



# **SUNDAY SCHOOL MINISTRY**

## **Discipleship Plan**

### **Year Seven**

### **Isaiah Lessons**

**Part 1**

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### **Isaiah Lessons**

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## Lesson 1: God's Response to Judah's Brazen Sin (Isaiah 3-5)

**Primary Verse:** "The LORD said: because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes... Instead of perfume there will be rottenness; and instead of a belt, a rope; and instead of well-set hair, baldness; and instead of a rich robe, a skirt of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty. Your men shall fall by the sword and your mighty men in battle. And her gates shall lament and mourn; empty, she shall sit on the ground." (Isaiah 3:16-26)

**Teaching Text:** Isaiah 3-5

**Supporting Text:** Isaiah 1-2, Matthew 21:33-46

**Judging Judah and Jerusalem:** While it may be true that God's wrath was not yet fully revealed against Judah's unfaithfulness, it cannot be said He didn't send fair warning. We must emphasize God's punishment hadn't been *completely* revealed because it was being made manifest long before the Exile. How? Through a licentious and limp leadership which was devoid of lawfulness and destitute in love, God had already given the people rulers who reflected their hearts and not His own. Although these rulers lived self-satisfied and indulgent lives, the prophet clearly proclaimed that God had a day when He would rip away their finery and reveal its worthlessness.

**All is Not Lost:** Though the vineyard, as a whole, has proven worthless, there is a Branch that is yet fruitful and will be made glorious. In fact, the destruction of the vineyard is the path of exaltation and even expansion for the Branch. As the Lord has demonstrated repeatedly, His acts of judgment are also acts of deliverance and vindication. By no means will He allow man's sin to frustrate His ultimate plans nor the unconditional promises He made to Abraham (Genesis 15) and David (2 Samuel 7). The certainty of Judah's destruction is tempered with the assurance that this destruction is not to the utmost extent. Rather, there is already talk of survivors for a ransacking that has not even taken place yet.

**No More Wine:** The prophet Isaiah, having itemized multiple sins against God that double as reasons for God's expulsion of Israel from His land, turned to poetic imagery to illustrate the covenant unfaithfulness of Yahweh's people. The metaphor of a vineyard reveals the plain but poignant picture of both God's judgment and His method for carrying out His justice. Despite the details of the damage He was determined to deliver, we must remember that divine disappointment developed into a decree for desolation only after centuries of diligent patience and restraint.

**Questions to Consider:** How does the list in Isaiah 3:2-3 function in Isaiah's message? Why does Sodom appear again in 3:9 after having been mentioned in 1:10? After examining the teaching text, what can we conclude about the relationship between a nation's treatment of the poor and God's judgment against that nation? If you were an inhabitant of Judah during the time of Isaiah's prophecy, how might you interpret the imagery spoken of in chapter 4 considering Israel's history? How might a person understand God's method of deliverance given earlier times? Thinking of the vineyard metaphor, is Judah destroyed for lack of productivity? Explain your answer fully. How does Isaiah 5 bring clarity to Matthew 21:33-46 and both the immediate and ultimate response of the Jews to Christ's parable?

**Challenging the Class:** When you come to church, are you seeking a sermon/message that soothes you or that is accurate and honoring to God? Of course, these are not necessarily contradictory, but what happens when we prefer and insist on the former rather than the latter? What has greater priority in the message preached: what God has said or the listening pleasure of the people? Think of Isaiah's heavy task! Are you praying for your pastor and those who preach in our church?

## Lesson 2: God's Response to Isaiah's Condition (Isaiah 6)

**Primary Verse:** "And I said: 'Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!' Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.' (Isaiah 6:5-7)

**Teaching Text:** Isaiah 6

**Supporting Text:** Exodus 19:16-18, John 12:36-41, Revelation 4

**The Vision:** The prophet Isaiah, in God's providence, was given the privilege to see pristine pictures of the future ministry of our Lord, the Prince of Peace. For this reason, he has been called, "the eagle-eye/eagle-eyed prophet." However well-meaning and accurate the title may be, it involves an undue elevation of eagles. Eagles are renowned for their piercing view of earth from the heavens. But Isaiah is blessed because from the earth he perceived heavens higher than any eagle could ever ascend to!

