

## ISAIAH – LESSON EIGHT

### ISAIAH 7

#### The Syro-Ephraimitic<sup>1</sup> Uprising

##### Vv. 1-2 – The Syria-Israel Confederacy

As we learned in the introduction, Judah's fortunes started changing dramatically some five years before Uzziah's death. Tiglath Pileser III ascended to (seized) the throne in Assyria and immediately started fulfilling his ambitions for world domination. The kings of Syria and Israel began to feel the heat, put aside their past animosity, and united against a common enemy. They sought to involve Jotham, and later Ahaz (2 Kings 15:37), but the result of that effort is unknown. Another more forceful effort to create an alliance with Ahaz (Judah) was made by Rezin (Syria) and Pekah (Israel) (2 Kings 16:11; 2 Chron. 28). Israel slew many of the mighty of Judah and took many prisoners. Apparently the effort would have succeeded but for the intervention of Jehovah (Read all of 2 Chron. 28). The date of these events is difficult to know. All we know for certain is that "it came to pass in the days of Ahaz."<sup>2</sup>

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1. In these passage Israel is called Ephraim. This most likely comes from the fact that Jereboam, Israel's first king, was an Ephraimite.

2. Edward J. Young gives the following explanation of these events: "Apparently the book of Kings gives an account of the beginning and conclusion of the campaign, whereas Chronicles presents the intervening events. It may be noted that 2 Kings 16:5 and Isaiah 7:1 are very similar. Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel came up against Jerusalem for war, they assert, but failed to take it.

According to 2 Chron. 28:5 the Lord gave Ahaz into the hands of the king of Syria. There has been question as to whether this event belongs to the same campaign or to a different phase of the same campaign. It is also possible that, even though King Ahaz was temporarily taken, the enemy could not conquer the city itself. If this were the case it would have been parallel to Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem in which the King Jehoiakim was captured but not the city itself. To determine the precise relationship between the accounts in Kings and Chronicles is probably not possible with our meager knowledge of the war. It is clear that both speak of the same

V. 1 records the first attempt by Syria and Israel to force Judah into their alliance against Assyria. The house of David was told what was happening, and the heart of the King and the heart of his people trembled with fear (v. 2). Why is reference made here to the house of David rather than to Ahaz? It is clear that the initial foray by Syria and Israel were at the behest of Jehovah (2 Kings 15:37). Yet they failed. One thing that most certainly was not done at the behest of Jehovah was the removal of Ahaz and the anointing of a new king who was not from the house of David. Recall that God used nations to punish his people, but then punished those nations for their iniquity (Isa 10; Jer. 25:12). He would use them to fulfill his purpose; he would keep them from defeating his purpose. His purpose and promise was to preserve a remnant who would be his people and to save his people by bringing forth the Messiah who would reign upon the throne of David (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Luke 1:32-33). If the invaders were

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war, but whether they distinguish different phases of that war we cannot be sure.

At any rate Ahaz was smitten and a great number of captives were taken from his army and they were brought to Damascus. The text does not state that Ahaz himself was taken to Damascus, and it may refer only to the prisoners of war. Apparently Ahaz was given into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with a great blow. The spoil which had been taken from Judah was brought to Samaria.

At Samaria, however, there was a prophet name Oded, who went before the returning army, advising the return of the captives, and in this advice he was joined by certain chiefs of the Ephraimites. Consequently the prisoners were taken to Jericho, a city of Judah, and there were dismissed.

About this time Ahaz appealed to the king of Assyria for help. In the language of 2 Kings 16:7, "Then Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria saying Thy servant and thy son am I, come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel who have risen up against me."

