

Isaiah 7:14
The Promise Specified

Main idea: God doesn't just dish out vague promises, or vague hope. He gets specific.

Clickbait on the internet is a link whose main purpose is to attract attention and entice visitors to click, but usually doesn't live up to the hype of the promise made in order to get you to click it. Here are a few examples.

[Clickbait Article]



This one's title is, "When you find out what these kids are jumping into, your jaw will drop!" And your mind starts to race to all the sensational things they could be jumping into. But when you actually click on the link, you find out that they're just jumping into a swimming pool.

Here's another one.

[Clickbait Article]



This one's titled, "Baby ducks see water for the first time, can you believe what they do?" And you wonder, what did they do? Did they just stare at it? Did they roll around in it? Did they almost drown? But when you click the link, you find out that they just took a little drink of water.

Some people assume that prophecy in the Bible is like clickbait.¹ Like, it makes this huge promise, but just kind of lets you down.² So a lot of people just ignore the Bible's promises today, thinking they sound too good or unbelievable. Because that's what we generally try to do with clickbait. We're so used to seeing clickbait links today on the internet that make huge promises, so we usually just try to ignore them.

¹ But God's promises are sure. 2 Corinthians 1:20

² Promises like Philippians 4:19 and Romans 8:28

[How Ridiculous Thumbnail]



HIGHEST DARTS BULLSEYE
WORLD RECORD! (45m/150ft)

4.6M views • 4 years ago

So when you see something like this, “Highest darts bullseye world record! 45m/150ft,” you might think it’s clickbait. But it’s not.

[Clips from How Ridiculous]



How Ridiculous.mp4

That’s a YouTube channel called How Ridiculous. The channel is run by three Christians in Australia, and it’s all about just doing ridiculous things. It’s great. Sometimes they drop stuff just to see it crash, sometimes they bounce planes off of trampolines, and sometimes they spend all day, or even all week, attempting to do something like get a bullseye from 150 feet away.

It’s pretty silly. Some might even call it “ridiculous.” Because from that distance, there’s absolutely no skill in getting a bullseye.

Some people think that prophecy is like that. Like, you have all these people hundreds of years ago making all these predictions, but there’s no reason to believe any of them because they’re all just shots in the dark.³ And it’s true that many things that people have considered to be prophetic have been nothing more than dropping hundreds of darts onto a dart board from 150 feet away. Some will hit, but most certainly will not.

For example, some people consider Nostradamus to be a prophet.⁴ Nostradamus was a man who lived about 500 years ago now who made over a thousand predictions of what would happen in the future. People say that he predicted all sorts of things such as the rise of Hitler, the Apollo moon landings, and the attacks on 9/11. And, just about anytime there’s a major event anywhere, there’s almost always someone who claims that Nostradamus predicted it.

So let’s look at just one of those predictions. Let’s look at how Nostradamus supposedly predicted 9/11. In a book full of hundreds of other supposed prophecies, Nostradamus wrote:

Earth-shaking flames from the world's center roar
And make the earth around a 'New City' quiver.

³ In contrast, we should recognize biblical prophecy as coming not from men, but from God. 2 Peter 1:21, Amos 3:7

⁴ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nostradamus>

So, did Nostradamus accurately predict 9/11? Well, only if you squint your eyes and cock your head at just the right angle. But to me, that sounds more like an earthquake or a volcano, right?

And that's not how real prophecy works. In biblical prophecy, it's not up to us to interpret the vague prediction just right so that it fits. No, God's word is specific. God doesn't just drop a few hundred darts, hoping some of them will hit the bullseye. No, every prophecy about the birth and life of Jesus is specific, the complete opposite of vague, and has been objectively fulfilled.⁵

So I want to look at one of the most well-known prophecies about the birth of Jesus in the Old Testament. Isaiah 7:14. But I want to look at it in the context that it was actually written in, because I think that will even more strengthen our faith that God's promises are far greater than any other promises that we might hear. So we're going to be reading Isaiah 7, starting in verse 2.

When it became known to the house of David that Aram had occupied Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind. The Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out with your son Shear-jashub to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to the Launderer's Field. Say to him: Calm down and be quiet. Don't be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering sticks, the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. For Aram, along with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has plotted harm against you. They say, 'Let's go up against Judah, terrorize it, and conquer it for ourselves. Then we can install Tabeel's son as king in it.'" (Isaiah 7:2-6)

Father, help us to believe Your promises, and trust in Your deliverance. Help us to rest in Jesus. In Jesus' name, Amen.