Isaiah's tenure as a prophet would permit him to see the reigns of multiple Judean kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Notable for the lengthy rule he enjoyed, Uzziah had just died after some 52 years as king during a relatively prosperous time in Judah (see 2 Chronicles 26 for details). But the vision in Isaiah 6 is of a king who has no successor, nor forerunner, nor any end (and *technically* has no beginning either). He is the King of Kings and, unlike Uzziah who succumbed to pride, the most exalted King - a Person with perfect purity. In His presence, sin is exposed, not tolerated.

**The Confession:** Everyone knows God is holy. But there's not one in one million who truly sees his/her own sin considering God's holiness. How sunken is the stain of sin on our souls that we fail to sense our scandalous situation before God! The pain of Isaiah's recognition of this fact is only surpassed by the grace of God that revealed it to him and granted atoning forgiveness despite Isaiah's unworthiness.

*"Hence that dread and amazement with which as Scripture uniformly relates holy men were struck and overwhelmed whenever they beheld the presence of God. Men are never duly touched and impressed with a conviction of their insignificance until they have."*

— John Calvin

**The Commission:** Isaiah's willingness to "go" is a popular subject to examine in this passage. While it is certainly of note, we should not ignore the mission entrusted to this prophet and the heavy harshness of conditions that would result from it. Without any reservation, it must be seen that the King has decreed disaster for Israel and, yet, He would reserve a remnant so small; it can only be called a "seed." Isaiah's preaching would go unheeded despite how faithful he would serve the Lord who ransomed him.

**Questions to Consider:** How does this vision of heaven inform your view of God and the worship He requires? How might this vision impact Isaiah's attitude and disposition towards his future hearers? Why was this experience necessary for Isaiah? Why does God send preachers/teachers when He knows they won't be heard? Does this commission remind you of another prophet with a smaller, but similar audience?

**Challenging the Class:** Isaiah's response to the holiness of God is not necessarily a given. It is grace that anyone dead in sin can recognize his own iniquity and respond to God's grace. Yet, how many perceive the exposure of their wickedness as the doorway to life? Do you?

## Lesson 3: God's Response to Assyria's Intentions (Isaiah 10)

**Primary Verse:** "Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood! Therefore, the Lord GOD of hosts will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory, a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire. The light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One a flame, and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day. (Isaiah 10:15-17)

**Teaching Text:** Isaiah 10

**Supporting Text:** Genesis 50:15-21, Habakkuk 1:1-2:4, Acts 4:24-31

At the time of this lesson's writing, the United States of America borders on deep divisions that drive the bonds of national unity. Part of the blessing of this governmental structure is it often works well despite being politically divided. Under the Trump administration, however, we have experienced not only political differences, but observers also detect a different moral vision within the two major political divisions. Many are sensing that the fractures in our nation are more and more obvious in the central government itself. As a decline in integrity continues nationally, many in the church are openly wondering if there is any redemption for this government or for the nation.

But how soon we forget; God is in control! Like children who look at insects through a magnifying glass, we can become fearful if we make human governments bigger than they actually are. The Bible is replete with scripture passages that warn us against exalting humanity because every time we do, we lose sight of God's power: Psalm 62:9, Psalm 144:4, Isaiah 40:15-17, Isaiah 51:12, Daniel 4:35, and James 4:13-15.

The scripture passage for our consideration gives us a striking contrast to the newspapers and our 24-hour news cycle which make government officials larger than life. According to Isaiah, entire empires are merely tools in the hands of the Lord. Mighty kingdoms, like ancient Assyria, are no more than an axe or a staff in God's view. They are mere tools for the advancement of His agenda and purpose. We may not understand how the worker or craftsman uses the devices for the trade they are dedicated to. Just the same, it is not always easy to perceive how or why God uses one government for a certain purpose over another. Yet, this teaching is clear in scripture. For this reason, the prophet Habakkuk was told, "the righteous shall live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

God's decisions are often offensive to many—not because they are wicked or foolish—but because God's choices are different from the ones we would make. Many are uncomfortable with the idea that God's freedom and humanity's freedom are often at odds. The bottom line is expressed in one word: sovereignty. Though we cannot explain all His ways, the Christian ought to have solid evidence from scripture, as well as from experience, to defend the wisdom and goodness of God's unmatched rulership over the world.

**Questions to Consider:** How is Assyria described in Isaiah 10:5? How is this "title" for Assyria ultimately manifested? If Assyria is used by God for a particular purpose, is God justified in condemning Assyria for doing what He intended them to do? Why or why not? What does Isaiah 10:5-14 explain? Are there other ways of explaining God's rationale for judging Assyria? What comfort is there, if any, for Isaiah's hearers concerning this message about Assyria?