It is at this point that we must consider the relationship of Isaiah 7 to the passages in Kings and Chronicles. With slight variations 2 Kings 16:5 and Isaiah 7:1 are practically identical. Isaiah 7:1 gives a summary of the entire situation. Ahaz had already been captured and released, and the huge spoil mentioned in 2 Chronicles 28:5ff had been taken. The meeting with Isaiah described in Isaiah 7:2ff. occurred, it would seem, after these events and before Ahaz made his appeal to Tiglath-pileser for help. Apparently what induced him to turn to Assyria was the report that Syria was resting upon Ephraim. The hostile intentions of the two enemy kings had not yet been abandoned, despite the fact that they had once released Ahaz."

permitted to destroy the house of David by eliminating the lineage of David, God's purpose would be destroyed. The next section reveals that God plans to stop the invasion.

### Vv. 3-9 – Confrontation Between Belief and Unbelief

God begins by speaking to Isaiah. Isaiah is instructed to take his son, Shear-jashub, and go to the conduit of the upper pool, in the highway of the fuller's field.<sup>3</sup> There they

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3. In all references occurs "the conduit of the upper pool, in the highway of the fuller's field"; this must have been a well-known landmark at Jerusalem in the time of the monarchy. Here stood Rabshakeh in his interview with Eliakim and others on the wall (2 Ki 18:17; Isa 36:2); clearly the highway was within easy earshot of the walls. Here Isaiah and Shear-jashub, his son, met Ahaz by command of Jehovah (Isa 7:3). An old view placed these events somewhere near the present Jaffa Gate, as here runs an aqueduct from the *Birket Mamilla* outside the walls of the *Birket Hamam el Batrah*, inside the walls; the former was considered the "Upper Pool" and is traditionally called the "Upper Pool" of Gihon. But these pools and this aqueduct are certainly of later date (see JERUSALEM). Another view puts this highway to the N. side of the city, where there are extensive remains of a "conduit" running in from the N. In favor of this is the fact that the N. was the usual side for attack and the probable position for Rabshakeh to gather his army; it also suits the conditions of Isa 7:3. Further, Josephus (*BJ*, V, iv, 2) in his description of the walls places a "Monument of the Fuller" at the N.E. corner, and the name "fuller" survived in connection with the N. wall to the 7th century, as the pilgrim Arculf mentions a gate. W. of the Damascus gate called *Porta Villae Fullonis*. The most probable view, however, is that this conduit was one connected with Gihon, the present "Virgin's Fountain" (see GIHON). This was well known as "the upper spring" (2 Ch 32:30), and the pool, which, we know, was at the source, would probably be called the "Upper Pool." In this neighborhood — or lower down the valley near *En-rogel*, which is supposed by some to mean "the spring of the fuller" — is the natural place to expect "fulling." Somewhere along the Kidron valley between the Virgin's Fountain and the junction with the Tyropeon was the probable scene of the interview with Rabshakeh; the conversation may quite probably have occurred across the valley, the Assyrian general standing on some part of the cliffs now covered by the village of Siloam. *The International Standard Encyclopedia*. It was customary for a fuller to work outside a town within reach of water in which clothes could be cleaned by treading them on a submerged stone. Hence the fuller was characteristically called a 'trampler' (Heb. *kaæb≈as*). At Jerusalem the locality outside the E wall where garments were spread to dry in the sun was called the '**fuller's field**' (2 Ki. 18:17; Is. 7:3; 36:2). Christ's garments at the transfiguration were described as brighter than it was possible for any fuller (Gk. *gnapheus*, 'cloth

were to meet Ahaz.<sup>4</sup> Isaiah was to begin his message, “Take heed and be quiet.” A prophet with God behind him dares to command the king. He then is to tell him not to be afraid of Rezin and the son of Ramaliah because the evil that they had purposed against Ahaz would not stand or come to pass. After all, they were only two tails of smoking firebrands.<sup>5</sup> They don’t have the power to accomplish what they are trying to do. Rezin is king of Syria and that is all he will ever reign over. Pekah, the son of Remaliah,<sup>6</sup> is king over Ephraim and that is all he will ever reign over. If Ahaz did not believe this message he would not be established. The implication is that he would be established if he believed. Isaiah offers Ahaz a radical alternative – reject all alliances and thoughts of alliances and trust fully in Jehovah. It was not an offer that could not be refused and Ahaz refused it. The presence of Shear-jashub, whose name means “a remnant shall return,” should have caused Ahaz to listen to the message because the name revealed the purpose of God to preserve a remnant of his people. Judah would not fall to the Syria-Israel conspiracy<sup>7</sup>; the son of Tabeel<sup>8</sup> would not become king. It is