So here was the situation. Ahaz was the king of Judah, the Southern Kingdom of Israel, but he wasn't a good king.⁶ Even though he was king of Judah, God's people, he didn't trust in God. In fact, he preferred to be friends with the king of Assyria, who were historically the enemies of the Jews because they worshiped false gods.⁷ So when Ahaz got word that he was going to be attacked both by the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and by the nation Aram, he called out to Assyria for help. He didn't cry out to God for help, he cried out to the Assyrians. He didn't trust that God would deliver him, so he thought that he needed to deliver himself. King Ahaz was scared. It says in verse 2 that his heart trembled like the trees of a forest shaking in the wind.

Have you ever been so scared that you physically shook? When I was 22 years old, an officer pulled me over for going 104 miles per hour, and I was shaking and stuttering so bad that he had me get out of my car to sit me in his vehicle while he wrote me the ticket. I thought I was going to jail!

That's how King Ahaz felt. He heard that he was going to be attacked, so he trembled like trees in the wind.

But then Isaiah comes along and tells him, "Calm down and be quiet! Don't be afraid."

Now, usually when you're upset or afraid, and someone tells you to calm down, does it work? No, we don't, because we don't think they know what we're going through. We don't know if we can believe them. And I'm sure Ahaz was thinking the same things about Isaiah. The difference, however, was that Isaiah was speaking as a prophet of God. If God Himself gave you a sign to say, "Hey, it's gonna be okay," I think we'd be much more likely to listen.

⁵ And if a "prophecy" does not come to pass, it's not from God. Deuteronomy 18:21-22

⁶ 2 Kings 16:2

⁷ Ahaz even tried to impress the King of Assyria by making Judah more like them. 2 Chronicles 28:24

So Isaiah tells Ahaz, “Don’t be cowardly. Because these nations who are seeking to attack you are just smoldering sticks.”

Now, if you touch a smoldering stick, it might burn you, but it’s not going to kill you. A lot of people use smoldering sticks called punks to light fireworks because they’re safer than matches or lighters that have open flames. A smoldering stick, on the other hand, is just a stick with a hot tip. So if it touches your skin, you might get a little burn, but it’s not really life-threatening.

And yet, even after being reassured by Isaiah, King Ahaz was still afraid that he and his people would be conquered by his enemies. So Isaiah continued. Verse 7.

This is what the Lord God says: It will not happen; it will not occur. The chief city of Aram is Damascus, the chief of Damascus is Rezin (within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people), the chief city of Ephraim is Samaria, and the chief of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all. (Isaiah 7:7-9)

So Isaiah tells King Ahaz flat out that it won’t happen. These nations that he’s afraid of wouldn’t conquer him at this time. In fact, one of them, Ephraim, which was part of the Northern Kingdom, would be shattered within 65 years, and Isaiah said that if Ahaz didn’t trust in God’s deliverance, then he would soon fall, too.

I want you to notice how specific this prophecy is compared to something like Nostradamus. Unlike Nostradamus, this isn’t vague at all. We can know for sure that it happened or didn’t happen. And, in this case, as with all of the prophecies in the Bible, it happened. Within 65 years, Ephraim was conquered by the nations around it and all the people were forced to leave their land in exile.⁸

So the prophecy was specific, and it was fulfilled, which gives us even more confidence in what happens next. Verse 10.

Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz: “Ask for a sign from the Lord your God—it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.” But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the Lord.” Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:10-14)

So, you may have noticed the prophecy in this passage about Jesus. Jesus would be born of a virgin, and would be called Immanuel, which means God with us. But before we look at how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy, I want to look at the verse in its original context.

So, once again, King Ahaz is terrified of the nations about to attack him. And even though Isaiah just assured him that it would not happen, apparently he didn’t believe the promise. And apparently, he didn’t even want to believe the promise. Through Isaiah, God tells Ahaz to ask for a sign. Ask for a sign that the Lord will protect you! It can be anything! As deep as hell or as high as heaven. But Ahaz replies, “I will not test the Lord.”

Now, I want you to ask yourself, what would you do? If Isaiah told you to ask for a sign, what sign would you ask for? Or would you, like Ahaz, say, “I will not test the Lord.”

⁸ 2 Kings 17:5-8, Jeremiah 7:27-29

Now, we might at first say that this was wise, because we're not supposed to put the Lord to the test,⁹ but by doing this, Ahaz was actually disobeying God. Through Isaiah, God literally told Ahaz to ask for a sign of His faithfulness, and Ahaz was like, "Nope, won't do it." So Isaiah basically responds, "Why are you being so difficult? Why are you trying the patience of God?"

And it was through Ahaz's refusal to ask for a sign that Isaiah responded that the Lord would give him a sign anyway: a virgin would conceive and give birth to a son, and she would name him Immanuel.