**Challenging the Class:** How long will you fret because of evil doers? Are you determined to be informed about your country and politics? Good! But, how much better is it to be trained by what God has said so you have His perspective on national and international news?

## Lesson 4: God's Resolve to Restore Rebels (Isaiah 11-12)

**Primary Verse:** "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness, he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth..." (Isaiah 11: 1-4a)

**Teaching Text:** Isaiah 11-12

**Supporting Text:** Isaiah 3:13-15, Jeremiah 23:1-6 and 33:14-26, Zechariah 6:12-13, Matthew 2:23

A nickname is a "pet name" or familiar form of a name. For example, Jim is a common nickname for James; Patty is a nickname for Patricia or Patsy, etc. Some nicknames are circumstantial, arising from ironic or comical circumstances (a larger man is called "Tiny;" a young lady who is well-known for accessorizing is called "Fancy," though her name is Janet). But a code name is altogether different.

Where the use of a nickname generally implies relational intimacy with a person, the code name usually involves one's understanding of another's function which is not obvious. The code name is used to conceal the purpose or existence of the plan from those who have not been previously informed.

Of the many titles Jesus is given in the Bible, there are few as enigmatic and puzzling as "the Branch." Messenger of the Covenant (Malachi 3:1), Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 12:6, 41:14), Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), etc. all have fairly clear connotations by which we can understand the function or character of the Messiah. But, "The Branch?" Unless one is knowledgeable of the vineyard analogy for Israel and the preaching of Isaiah, Zechariah, and Jeremiah, one would be lost as to the way this title is used.

With reference to the mysterious passage of Matthew 2:23 (which seems to quote a nonexistent passage of scripture), consider the following quotation from the Christian Resource Institute:

In Hebrew, the word "branch" is *netzer*, actually only three consonantal letters: **NZR**. Note that the town **NaZaReth** contains the same three primary letters (plus an ending often attached to nouns). In the Aramaic form of *Nazareth*, (Aramaic was the common language spoken by most Israelites after the exile...), it comes very close in sound to the Hebrew word for "branch." It seems, then, that Matthew was not at all "mistaken" in this Old Testament reference... He was identifying the obscure Galilean town of Nazareth in which Jesus grew up with the Old Testament reference to a **netzer** (Branch) God would raise up to bring justice and righteousness and peace to His people.<sup>1</sup>

**Questions to Consider:** How important is it to have the context of Isaiah 3:13-15 to fully appreciate what is said of The Branch in Isaiah 11? How well are you able to explain this title considering the imagery in Isaiah 5? How can "The Branch" also be "the root of Jesse?" Is the Messianic description in Isaiah 11 a national or international figure? How can you explain/defend your position? Does anything said in Isaiah 11-12 contradict earlier predictions of exile? What implicit promise is there in Isaiah 12:1?

**Challenging the Class:** Does your worship flow from your circumstances or from gratitude for God's salvation? Since one is subject to change and the other is not, it behooves us all to examine what motivates and informs our expressions of love and dependence upon God.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crvoice.org/branch.html>

# The LORD Himself Will Give You a Sign

Thursday, 31 Dec 2015

• Dennis E. Johnson

*'Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.' Seriously? Name your miracle? Of course, I knew what that was. No god that I knew could deliver on an offer like that. It had to be a trap."*

I, King Ahaz, admit it. It didn't turn out as I expected. But realistically, what alternative did I have?

My administration and my nation were under military assault from all sides, and I needed to forge an alliance with a rising power, one with expansionistic aspirations and that would welcome a pretext for invading my enemies. Where else, realistically, could I turn, except to Assyria?

Let me explain our crisis, and you tell me whether you could come up with a better solution! It was my fate to rule Judah in troubled times. My grandfather Uzziah (also known as Azariah) and my father Jotham had it easy. Grandpa reigned for over half a century though toward the end he suffered from a mysterious skin disease and withdrew from public life, so my father ruled with him.

Grandpa was a military genius, conquering neighboring peoples to the west (Philistia) and south (Arabia), and subduing the Ammonites on our eastern border. He strengthened the fortifications of our capital, Jerusalem, and built watchtowers in the countryside to protect his vast farms and pasturelands. His standing army, outfitted with the latest in military weaponry, numbered in the hundreds of thousands and their courageous leaders in the thousands. His prowess in war reminded people of our royal ancestor David, and his international fame rivaled that of David's son Solomon. No one dared mess with Grandpa! My father had his strong points, though his reign was much shorter. He too was a builder and a warrior, keeping the Ammonites in submission.