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dresser’) to whiten them (Mk. 9:3). *IVP-NB Dictionary*.

4. This is a good example of the wisdom of reading scripture carefully. If they were to meet Ahaz there, then Ahaz (providence aside) had already decided on his own to go there. Why would he be going to a place where water was to be found? Could it be that he had already decided to resist the siege of Rezin and Pekah and was surveying the water that would be available during the siege?

5. Amos 4:11 defines “firebrand”: “I have overthrown *some* of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the LORD.” It is a piece of wood plucked from the fire – still smoking but its life is gone. All that was left was what Delitzsch described as “fag ends . . . which would not blaze any more but continue smoking. They would burn and light no more, though their smoke might make the eyes smart still.”

6. Pekah is treated with disdain and not even called by name. He had no right to the throne, having ascended by usurpation (2 Kings 15:25). Pekah appeared to be the leader in Gilead during Menahem’s reign but surrendered control there when Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria confirmed Menahem’s rule. Pekah then was given a high office in the army, and the coup followed shortly after Pekahiah succeeded Menahem. Pekah reigned in Samaria 752–732 B.C. and was in turn assassinated by Hoshea (2 Kings 15:30).

7. Neither would Judah fall to the Assyrians. Both might be smoke in their nostrils and eyes, but even if it did, God would reserve a remnant for himself.

8. Haley suggests that this son of Tabeel was a Syrian. Young, citing Alexander, gives evidence

Ephraim that shall fall within 65 years so that it shall not be a people.<sup>9</sup> Isaiah closes his message to Ahaz by giving him a choice. Believe and be established; disbelieve and not be established. This is another reason that Ahaz should have believed Isaiah's message. Not only was his own reign at risk. The reign of the house of David was at risk.

But how could that be? God had promised that the throne of David would be established forever (2 Sam. 7:11-13). And God kept that promise (Luke 1:32-33). But what happened in the interim? Listen to Jeremiah: "28 Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? is he a vessel wherein none delighteth? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they know not? 29 O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Jehovah. 30 Thus saith Jehovah, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting

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that he might have been a son of Uzziah or Jotham by a princess of Tabeel. A letter written before the fall of Damascus in 732 B.C. from the Assyrian archives at Calah (the letter is from the 1953 finds at Nimrud) mentions the land of Tabel. This Aramaic name points to a location north of Ammon and Gilead. Hence, son of Tabel refers to a prince of Judah whose material home was in the land of Tabel in northeastern Palestine or southeastern Syria. Young apparently rejects Alexander's theory because he writes of "this man, the son of Tabeel."

9. This prophecy reaches beyond the fall of Samaria that occurred just a few years later. It looked to the time that Ephraim "shall not be a people." It was fulfilled when Esar-Haddon, who ruled Assyria and brought foreigners into the land (2 Kings 17:24). When these foreigners intermarried with the Ephramites, Ephraim was no more. Thus the sixty-five years were from the days of Ahaz to sometime in the reign of Esar-Haddon. This prophecy may have been made during the reign of Manasseh. The Bible does not tell us when Manasseh was deported. However, Esar-Haddon's own inscription (681 – 669 B.C.) mention that Manasseh was one of the Hittite kings who was in vassalage to him. If the prophecy was made about 734 B.C., and Manasseh was carried away in 669 B.C., the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Manasseh's sole rule, and the 27<sup>th</sup> if the years of co-regency with Ahaz are counted, we have 65 years. Of course, it could be that Isaiah was merely rounding off a number and means no more than that around 670 B.C. Israel would cease to exist as a people. In this case the problem practically vanishes. The message was probably delivered at the beginning of the Syra-Ephraimitic war. At this time Tiglath-pileasar was probably in Philistia (2 Chron. 28:18-20). In 732 B.C. Tiglath-pileasar made his campaign against Damascus. In 732 he placed Hoshea on the throne, and Ahaz began his first year as sole king.

upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah” (Jer. 22:28-30). Jeremiah pronounced the end of the Davidic dynasty. Coniah (aka Jeconiah and Jehoiachin<sup>10</sup>) was not childless (1 Chron 3:17-18). He was childless in the sense that none of his sons ascended to David’s throne. It was Zedekiah who followed Jeconiah, having been placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel announced the dethronement of Zedekiah and echoed Isaiah that “for no more shall a man of his seed prosper sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling in Judah.” Ezekiel added that the throne of David “be no more” “until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezek. 21:25-27), an obvious reference to the Messiah. Jechonias (Greek spelling) was in the lineage of David through Solomon (Matthew 1:11-12) and Nathan (Luke 3:31), both of whom were sons of David.<sup>11</sup> When Christ ascended to the throne of David he “whose right it is” had come. Christ is the heir to the Davidic throne in heaven, not on earth. And “Of the increase of *his* government and peace *there shall be* no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa. 9:7).

### **Vv. 10-17 – The Sign of Immanuel**

Isaiah sought to be certain that Ahaz had no reasonable basis to fear the two conspiring kings, he told Ahaz to ask God for a sign. He placed no limits on the sign. It could be either in the depth below or in the height above. It could be natural or supernatural. As Haley says, “It could be an earthquake or lightning, be it something

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10. Jehoiachin evidently was a throne name taken at the time of accession to the kingship. Jehoiachin’s original name seems to have been Jeconiah or Coniah. He retained the title “king of Judah” even in exile, but he never returned to Judah to exercise rule there. Nevertheless, he was ultimately released from prison by Evil-merodach of Babylon and accorded some honor in the land of his captivity

11. The two most common explanations for the dual genealogies are: 1) Matthew gives the genealogy through Joseph and Luke through Mary, or 2) a Levirate marriage. Neither is explicit in scripture. It is an interesting study, but not relevant here.

in the sea or in the stellar spaces of the heavens, be it something sensational or something simple – God would give it.”

Feigning piety, Ahaz refused to ask a sign. He even alluded to scripture (Deut. 6:16), saying that he would not tempt God. How simple it is to misuse and misapply scripture. He could not have tempted God by asking for a sign when God had requested that he ask. To what end then did he refuse? Could it have been because it a sign would have provided him no useful information because his mind was already made up? Whatever the cause, he rejected Jehovah and chose to walk in his own path.

Ahaz’s unbelief brought a quick response from Isaiah. Notice that the response looks beyond Ahaz to the house of David. While Ahaz is included, it flows through Ahaz to the house of David and through the house of David to the entire nation of Judah. Ahaz was king. His decision affected not only himself, but also the destiny of those who would follow after him and all of those over whom they would rule.

The language that Isaiah uses is significant. 1) In v. 11 he told Ahaz to ask a sign of “Jehovah *thy* God.” In v. 13 he refers to Jehovah as “*my* God.” Clearly at this point Ahaz’s unbelief had had at least one result – the relationship between him and God had been severed. The king had rejected God and God had rejected Ahaz. 2) In vv. 13 and 14, the pronoun “ye” or “you” is plural. Isaiah is not addressing only Ahaz, but is addressing descendants and subjects as well. It is to the entire group that the sign is addressed, not just to Ahaz. Ahaz was out of the picture. The sign that is given is given to the house of David and to Judah.

