

# LESSON FOUR

**TITLE** Advent – Love

**SCRIPTURE** Isaiah 7:10-14

## MEMORY VERSE

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

## MAIN IDEA OF TEXT

God's love is most clearly seen in the child born of a virgin – Immanuel (“God with us”).

***BEGIN this time in prayer, confessing any sins you know of, thanking the Lord for the gift of his Word, and asking the Holy Spirit to guide your study.***

# 1 GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

## TEACHER TIP

*Start your lesson by telling a story that relates to the main idea of the lesson to grab the attention of your participants. In this section, we have provided you with two options, but feel free to develop your own.*

## OPTION 1: "WHAT CHILD IS THIS?"

Advent allows us to reflect on the coming of Christ into the world and the hope, peace, joy and love that entered the world at his birth. Perhaps the best Christmas hymn to capture the wonder of God's promise realized at the coming of Christ is "What Child is This?" His royal birth occurred in a lowly manger in Bethlehem and his parents were about as far away as you could get from a king or queen. But there was something special about this child and what his birth meant, not just for Israel, but for the whole world.

Let's watch this classic hymn performed by Italian tenor Andrea Bocelli and Mary J. Blige and reflect on God's love seen in the coming of the Savior into the world.

*What child is this,  
Who laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,  
While shepherds watch are keeping.*

*So bring him incense, gold, and myrrh,  
Come, peasant, king, to own him.  
The King of kings salvation brings,  
Let loving hearts enthrone him.*

*This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
The babe, the son of Mary.*

*Raise, raise a song on high,  
The virgin sings her lullaby  
Joy, joy for Christ is born,  
The babe, the Son of Mary.*

*What child is this?  
What child is this?*

*This, this is Christ the King,  
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,  
The babe, the son of Mary.*

*(Play song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EbvwwwTqeRo> - fade clip out at 4:28)*

## POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. *What does the song tell us about God and his ways, that the King*

- of kings was born in such a humble fashion?*
- 2. Share about a time when you received what you believed to be a sign from God. How did you confirm that sign?*
  - 3. In what ways have you seen God's love operating in your life and in the lives of those around you recently?*

**Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:** The birth of Christ was promised long before God spoke to Joseph and Mary. Many centuries ago, Judah's king, Ahaz, was in a bind. The kings of Israel and Syria were threatening him and the people of Judah and he was afraid. That's when God intervened through his prophet Isaiah to give king Ahaz a message of love. A child would be born but this would be no ordinary child and his conception would be miraculous. He would be born of a virgin, and his birth would provide hope for the king and for Judah. God had a plan and it would hinge on this special child born in a miraculous way.

## **OPTION 2: MARY REMEMBERS JESUS' BIRTH (FROM THE CHOSEN)**

Luke's gospel gives us a closer glimpse into Mary's experience of learning that she would give birth to the Savior of the world. The angel Gabriel visited her to give her the news and her response revealed her faithfulness. "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38). Her song in Luke 1:46-56 radiates with love for God and all his marvelous works and there is a sense in which she understands that through her and through the birth of her son God's promise to bless all nations will be fulfilled (vv. 54-55).

Let's watch a dramatic retelling of Jesus' birth by Mary from the acclaimed show *The Chosen*. As you watch try and empathize with Mary. What must it have been like for her to know that the child she was carrying was the Son of God? What must it have been like for her to see her son grow into a man who would become the leader of a movement that forever changed the world and gave humanity hope for salvation?

*(Play clip: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhJEd2Cit\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qhJEd2Cit_Y))*

### **POTENTIAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- 1. Mary responded to Gabriel's message that she would be the mother of the Son of God by saying, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38). Where in your life (home, marriage, work, community) would taking a servant-hearted approach like Mary's be beneficial to you?*
- 2. What marvelous works has God done for you recently that you want to praise God like Mary did in her song (Luke 1:46-56)?*
- 3. Share about a time when God did something you thought impossible. What did God do and what did it teach you about him?*

**Transition Statement from Attention Grabber to Text:** Mary discovering that she would give birth to the Savior of the world had already been foretold. Through Isaiah, God promised that a virgin would conceive and give birth to a child. It would have been impossible for Isaiah and those of his day to fully understand what this virgin birth meant, but with hindsight we can see God's plan in motion many centuries before Christ came into the world.

This week we are going to look at the virgin birth of Jesus and how God promised it long before the first Christmas through the prophet Isaiah. God's promises increase our faith to believe that God will do what he promises, even the seemingly impossible.

# 2

# SET THE STAGE

## TEACHER TIP

*In this section, you will find the historical, cultural, and literary context you need to properly interpret and apply the text.*

## OUTLINE

1. God speaks, King Ahaz's response (vv. 10-12)
  - a. God tells Ahaz to ask for a sign (vv. 10-11).
  - b. Ahaz refuses to ask (v. 12).
2. God gives a sign to the king (vv. 13-14)
  - a. God rebukes Ahaz for not asking (v. 13).
  - b. Through Isaiah God gives Ahaz a sign: a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, Immanuel (v. 14).
3. God's actions on behalf of his people, despite Ahaz's lack of faith (vv. 15-17)
  - a. Before the promised child comes of age Ahaz's enemies will be defeated (v. 15-16).
  - b. Because of Ahaz's lack of faith judgment will come upon Judah as well as Syria and Israel through Assyria (v. 17).