The big flaw in both Grandpa and Dad was their loyalty to the Lord, following in old David's footsteps. Of course they both made the necessary political compromises, letting their people worship wherever they chose, however they chose, and whichever god they chose. And, to Grandpa's credit, he insisted on his royal right to take center stage in Judah's worship, a privilege those Levite priests had monopolized for far too long! I suppose the sudden outbreak of Grandpa's skin disease had something to do with the fact that my father, ever the traditionalist, lacked the stomach to demand his right as king to lead our worship. I have certainly remedied Dad's defect! What my father and grandfather failed to grasp was how risky it is to put all your eggs in one basket, whether religiously or politically. As monarch of a minor nation confronted by danger on all sides, I realized that when it comes to gathering allies (human and divine), the

motto has to be “The more the merrier.” If the support of Molech, god of the Ammonites, could be bought by human sacrifice, then passing a few of my own sons through his fires seemed a small price to pay.

But I digress. I was saying that my grandfather and father had easy reigns, distinguished by military victories, political dominance, and economic prosperity. It’s understandable that they were loyal to the Lord, the unseen god who (so the story goes) once upon a time rescued our people from slavery, preserved them in the Sinai badlands, gave them possession of the land that we now call “home.” Since everything was going well for them, it was safe enough for those who preceded me to the throne to trust this invisible “Lord.” Yes, I have heard troublesome prophets claim that things went well for them because they were trying to be loyal to the Lord, but I don’t buy it.

My times, however, have been different. I was confronted with enemies on all sides. Immediately to the north, our kinsmen, whose fathers had long ago rejected my ancestor David’s royal house, were now ruled by a royal pretender, a traitorous assassin named Pekah. Pekah formed an alliance with Rezin, king of Syria, and together their troops pushed south into Judah, actually succeeding in besieging Jerusalem! Tens of thousands of my hard-fighting troops fell in battle. Even more of my subjects’ ordinary men, women, and children were taken as prisoners of war. Seeing my troubles descending from the north, the Philistines invaded from the west and the Edomites from the south. We were attacked on all sides!

What I needed was a strong ally who could split maybe even crush the Pekah-Rezin alliance, forcing them to withdraw their troops from outside Jerusalem’s walls to defend their own borders. Who better to approach than Tiglath-Pileser, sovereign of Assyria, the rising power in the Land between the Rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates? If Assyrian troops could be induced to sweep across the Fertile Crescent and break through Syria’s “backdoor,” maybe even press farther west into the realm of Israel’s northern tribes, then I would be saved! Small states need strong saviors, and Tiglath-Pileser would be my rescuer.

Of course, enlisting Assyria’s military support would be costly, both financially and politically. I had reckoned on that. I would have to swear allegiance to the Assyrian ruler and pay tribute fees in exchange for his protection. What I had underestimated was Assyria’s insatiable appetite for “protection money.” Not only would I have to plunder the wealth of the Lord’s temple, but I would also, regretfully, draw on my own royal treasuries. That last part really hurt. Grabbing gold from the Lord’s house didn’t bother me, since I had big plans to reconfigure its design, replicating the cutting-edge trends in worship I had witnessed in Damascus after Tiglath-Pileser overwhelmed that Syrian capital. At least that part of my plan worked! But Tiglath-Pileser’s greed was ravenous, always demanding more. I have to grudgingly admit that my alliance with Assyria brought more grief than relief.

But what alternative did I have?

What did you say? I could have turned back to the Lord, who gave victories to my ancestor David and peaceful, prosperous reigns to my grandfather Uzziah and my father Jotham? You sound just

like that annoying prophet Isaiah, who claimed to have been enlisted as the Lord's spokesman in a terrifying vision at the temple around the time of Grandpa's demise! I know Isaiah had my father's ear, but as I've said it's fine to trust the Lord (or whatever works for you) in tranquil times. But I had a crisis on my hands! The threat of the Israel-Syria alliance had my heart and the hearts of my subjects shaking like the trees of a forest shake in the wind!

