

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

“Christianizing Isaiah” or “Weaponizing the O.T.”

#PredictionFulfillment #Prophecy Historicized
#ReductionistTheology / #IsaiahISNOTpredicting Jesus

I. Inclusive Architecture / Preventative Maintenance.

- A. We are not letting go of Jesus, diminishing His story, or removing His significance. We are simply learning to read the Scriptures responsibly, contextually and historically.
- B. This conversation is not about making Jesus smaller; it is about making our reading of the Bible deeper, more honest, and faithful to its original context.
- C. Saying that Isaiah was not originally predicting Jesus does not mean Jesus is disconnected from Isaiah. New Testament authors saw Jesus as one who embodied some of Isaiah’s descriptions and wrote about Jesus in a way that attempted to connect Jesus to Israel’s story.

II. The “Jesussy” Passages in Isaiah

A. Isaiah 7:10-14 ¹⁰ Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ “Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven.” ¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, and I will not put the Lord to the test.” ¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals that you weary my God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you **(Ahaz) a sign**. Look, the **young woman** is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him **Immanuel**.

- 1. God is speaking to King Ahaz (the addressee), who is in crisis.
- 2. The “sign” given is for Ahaz as a reassurance in his present crisis (not future).
- 3. Notice this is a “young woman” (not a virgin) and she “is with child” (not going to be pregnant in the future). This is an observation, not a prediction. The Hebrew word is ‘**almāh**, meaning a young woman of marriageable age. It is not the Hebrew technical word for “virgin” (*bēṭûlāh*).
- 4. **Matthew 1:21-23** ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ “Look, **the virgin shall become pregnant** and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”
 - a. What is Matthew doing? Matthew’s intended audience is Jewish. His use of **Isaiah 7:14** functions as an argument that Jesus belongs within Israel’s scriptural story and therefore should be recognized as Messiah. Matthew is endeavoring to portray Jesus as the continuation and culmination of Israel’s story, even though **Isaiah 7:14** in its original eighth-century context concerned Judah, Ahaz, and an immediate historical crisis.
- 5. **Immanuel** appears in **Is. 7:14, 8:8**, and arguably **8:10**, where the phrase “God is with us” functions as a theological statement about Judah’s situation—not as a personal name. **Immanuel** “God is with us” is not a declaration of a child being God incarnate. “God is with us” is a comfort that God is with King Ahaz and the people in the midst of their present crisis. Names containing “**El**” (a generic name for “God”): Michael “Who is like God?” / Nathaniel “Gift of God” / Ezekiel “God strengthens” / Immanuel-Emmanuel “God is with us” / Israel “He struggles with God” / Peniel “Face of God” / Boel “God is in him” / Ithiel “God is with me”

(A con’t). **Isaiah 7:15-16** ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey **by the time** he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶ **For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good**, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

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6. Isaiah then says before the child reaches certain development, the two threatening kings will be gone (7:16). This creates a chronological problem for a futuristic Jesus prophecy.
7. Isaiah's prophecy is directed to the "house of David" - its original referent was a Davidic heir in Isaiah's own period, possibly Hezekiah.

B. Isaiah 9:2, 6 ²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; ⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

1. Notice a child **"has been born."** Important linguistic point: English translations often render **Isaiah 9:6's** opening verbs as future ("a child will be born"), but the Hebrew forms are perfect forms: "a child **has been born**; a son **has been given**" (scholars perceive Isaiah is talking about Hezekiah – celebrated historically as a godly king).
2. The darkness Isaiah is talking about is the devastation of **Zebulun and Naphtali** by Assyria, a result of military catastrophe and oppression – Matthew connects this to Jesus, but the context is not futuristic, it's present.
3. This description sounds like Jesus: "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." However, Israel's Kings often have these lofty descriptions – called **"throne names."** Consider these examples of "throne names:"

Psalms 2:7 "I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, **You are my son; today I have begotten you.**"

-Notice, God's begotten son, is David.

Psalms 45:1 "Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus..."

-In Hebrew, **"anointed"** is מָשִׁיחַ / **meshicho**, meaning **"his messiah"** or **"his anointed one."**

Cyrus is called God's "messiah/anointed one." Cyrus was a Persian king, not an Israelite and not "the Messiah" in the later Christian sense. In Isaiah, "messiah/anointed one" can refer to someone appointed by God for a task — in Cyrus's case, to defeat Babylon and help make Israel's return from exile possible.

Psalms 45:6-8 ⁶Your throne, **O God,** ^[b]endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity; ⁷you love righteousness and hate wickedness. **Therefore God, your God,** has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; ⁸your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.

-^[b] 45:6 Or *Your throne is a throne of God.* v.6 refers to **David as "God"** but a better reading is David's throne is a throne of God.

-v.7 makes a distinction between David as an appointed earthly "God" and God who anointed him.

Psalms 110:1 The **Lord says to my lord**, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.

-Notice, David is called "my lord." Psalm 110 is a very good parallel for understanding how Israelite **royal language** could be extraordinarily exalted without necessarily making the king identical with YHWH.

David is: seated at God's right hand; given authority by God; called **"my lord"**; portrayed as ruling God's enemies; functioning as God's chosen royal representative.

