

The human brain weighs three pounds. It is the size of a softball... and yet with it we have the capacity to learn something new... every second... of every minute... of every hour... of every day... for the next three hundred million years. ... God has created us with an unlimited capacity to learn. What that tells me is that we ought to keep learning until the day we die.

Leonardo da Vinci once observed that the average human "*looks without seeing, listens without hearing, touches without feeling, eats without tasting, inhales without awareness of odor or fragrance, and talks without thinking.*" ... But not da Vinci.

The quintessential Renaissance man... who called the five senses the ministers of the soul... trained himself in curiosity. ... He never went anywhere without his notebooks... in which he recorded ideas and observations in mirror-image cursive. ... His journals contain the genesis of some of his most ingenious ideas — a helicopter-like contraption he called an orinthopter... a diving suit... and a robotic knight. ... While on his own deathbed... he meticulously noted his own symptoms in his journal. That's devotion to learning.

I would like for you to know... that I face this challenge... (to keep learning more)... every December... when we enter the Christmas season. I keep looking for different ways to relate the truths of Scripture... about Jesus' birth... that will edify any listener of the sermons I present. ... So... when I decided to preach through the book of Matthew... I thought about this again. ... Matthew presents the birth of Christ... and I am going to have to relate the Christmas story to an audience who is already VERY familiar with every nuance and detail.

Last week my challenge was to present the genealogy of Christ in a manner that not only holds your interest through all the “begats”... but would also lead you to insights that would build your faith. I was so happy when my research came across the Name Jechoniah... and why his name in this genealogical record... was the key... as to why Matthew gives us this lineage and why Matthew went straight from the list of “begats” to the virgin birth from Joseph’s perspective.

The whole point of last week’s message was for us to marvel at God’s sovereign control... as He works out His plan through the ages. ... Satan can try to foil God’s revealed intention... but he will NEVER succeed. Every part of God’s announced future will happen – exactly as He proclaims it.

As a reminder to those who were here last week... and to let those of you who were not here... in on it... God announced His plan through Nathan the prophet... which we read in 2 Samuel 7:14-17... that King David would always have one of his descendants on the throne of Israel – forever! This would also include the future Messiah.

But when we read the Bible books of Kings and Chronicles... we see how Satan did everything he could to pollute the line of Kings from David forward. I am certain that Satan played a major role in these Kings becoming very corrupt... worshipping idols... setting up their carved images - even in the Temple... sacrificing their own children by throwing them into the fire that burned in the belly of Molech. Instead of leading the people of Israel to the Lord... they led them away from Him. ... Things got so horrible that God finally said, “Enough! This lineage will end. Jechoniah is the last one. No one after him will be king...” We read this

pronouncement in Jeremiah 22:28-30. Satan must have thought that he scored a victory.

Then after 400 years... Jesus is thrust onto the scene and is presented as the Messiah. *“OK... Jesus... son of Joseph... (son of a simple carpenter)... just what are your credentials...? Do you have the pedigree to be king...?”* When the credentials of Jesus’ pedigree are investigated... (as they surely would have been... by his enemies... those who wanted to deny Him)... Jesus is found to be in the lineage of King David. ... But wait a minute. (And I can just see the Scribes rubbing their hands together and sneering with delight...) ... *What’s this...? Here is Jechoniah’s name in the genealogy. ... He cannot be the Messiah – He is disqualified according to Jeremiah our true prophet!* Jeremiah said no one who is a descendant of Jechoniah will ever be King... and Jesus is a descendant. – Problem! The enemies of Christ have a strong case to reject Him.

This morning’s passage is Matthew’s solution to the problem. Matthew does not ignore the problem. He confronts it head-on. This disciple of Christ gives a full list of Jesus’ ancestors (not all of them... he leaves some off the list... which Hebrew genealogies sometimes did) – but he was sure to mention Jechoniah (in Matthew 1:11). He *boldly* does that... as he brings the list all the way down to Joseph... And now... today... we see that Matthew declares that Joseph is not Jesus’ biological father. Matthew 1:18... *“before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit...”* Joseph and Mary did not have sexual relations – until after Jesus was born. Matthew 1:25... *“but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”*

Before we get further into today's passage... let me just mention that Luke (the only other Gospel writer to present the lineage of Christ) presents a different genealogy. Luke traces Jesus' lineage from David down to Jesus' mother... not Joseph (as Matthew does.) Matthew goes from King David through his son (Solomon) all the way to Joseph... while Luke goes from King David through a different son (Nathan)... down to Jesus' mom (Mary). So Jesus has the proper pedigree... **and**... it does not involve Jechoniah (on whom Jeremiah pronounced the curse.) Satan's ploy has failed... and the sovereignty of God shines brilliant!