So what did Isaiah, that self-pronounced messenger of the Lord, have the temerity to say to me? I went out to inspect the conduit leading to the upper pool, trying to ensure that our city's water supply would not be disrupted in the siege we expected. There he was, with his little son, "Remnant Shall Return," waiting for me. What kind of a name is that to give a boy? What a bizarre blend of hope ("shall return") and disappointment (only "a remnant")! But I digress. What galled me was the message that Isaiah claimed his God (the God of my fathers, but not really mine) had given him: "Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah."

"Smoldering stumps of firebrands"? Pieces of kindling smoking but on the verge of being extinguished? Where had this prophet and his God been living? I had read the reports from the battlefield, the shocking totals of our casualties, and I knew the real picture: the forces of the Rezin-Pekah alliance were a wildfire racing across fields from the north, and the troops of Judah were mere stubble, consumed in an instant by their fiery rage. Isaiah's facile "Do not fear, do not let your heart be faint" was so out of touch with reality that I would have laughed had the situation not been so dire.

But his message from the Lord wasn't finished. Isaiah went on to announce that within sixty-five years not only Rezin and Pekah but their respective nations, Israel and Syria, would be crushed, "shattered from being a people," he said. That was the outcome even better than the outcome that I had in mind in enlisting Tiglath-Pileser's intervention. But sixty-five years? My grandfather had ruled for only fifty or so, and that was an unusually long reign in our part of the world. What good would it do me if my foes were destined for destruction long after I was buried in my tomb? I can understand why a preacher with no political experience or responsibility could dare to call me to be "firm in faith" in his unseen Lord. I had a kingdom to protect, so I naturally had to put my faith in forces more visible, more tangible...like the ruthless armies of Assyria, champing at the bit to lash out from the Land between the Rivers, across the Fertile Crescent, and down into Syria, bursting through Damascus's backdoor!

Did Isaiah see the contemptuous unbelief in my eyes? Did he sense that I was not one to be fooled by empty words, hollow promises? That I would demand something I could see and touch before I placed my faith in his unseen God? The old ones passed down stories of his drowning Egyptian charioteers in the sea, his feeding wanderers in the desert daily for decades, his shattering Jericho's walls. If he were willing to do stunts like these, I might have reconsidered my devotion to the gods who seemed to be giving our neighbor-nations such success in making our lives miserable, with their user-friendly ever-so-see-able images.

So (claimed Isaiah) the Lord made me an offer, handed me a blank check: "Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." Seriously? Name your miracle? Of course, I knew what that was. No god that I knew could deliver on an offer like that. It had to be a trap.

But I was too clever for Isaiah and the Lord he claimed to be representing. I was not going to bite at that bait! In fact, in the back of my mind I found a line from our ancient Scriptures, probably something I had heard from my grandfather or father, that came to my rescue. I simply said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test." Isn't that exactly what Moses, our deliverer, had said? "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah." That's what he said, I'm pretty sure. You can see that, actually, Isaiah was trying to lure me into impiety, into calling the Lord's bluff by naming a sign for him to accomplish in order to win my trust and loyalty. (Besides, what if the Lord had actually granted the sign I named? Then, to be frank, my bluff would have been called because, just between you and me, I've always been devoted to so many gods and to my own political savvy that I couldn't have brought myself to trust the Lord alone, no matter what stunt he would have pulled off.)

So I neatly sidestepped Isaiah's snare and was ready to walk away from that dreamer. Conversation over. But it wasn't. Isaiah seemed peeved, frustrated, and impatient. How dare he be peeved with his king? He spit out, not altogether respectful of my office: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign."

Well, I didn't see that coming! I was aware of rumors that this Lord was prone to predict future events and then fulfill his own predictions, just to show that his power and wisdom were infinitely better than the gods of Ammon and Philistia and Edom and Moab and Syria and, I guess, even mighty Assyria. What if he were to do something really stupendous now, despite my deep doubt and disloyalty, something I could not deny or explain away?

It turned out I didn't need to worry that Isaiah's God would call my bluff. Do you know what his magnificent, doubt-destroying, faith-compelling sign was? "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The infant baby of a young unwed mother, given the name "With Us Is God." That's it? What I needed was a general like Gideon, a champion like Samson, a battery of plagues on the troops approaching Jerusalem's walls those who (so the stories are told) brought mighty Egypt to its knees and loosened Egypt's death-grip on our fathers in slavery. That's what I needed power! But a baby? Seriously?