The sign is one of the great Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. It foresees the virgin birth of Jesus. Several questions arise in connection with various translations of the promise.

1) Some read “the virgin”; some read “a virgin.” The Hebrew justifies the “the.” Its presence makes the reference to a definite or particular virgin.

2) Most translations render the Hebrew word *almah* as “virgin; some render *'almâh* “young woman.” The question raised is not just what does it mean in scripture, but

what does it mean in Isa. 7:14. The word *'almâh* also occurs in Gen. 24:43, Ex. 2:8, Psa. 68:25, Song of Sol. 1:3, 6:8, and Prov. 30:19. In each instance it either may or must be translated "virgin." Even if one takes the position that it only "may be" translated "virgin," and it may also be translated "young woman," it then is the case that its meaning must be determined by the context. What does the context of Isa. 7:14 demand? Some suggest that the female in question was a virgin at the time of the prophecy, but then became married and conceived in the natural manner. This is the position of some who espouse that some unnamed never-heard-from-again female was in Isaiah's prophecy. Some try to avoid this by saying that the woman was Isaiah's unnamed wife in 8:2. However, the child that she conceived and delivered was named Maher-shal-al-hash-baz. He probably wished it had been Immanuel. Additionally, since Isaiah was already married and already had a child his wife was not a virgin. The speculators have no problem with that. They simply assert that Isaiah married a second wife or was involved in a Levirate marriage. Aside from those problems, there is the problem of a prophet giving a sign that involved his own family. In this case all he would have to do would be to impregnate his wife, hope it was a boy, and name it Immanuel. It is easy to be a prophet when you can control your own fulfillment. Finally, what kind of sign would it be when a young woman who was a virgin got pregnant? Either she would be married or she would not be. If she were married, no problem. If she were unmarried and the conception was by natural copulation, there would be the problem of illegitimacy. Maybe that is why, having rejected the virgin birth because it is supernatural, and according to them there is no such thing as supernatural, some still contend that Mary was either raped by or had an affair with a Roman soldier and made up the story to hide her adultery.<sup>12</sup> It was a sign only if the young woman was a virgin when she conceived. There is only one documented occurrence of that – Mary and the Christ child. The word "blasphemy" comes to mind when, concerning the Savior's birth, just the thought of illegitimacy fills unholy minds and passes over unclean lips!

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12. That is what it would have been considered because she was betrothed.



Those who contend for the translation, “young woman,” argue that if Isaiah had had a virgin in mind he would have used the Hebrew word *bethulâh*, which, they say, is the word that always means virgin. Once again their Hebrew is mistaken. Read carefully the *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*:

(*bětûlâ*). **Virgin, maid, maiden**; probably from an unused verb *bātal* “to separate.” Although Hebrew lexicons and modern translations generally translate *bětûlâ* as “virgin,” G. J. Wenham (“Betulah ‘A Girl of Marriageable Age,’ ” VT 22:326–48) and Tsevat (TDOT II, p. 338–43) contest this as the general meaning but prefer “a young (marriageable) maiden.” But whereas Wenham does not concede the meaning “virgin” in any text, Tsevat allows this meaning in three out of its fifty-one occurrences (Lev 21:13f; Deut 22:19; Ezk 44:22). In any case, a strong case can be presented that *bětûlâ* is not a technical term for *irgo inta’ ta* in the ot, a conclusion that has important bearing on the meaning of *almâ* in Isa 7:14.<sup>13</sup>

Works of the nature of the *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* are interested in their scholarship, not in their theological positions. Case closed. Isaiah is saying that one who was a good woman who had never had intercourse with a man would conceive and bear a son.