But now that we have that problem solved... (Being the nice guy that I am...) let me involve you in another controversy... that is perhaps... just as perplexing. This one surrounds itself around Matthew quoted Scripture about the virgin birth. In the midst of Matthew's solving one problem... in the minds of many scholars... Matthew steps directly into another problem (of epic proportions)... when he quotes from Isaiah. ... Let's now look at Matthew's quote... in today's passage...

Matthew 1:22-23

We can see why Matthew tells the story about Joseph's learning about Mary's conception... (by the Holy Spirit)... right after he gives the lineage of Christ through the cursed man... Jechoniah. ... We can also understand the importance of Matthew including what Isaiah prophesied. ... It is though Matthew is telling the critics of Jesus' pedigree... "*This explanation about the Holy Spirit getting Mary pregnant... is **not really** all that far-fetched... Look... you should have seen it! Then it would not seem so strange... as the solution. Check and see... folks... It was prophesied...!*"

Atta Boy Matthew! You're really cooking with gas here! You have presented a pretty air tight case. Way to answer Jesus' pedigree critics! ... But wait a minute. Not so fast. ... You see... once we allow ourselves to be placed among the circumstances of this *particular* prophecy... things can get quite murky. ... Does the quote from Isaiah really fit... as a prophecy for the virgin birth of Jesus...? Let's walk back several centuries... and take a look around to see the context of this prophecy.

The story and context of Isaiah's prophecy is found in Isaiah chapter seven. Please turn there with me... but keep your finger (or some marker) here in Matthew. We will come back.

Chapters seven through twelve of Isaiah use the name "Immanuel" 3 times... which means "with us, God" or "God among us." It is for this reason that these chapters of Isaiah were often referred to as "*The Book of Immanuel*." So the point I am making is that this section of Isaiah was known as having Messianic overtones.

As we pick up the story in Isaiah 7... an empire (to the North) was rising... which was threatening the smaller kingdoms all around it in the Middle East. It was the Assyrian Empire. Among the smaller kingdoms who were feeling threatened... was #1. **Syria** (also known as Aram)... #2. **Israel** (also called Ephraim... and composed of the ten Northern Jewish Tribes) and #3. **Judah** (the Southern Kingdom... made up of the two remaining Jewish tribes.)

Syria's king and Israel's king joined forces to take on their common enemy... but they knew that they still did not have enough military might to withstand the powerful Assyrian army. So Syria and Israel invited Judah to

join forces with them... but Ahaz... (the King of Judah) refused. This only made the two kings of Syria and Israel mad... so they conspired to dethrone Ahaz... and wipe out the entire House of David... They planned to establish a new dynasty in Judah... (a new line of kings) with the initial king... one who would make an alliance with them to go against the mighty Assyria.

Isaiah 7:1-2

Ahaz was not a worshipper of the one true God of Israel. He was an idolater and he now faced an eminent threat from these two yahoos.

Ahaz was out looking at the water supplies... to see if they could withstand a siege from this impending threat. God told Isaiah to go and meet with King Ahaz... there... (at the water supply pool.) But prophet Isaiah was also told to take his young son along with him. ... (This important for our understanding the prophecy that Isaiah will deliver.) ... Young Shear-jashub... and his dad... (the prophet Isaiah) were BOTH to go and meet King Ahaz... while Ahaz prepared to hold out against the kings of Israel and Syria.

The message God told Isaiah and his son to deliver was *“Don’t be afraid of these two kings. I have a covenant I made with David saying a descendant of his will be on the throne forever. These two kings will not wipe you and the entire House of David out. I intend to keep my covenant to David...”*

Now... God would eventually stop the line of David through Jechoniah... but if the Kings of Syria and Israel succeeded in their plans... David’s other line of descendants through Nathan through Mary and to Jesus (Messiah) ... would also be wiped out. God would not let that happen.