Then he added that before the boy grew up, old enough to tell good from evil, Pekah and Rezin would be destroyed, and that Assyria my ally would become Assyria my afflicter. As it turned out, the last part actually happened. But remember, I was the one who put that whole course of events in motion, for good or ill, by reaching out to Tiglath-Pileser!

Still, I confess to you (please keep my secret), what gnaws at me is that promise of a virgin's son named Immanuel. If she really were a virgin, of course, that would be a miracle. And her son would be a miracle baby, a one-of-kind human being. But I prefer a more plausible explanation: perhaps the prophet meant that the mother would be an unmarried young woman, who should

have been a virgin. If we had been observing the Torah Moses gave us, a pregnant girl like that would either be married in a hurry or executed for breaking her engagement vow. And perhaps her choice of a name, "With Us Is God," was just wishful thinking, not an actual clue to the identity of her son. But what if Isaiah, what if his Lord, meant something more?

My memory of Moses' Torah is admittedly hazy. I even surprised myself when I pulled up that bit about not putting the Lord to a test. But I think I heard somewhere that at the dawn of time, when our first parents had grown up enough to tell good from evil and their discovery didn't go especially well for them, God said something about a woman's son, one who would wage war against the ultimate enemy, suffer a grievous wound, but emerge triumphant, crushing the foe's head. Does that ring a bell with you too?

So I wonder...Did the prophet really mean a virgin a young woman who had never slept with a man? Did he really mean a miraculous birth, a miraculous child? Did he really mean that the child's name, Immanuel, would be not just an expression of wishful longing but actually an assurance of divine promises kept? That in him the assurance spoken (so the old stories claim) to Isaac and Jacob and Joshua and others, "I will be with you," will actually come true?

What's that you say? It did?

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# The Priestly Branch on the Throne

“Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the LORD. It is he who ... shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne” (vv. 12–13).

- Zechariah 6:9-15

The Old Testament is filled with messianic prophecies that Christ has fulfilled. Zechariah 6:9–15 is one of the most important of these prophecies, as it confirms the union of the priestly and kingly offices in the person of our Savior.

We read in today’s passage of a series of actions that the Lord commanded Zechariah to perform. The prophet was to take Heldi, Tobijah, and Jedaiah to the house of Joshua the high priest and place on his head a royal crown (vv. 9–11). Not much information is given about these three men; the most we can say is that they were probably recent arrivals from Babylon who returned to the covenant community in Judah after the initial group of exiles came back to the Promised Land. The key thing to note about them is that these Jews were not residents of Judah, as Zechariah will have some things to say about foreigners in verse 15.

After Zechariah put the crown on Joshua’s head, God told him to announce the Branch who would sit as a priest on David’s throne (vv. 12–13). At first glance, we might want to see the Lord identifying Joshua himself as the Branch, but this cannot be the case. The Hebrew word translated as “man” in verse 12 lacks the definite article, so the phrase is better translated as “a man whose name is the Branch” and not “Joshua, *the* man who is the Branch.”

Furthermore, the Lord said that the man in question would “build the temple of the LORD.” This points to the future, which in the immediate context means that the temple in question could not be the second temple built by the exiles. Whoever the Branch was, he would have to build a temple not yet standing in Zechariah’s day. Finally, the crown did not remain on Joshua’s head but was placed in the temple to await its rightful wearer (v. 14).

The title *Branch* is used elsewhere in the prophetic literature for the Messiah (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5). Thus, Zechariah’s actions showed the people that the Savior who was yet to come in his day would, unlike any ruler before Him, be a priest who is also fit to be the king.

As Hebrews 7 indicates, this priest-king Messiah is none other than Christ Jesus our Lord, who now lives to make intercession for the people whom He leads against His foes (see also Rom. 8:34). This Jesus builds His temple—His church—on the Apostles, who serve as the church's foundation even as Christ is its cornerstone (Matt. 16:18). Moreover, our Lord enlists the help of foreigners to build His temple (Zech. 6:15), namely, Gentiles who like Zechariah's three friends will come to the kingdom from far off and work for its glory.

## Coram Deo

John Calvin writes that today's passage must refer to "the building of the spiritual temple, when Gentiles, formerly remote from God's people, joined them as friends, and brought their labor to the work of building the temple, not with stones or wood, or with other corruptible materials, but with the doctrine and the gifts of the Holy Spirit." We are fulfillments of prophecy, the foreigners honored to build Christ's church in Him. Let us not forget this great blessing.

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