvation is to be received by faith. God hates unbelief and his people suffer when they refuse to trust him. The various judgements mentioned in Isaiah 7:18–8:8 all come upon Ahaz and Judea because of the sin of unbelief.

• *Judah will be attacked because of its unbelief*

It is because of Judah's refusal to trust God that the land will be attacked by its enemies.

¹⁸In that day Yahweh will whistle for flies from the distant streams of Egypt and for bees from the land of Assyria. ¹⁹They will all come and settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks, on all the thorn bushes and at all the water holes.

Egypt was famous for its flies; Assyria was famous for its bees.

• *The people will be savagely humiliated*

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²⁰In that day the Sovereign Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the River – the king of Assyria – to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to take off your beards also.

• *They will fall into extreme poverty*

They will fall into extreme poverty.

²¹In that day, a man will keep alive a young cow and two goats. ²²And because of the sufficiency of the milk they give, he will have curds to eat. All who remain in the land will eat curds and honey.

• *They will struggle to keep their animals alive*

People will struggle to keep their animals alive so as to have milk. They will have little else and to stay alive will have to rely on sour milk and the natural honey produced by Judah's wild bees.

• *The land will go wild again*

The land itself will go back to being uncultivated bush.

²³In that day, in every place where there were a thousand vines worth a thousand silver shekels, there will be only briars and thorns. ²⁴Men will go there with bow and arrow, for the land will be covered with briars and thorns. ²⁵As for all the hills once cultivated by the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briars and thorns; they will become places where cattle are turned loose and where sheep run.

• *Ahaz's unbelief will delay the coming of the miracle child*

The miracle-child is to be received by faith. Ahaz's unbelief delayed his coming and brought calamitous judgement instead



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