Isaiah 7:3-9

Ahaz did not trust in God. In fact Ahaz had made his own arrangements. Ahaz had sent letter and gifts to the Assyrian Emperor... asking for his help against these two kings. (Ahaz had greater faith in the Assyrian Empire than he did in the God of Israel.)

So God had Isaiah give him another message. God offered Ahaz a sign... whatever it took to convince Ahaz not to fear... not to trust the Assyrians... but to trust Him. *“Name it Ahaz... either a natural sign or a miraculous sign... anywhere you want it... Ahaz... in heaven... on earth... under the earth... whatever it takes to convince you...”*

But Ahaz suddenly became very self-righteous... and refused God's offer. This idolater said that it was not right to test the Lord God Almighty. (I can almost see him throw his nose in the air as he said it so self-righteously.) He misapplied Deuteronomy 6:16. In Deuteronomy... it is forbidden to ask God for a sign. But this was not the case here. God was asking to give him a sign... and Ahaz was invited to respond. ... But Ahaz did not want a sign. You see... Ahaz wanted to keep his alliance with Assyria.

Isaiah 7:10-12

And now we come to the quote that Matthew used for the virgin birth of Jesus.

Isaiah 7:13-16

Now that we have looked at the context of the prophecy... does anyone see a problem with it being quoted in Matthew as a prophecy for Jesus' virgin birth... which would not happen... until hundreds of years later...?

This was a sign for Ahaz. ... How would a virgin birth that would happen centuries later encourage Ahaz with his immediate threat...? Clearly God was speaking through Isaiah to Ahaz... about an immediate need for Ahaz to be assured. ... If Isaiah 7:14 is about Jesus' birth... how would that give the necessary encouragement that was needed right away...?

Am I free to go to any story in the Old Testament... ignore all of its context... and make it say whatever I want...? Or is it only this one that we have such license to do this...?

Oooo! I told you that we had another problem of epic proportions... didn't I...?

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For many years... I believed that this is a case of what has been termed "double fulfilment." When it comes to Old Testament prophecy... it is believed that there is often an immediate fulfilment (within the same generation... of when the prophecy was made... In this case to Ahaz' immediate generation)... and also a second fulfilment of the same thing in a future generation... many years later. ... The principle of "double fulfilment" says that God fulfilled the sign to Ahaz right away... that Ahaz was shown that he made the wrong decision to trust in the Assyrian Empire and not God... and then God did it again... many years later at Jesus' birth.

But... you know what...? That explanation has never completely satisfied me. ... Were there really two virgins who gave birth to a son... and both named their son Immanuel...? Has there really been two virgin births in history...? Don't you think history would have made more of it...? Why has there never been a big deal made out of it...? The Jews have always been

good historians. ... But there is not one peep of a virgin birth in the Old Testament... or anywhere else in their history. Did no one notice...? Was it kept super-secret...? Why...? ... Especially as the fulfillment of specific prophecy... why would it be kept under raps...? ... And - Is Jesus' virgin birth **not** so unique after-all...?

(Isaiah 7:14) The Lord Himself will give you a sign... Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son...

Some have tried to explain this by saying Ahaz was given a lesser sign... It was only a young woman that conceived and gave birth to a son... in Ahaz' day... and many years later... a much better sign was given when an actual virgin (Mary) gave birth.

But I find this too... to be less than satisfactory. How could a young woman in Ahaz' day... who gives birth to a son... be enough of a sign... that it brings Ahaz back to faith in God. Young women were having sons all the time during Ahaz' day. It certainly is a lesser sign. Too weak... in fact. Even if that young woman happened to name her son Immanuel – it still is a pretty lame sign... certainly not enough to accomplish what Ahaz needed.

So... where do we turn...? Where can we go...? How do we solve this problem of epic proportions...?

There is another principle that applies to Bible prophecy. This one is called “double reference”... instead of “double fulfillment.” ... Unlike the first principle of “double fulfillment”... the principle of “double reference” declares that there is only **one** fulfillment of the sign... however different parts of it get fulfilled at different times. One block of the Scripture is dealing with one person... one event... and one place and time... and it is

followed by another section that deals with a different person... different event... and different place and time. There is a gap of time involved in what looks like a single prophecy. This can only be ascertained from the author's grammatical nuances and other Scriptures.