C. Isaiah 40:1-3 Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to **Jerusalem**, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her **penalty is paid**, that she has received from

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the Lord's hand double for all her sins. ³ A voice cries out: "**In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord**; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

1. This is one of the clearest examples of **contextual transformation** (ref. to **Matt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; John 1:23**).
2. **Isaiah 40** begins the great restoration section: "Comfort, comfort my people..." The imagery is of **Israel returning from exile** (not John preparing the way for Jesus). The highway through the wilderness is the route by which YHWH leads the people home from Babylon. Isaiah 40:3 is therefore fundamentally an **exodus/restoration text** (not predictive).
3. The NT turns the voice into John the Baptist and the coming of Jesus, but it isn't what Isaiah's speaker was originally describing.

D. The 4 "Servant Songs": **Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; and 52:13–53:12**

Isaiah 41:8–9 "But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen..."

Isaiah 44:1–2 "But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen..."

Isaiah 44:21 "Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are my servant..."

Isaiah 45:4 "For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen..."

Isaiah 48:20 "The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob."

Isaiah 49:3 "He said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'"

Now **Isaiah 53:4–7** "the suffering servant" in Isaiah's context: "⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases, yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

1. The singular "**he**." The Hebrew word for servant, '**eved**, is grammatically masculine singular. So, if Isaiah personifies Israel as the servant, ordinary Hebrew grammar naturally gives us: "**he**" rather than "they." We do this in English: "America announced that **it** would..." or: "Israel has forgotten **her** God." The Hebrew Bible routinely personifies Israel. And the servant is repeatedly identified with Israel. So an individual figure can function as a representative embodiment of Israel.
2. This sounds remarkably like Christian atonement theology. But, there is another historical reading: **Israel's suffering has redemptive significance**. The "servant" or "he" is the remnant of Israel taken into Babylonian captivity. "He" or the remnant of Israel suffered because of the sins of others or collective Israel in a way that becomes **vicarious**. This is why scholarly literature distinguishes: **collective Israel from the faithful remnant**.

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The collective/remnant interpretation isn't a fringe invention.^{1 2 3 4}

III. The Gospel's Misappropriation of the Old Testament (especially Matthew).

A. Matthew's "fulfillment" citations or "this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet..."

(13 in all: Mt. 1:22–23 & Isaiah 7:14; Mt. 2:5–6 & Micah 5:2; Mt. 2:15 & Hosea 11:1; Mt. 2:17–18 & Jeremiah 31:15; Mt. 3:3 & Isaiah 40:3; Mt. 4:14–16 & Isaiah 9:1–2; Mt. 8:17 & Isaiah 53:4; Mt. 12:17–21 & Isaiah 42:1–4; Mt. 13:14–15 & Isaiah 6:9–10; Mt. 13:35 & Psalm 78:2; Mt. 21:4–5 & Zechariah 9:9 / Isaiah 62:11; Mt. 27:9–10 & Zechariah 11:12–13) are best understood as part of his effort to persuade a Jewish audience that Jesus was the Messiah. Many of the Old Testament passages he cites were not originally predictions of a future Jesus but referred to Israel, its history, kingship, exile, restoration, or other events in their own contexts. Matthew therefore uses Scripture typologically and rhetorically. This approach was particularly strategic for readers who did not already accept Jesus as Messiah.

B. Prophecy Historicized - The Gospel writers use Scripture retrospectively to interpret and sometimes shape the Jesus story. They were doing something that made sense within their Jewish interpretive world, even though it doesn't conform to our modern grammatical-historical expectations

IV. So What Now?

A. It's OK to admit this might sting. Indoctrination/exposure informs our beliefs. Beliefs become our identity. Who are we without this identity? What happens to our identity when we realize these verses aren't predicting Jesus?

B. Let go of religious supremacy culture. Old Testament imagery, virgin birth, resurrection are not meant to be weaponized against other religions or the rest of humanity.

C. Practice Mature Religion. Honor the suffering of Jesus, the crucifixion, the blood, without requiring the Hebrew Bible to function as a forecasting of Jesus. Allow Isaiah, the Psalms, the prophets, and the Hebrew Scriptures to speak first from within their own world, to their own people, and for their own purposes. Honoring Jesus does not require erasing Israel, flattening Jewish Scripture, or diminishing the faithfulness of those who continue to read the Hebrew Bible without Christian conclusions. **A more mature faith** can revere Jesus deeply while also respecting the integrity, dignity, and ongoing sacredness of the Hebrew Bible and its adherents.

¹ The St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology notes that the traditional Jewish interpretation identifies the servant with Israel and, in particular, the exilic community.

² Bible scholarship likewise notes that collective interpretations understand the servant as Israel, while some restrict the identification to a pious remnant within Israel.

³ The Oxford study of the historical/collective sufferer specifically discusses scholarly interpretations of Isaiah 53 that understand the servant as the personification of a collective group and connect the imagery with suffering in exile.

⁴ [Marcus J. Borg](#), *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* — especially the chapter "Reading the Prophets Again." [Amy-Jill Levine](#) and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Bible With and Without Jesus: How Jews and Christians Read the Same Stories Differently*. [Peter Enns](#), *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*.