But what about Ahaz? How was something that happened some 700 years later a sign to Ahaz? First, the prophecy contained a specific time. That time was determined by the age of the child when he is able to eat “real food,” in his case curds and honey, and he knew how to refuse the evil and choose the good. In that day the time was generally considered to be around three years. Some three years later Rezin and Pekah were dead. The part of the prophecy that related wholly to Ahaz’s day came to pass. From that Ahaz could and should have concluded that God had not and would not forever turn away from his people – Shear-Jashub – a remnant will return. Ahaz had no part in the remainder of the prophecy. He had sealed the fate of the House of David and there was no return.

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13. Harris, R. L., Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1999). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed.) (137). Chicago: Moody Press.

Since there is only one woman in history to whom Isaiah's language applies, it is clear that the son of promise is the one of whom Isaiah wrote: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (9:6).

Matthew resolved the issue for believers: "20 But when he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. 21 And she shall bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins. 22 Now all this is come to pass, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, 23 Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, And they shall call his name Immanuel; which is, being interpreted, God with us" (Matt. 1:20-23).

One last issue is raised by these verses. Why was the Christ child not named Immanuel? 9:6, cited above, helps us begin to understand. In that passage Isaiah gave a list of names by which Jesus would be called. If Isaiah meant that Christ would literally be called by all of these names, that would be worse than Mary's calling to "little Immanuel" to come in for dinner. These names were obviously given to define the nature and character of Jesus. By nature Jesus was Immanuel, "God with us." His name was Jesus. That practice was first demonstrated first in Genesis. Adam declared upon Eve's creation that she would be called "woman" because she was taken out of man. He later called her name Eve. The first designation was her nature; the second was her name. When Gabriel appeared to Mary he instructed her to name her child Jesus. He then proceeded to declare his nature – he would be great and will be called the Son of the Highest.

### **Vv. 18-25 – The Devastation from Assyria**

God permitted Ahaz to avoid an invasion by Rezin and Pekah, but vv. 18-25 describe the invasion of Judah and the laying waste of the land. "In that day" is the time of the

Assyrian invasion. In that day Jehovah will call for the fly (Egypt<sup>14</sup>) and the bee (Assyria<sup>15</sup>). The Egyptian army was numerous like a swarm of flies, but it was not well disciplined. The Assyrian army was disciplined and purposeful. Egypt's rivers are the Nile and its tributaries and canals. Once Jehovah calls for them they will come (v. 19). They will cover the land from the desolate valleys to the clefts of the rocks, the thorn hedges and all pastures. The invasion will be so devastating that Judah is compared to a man who has been stripped by the king of Assyria and then shaved from head to foot, including the beard. It is hard to imagine a greater humiliation than this. Judah will be naked and its wealth stolen (v. 20<sup>16</sup>). They will be so poor that a man will have one cow and two sheep and all the people will have to eat is butter and honey (nothing is said about a biscuit, vv. 21-22). Vineyards will become fields of thorns where hunters will come because the land is fit only for wild animals. People will avoid the pleasant walks that they in pastures and well-kept fields that they once enjoyed, because they have been invaded by briars and thorns. They will be good for nothing but a place for ox and sheep to roam. They will be bereft of people (vv. 23-25).

All of this devastation will be the result of an Assyrian invasion that Ahaz could have avoided if he had trusted in God instead of man.

How important it is that we recognize that "God is with us." Do we recognize how great and wonderful that blessing is? If not, perhaps the failure arises from the fact that we do not recognize the true nature of Jehovah. The God who created the universe and thus exists outside of it (his "transcendence" is yet capable even as an all-powerful supreme Being to enter into relationship with man whom he created (his "immanence"). With the coming of Christ, "Immanuel" ("God with us") was realized. He is "Christ in you; the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). Paul summarized it well: 33 "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; 34 who is he that condemneth? It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather, that was raised from the dead,

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14. Egypt was known as a land filled with flies, including the tsetse.

15. Ancient records speak of Assyria as a land of beekeepers. The bees are symbols of cruelty and danger (Deut. 1:44).

16. Notice in v. 20 that Egypt has disappeared from the picture.

who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Even as it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:33-39).