In the case before us in Isaiah seven... verse 14 is a long-range prophecy concerning the birth of the Messiah... and verse 15-17 was specifically for Ahaz... during his own day... and for his immediate need.

Did you happen to notice in verse 14... the definite article before the word virgin. It does not say "a virgin." It says "THE virgin." This calls for a rule of interpretation that says the reader must look for a previous mention of a virgin. Going backwards from there... the first one you find is usually what it is referring to. But there is nothing... until you go all the way back to Genesis 3:15.

Genesis 3:15 (ESV)

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

This is a Messianic Prophecy. A seed of a woman... (a single and certain individual... a person... a future offspring from a woman)... not a woman and a man... but the offspring of a woman... a virgin... will come and put an end to the evil caused by Satan.

God is reminding Ahaz that He has had a plan going way back in time. Isaiah tried telling Ahaz that God was not about to allow the King of Syria and the King of Israel to destroy His Messianic plans to use the House of David. He already told him... "*Rest assured King Ahaz... I will not allow your destruction as announced by these two yahoos.*" Now He backs up

even further... and stays with His Messianic reasoning to redeem the world... It is still the same reason for why He is not going to allow the two Kings to overthrow Ahaz' kingdom. *“Ahaz... it's not about you! Get it through your thick skull! I've made and announced My plans long ago... and these two enemies of yours will not alter them... The offspring of woman I spoke of... to Adam and Eve... will come and rescue man from the problem of sin... It is going to happen... but it **will not** if The House of David gets wiped out. So be at peace... The House of David will not be wiped out by these evil kings. Its simply not gonna happen! What **will** happen... is that the virgin will give birth and name her son Immanuel – God among us.”*

Now as to the more immediate fulfillment and direct assurance to Ahaz in Verses 15-17... we now can see the reason Isaiah was commanded to take his infant son with him to talk with Ahaz. Remember how we saw in verse 3 that Isaiah was commanded to take Shear-jashub along with him.

Isaiah points to his son and says... Before my young son is old enough to make distinctions between what is morally right and wrong... those two jackal kings will themselves be deposed... and they will no longer be any threat to you.

Isaiah 7:15-16

Isaiah again used the definite article before the term boy in verse 16... “THE boy.” ... But this time we don't have to go all the way back to Genesis. There is a boy mentioned in the immediate context – Shear-jashub! *“Before Shear-jashub can distinguish between right and wrong...”*

*these guys will be outta here! Rest easy Ahaz.” ... And this **was** fulfilled within three years.*

Don't you love how God's Word all fits together...? It does not contradict itself. It **can** be trusted. Marvel at it ! Whenever you think you have found a contradiction... look a little deeper. There is always something you have not yet discovered.

Now let's return to Matthew...

Matthew 1:18-25

The birth of our Savior is the most profound mystery in the whole universe. This mystery is encapsulated in what Matthew writes about the virgin birth of Jesus.

There are... after all... other ways Jesus could have come into the world. On the one hand... if He had come without any human parent... then it would have been hard for us to imagine... or believe that He could really identify with us. ... On the other hand... if He had come through two human parents — a biological mother and a biological father — then it would be hard to imagine how He could be fully God... since His origin would have been exactly the same as ours.

But God... in His perfect wisdom and creative sovereignty... ordained a virgin birth to be the avenue through which Christ would come into the world. Satan could not prevent it by polluting the House of David... or by wiping it out completely. God has an eternal plan... and that plan is to pursue mankind. ... You can be the recipient of God-initiated action... by placing your trust in His eternal plan... of dealing with sin.

The Savior did indeed come. He came... and He took the punishment you and I deserve... because we are all sinners. ... Ever since the Garden of Eden... every person who has ever lived... has been turning away from God and trying to do things our own way... without Him. This has earned us an eternity without God. ... God created us to be in fellowship with Him. But we rejected that... and He pursues us.

Jesus died on the cross and took our punishment... so our fellowship with Him would be restored. We are restored when we put our faith in what Christ did for us... and stop living for ourselves.

Today... won't you put your trust in Jesus... die to yourself... and become His follower...?