And that happened. The word "virgin," in Hebrew, could also be translated, "young maiden."¹⁰ Most likely, Isaiah was talking about his own wife.¹¹ Not long after Isaiah had this conversation with Ahaz, Isaiah's wife became pregnant with their second child, and Ahaz would have heard about it because Isaiah was quickly becoming a famous prophet in the nation, and he was constantly speaking in public about what would happen to the nation.¹² So when Ahaz heard that Isaiah's wife would have a son, he was to be reassured that the nation of Judah would not fall into the hands of the kings of the nations around him...yet.

Because look at what Isaiah says next. Verse 15.

By the time he [Isaiah's son] learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating curds and honey. For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned. The Lord will bring on you, your people, and your father's house such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah: He will bring the king of Assyria." (Isaiah 7:15-17)

So, evidently, Ahaz and the nation of Judah were safe...for now. But not for long. After Isaiah's son grew to be about 12 years old, the two nations that King Ahaz feared wouldn't be a threat, but Assyria would be. And sure enough, Assyria began to invade the nation of Judah not long after that point, which severely weakened them so that they were also eventually taken captive by the Babylonians.¹³

So the same nation, Assyria, that Ahaz originally wanted to ask for help in fighting against the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the nation of Aram would eventually lead to him and his people being conquered.

So the message to Ahaz was simply this: don't look to the nations around you for help. Look to the Lord for your help, and He will save you.¹⁴ But if you don't cry out to the Lord, you can expect judgment.¹⁵ Because our God is a jealous God, a consuming fire,¹⁶ and He will not allow us to continue in half-hearted devotion.¹⁷ He wants all of our hearts.¹⁸

Now, that's Isaiah 7:14 in its original context. It wasn't at all vague, it was specific, and all the things that Isaiah prophesied would happen to Ahaz and the people of Judah happened, exactly within the timeframes that he said they would happen.

⁹ Deuteronomy 6:16

¹⁰ עַלְמָה (Strong's #5959)

¹¹ Isaiah 8:3-4

¹² Open air preaching, FTW. Isaiah 58:1

¹³ 2 Kings 24:10-12

¹⁴ Psalm 57:2

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:10

¹⁶ Exodus 20:5, Deuteronomy 4:24

¹⁷ Revelation 3:15-16

¹⁸ And since, by and large, we were unwilling to give Him our hearts, He creates a new heart in us. Psalm 51:10, Ezekiel 36:26

But the thing about biblical prophecy is that God likes to play a game of near and far.

[Clip of Grover on Sesame Street]



grover near and
far.mp4

So whenever we see a prophecy in the Bible, there's always a near and far fulfillment of that prophecy. There's always an immediate fulfillment, and an ultimate fulfillment. And I think that's because the immediate fulfillment is like a sign to us that God will surely bring about the ultimate fulfillment, which is Jesus.¹⁹ You see, the point of the Bible isn't learning about good kings and bad kings and history and nations going to war with one another. The point of the Bible is Jesus, and all of the Bible points to Him.

So yeah, when Isaiah gave this prophecy to Ahaz, it was fulfilled at that time, but there was a greater fulfillment yet to come. When Jesus would be born, it wouldn't just be to a young maiden, but to a true virgin by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So not only was the promise first given in Genesis to Adam and Eve, and then clarified to Abraham, but now in the prophets, we have a very specific picture of the promise.

And we're actually given many of these very specific prophecies about Jesus through the Old Testament prophets.

Micah 5:2 tells us where Jesus would be born. It says:

Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times. (Micah 5:2)

And we know from the gospels that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, from the tribe of Judah.

Hosea 11:1 tells us that Jesus would also come out of Egypt. It says:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. (Hosea 11:1)

And we know that as a baby, Jesus was taken to Egypt for a period of time before returning to Israel.

And there are so many more prophecies about Jesus's life and death in the Old Testament. And for each of these prophecies, if you study them in their original context, you find that not only were they fulfilled immediately to prove their trustworthiness, but that they also find their greater fulfillment in Jesus.

So the challenge of Isaiah 7 is the same challenge that Ahaz received. Don't seek to save yourself. Your deliverance comes from the Lord. Trust in Jesus. All of these prophecies are a sign to us that we can truly believe everything that God has promised. It's not hundreds of darts from 150 feet away, and it's definitely

¹⁹ John 5:39

clickbait. It's specific, and clear, and it's all a sign to us and everyone that Jesus truly is the Savior of the world.²⁰

Prophecy is God's way of telling us, "Hey, it's gonna be okay. Trust in Jesus, and be saved."

²⁰ John 3:16-17, John 4:42, Titus 2:11, 1 John 2:2, 1 John 4:14