## CONTEXT

King Ahaz finds himself in dire straits and is filled with fear, but God speaks to him through his prophet Isaiah with a word of love and a sign of hope for the king. This is early in Isaiah's prophetic ministry. In chapter 6, God commissioned Isaiah with a vision of the throne room and the glory of the Lord.

## FALLEN CONDITION & GOSPEL RESPONSE

### FALLEN CONDITION FOCUS

Life is unpredictable and we cannot control much of what happens to us. But rather than trust God to lovingly bring about good, we try to control our lives for our own purposes, security, and comfort

### GOSPEL RESPONSE

Whether we find ourselves in the highest heights or the deepest depths in life, God acts in love to bring us closer to him.

# 3

# LOOK AT THE BOOK

## TEACHER TIP

*In this section, you will find exercises you can use to lead your class through the process of Observation, Interpretation, and Application. As the teacher, work through all the exercises below to ensure you gain a good understanding of the text.*

Nearly 800 years before Jesus' birth King Ahaz reigned in Judah. Israel as a nation was split between two kingdoms, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Ahaz didn't have a lot of experience as king and the kings of Syria (Rezin) and Israel (Pekah) took advantage of this fact. They needed Judah to join them in fighting against the mighty Assyrian Empire that was threatening them. Instead of simply asking for help they decided to wage war on Judah and go to Jerusalem and demand that Ahaz join them. If Ahaz refused, then he would be taken off the throne. When Ahaz heard of this plan he was overcome with fear.

Ahaz considered his available options but God stepped in with a word for the king. In time God sent the prophet Isaiah to speak to the king. God's message to the king is what we're going to focus on this week because this is a message of love. God's love for his people cannot be matched nor measured. He has a plan for his people and he will see it through to completion. Life may not work out the way we planned or want it to, but we can have confidence that God's plan is for our good and for his glory.

Regardless of what we face in life there is no reason to fear because our security and our future rests in the loving hands of God. Because Christ came, lived, died, and rose again, we can have assurance that all things truly work together for good (Romans 8:28) and that God's spirit gives us a new heart to live the life we were always meant to live. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7).

10 Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, 11 "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights."

12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test."

13 Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

## OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

### OBSERVATION EXERCISE 1: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

Read Isaiah 7:1-17 and 2 Kings 16:5-9 to understand the full context of Ahaz's predicament and what God did to give the king assurance and hope. Based on your reading of these passages what was the king up against? What was his plan to solve the problem he had?

## **OBSERVATION EXERCISE 2: EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS**

Ahaz refused to ask God for a sign, despite God's asking him to ask for one. Why does Ahaz refuse to ask? How does God respond to the king's lack of faith?

## **OBSERVATION EXERCISE 3: SEEING THE SIGNS**

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for asking him for a sign (Matthew 16:1-4) because it revealed a lack of faith. And yet, God told Ahaz to ask for a sign and he gave him one. How would you summarize the sign given to Ahaz in your own words?

## **INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

### **INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 1: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT**

Ahaz showed a lack of faith, despite God's assurance to him. Read Exodus 3:1-4:17. In what ways are Ahaz and Moses' lack of faith and trust in God similar? What does God's response to each of these characters say about his character?

### **INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 2: EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS**

Read Hebrews 3:7-19. What does this passage reveal to you about God's people while they were in the wilderness? What lesson do they and Ahaz teach you about the importance of listening when God speaks?

### **INTERPRETATION EXERCISE 3: SEEING THE SIGNS**

Read Matthew 16:1-4 and reflect on how the sign of Jonah points to the Cross and the empty tomb. What makes Jesus' death and resurrection the most important sign that we have to rely on in order to trust and have faith in God?

## **TEACHER TIP**

*In this section, you will find questions to choose from that will help your group consider how God is calling them to respond to the text. Help your group set measurable action steps.*

## **APPLICATION: HOW DO I RESPOND?**

**QUESTION 1:** In what ways is God currently speaking to you? How is he calling you to take a step of faith and trust him?

**QUESTION 2:** In what ways might you be holding on to control over your life and not trusting God? What would it take for you to relinquish that desire for control and turn to God instead?

**QUESTION 3:** Think of someone you know who trusts God, even in difficult circumstances. What are they like and how might you follow their example in your own life?

**QUESTION 4:** Who in your life needs to hear a word about God's love for them? How could you be God's voice to deliver that message to someone?

**QUESTION 5:** Immanuel means "God with us." How would you live differently if you believed that God is truly with you throughout your day-to-day life? How would that affect the way you see your circumstances, problems, etc.?

# 4

# CHALLENGE

## TEACHER TIP

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*End your time of study with one final challenge and prayer. Your final challenge should pull together everything you covered in this lesson and call your participants to action.*

The God of the universe—with all his power and goodness—is for us. Not only is he for us, but he is with us. He weaves his love into our lives and speaks to us through his Word, through others, and through our circumstances.

God gave Ahaz a sign and it was a sign of love. A virgin conceiving a child seems impossible except for the fact that God can—and does—the impossible. All God asked of Ahaz was that Ahaz trust him, and that's what he asks of us today. Centuries later God gave a similar ask to Joseph, Mary's fiancé. He was afraid and thought it best to divorce Mary quietly as to not shame her. But God spoke to Joseph through an angel with the promise that the child Mary was carrying was truly special and would save God's people from their sins (Matthew 1:18-25).

Are there seemingly impossible places in your life where you're waiting on God to act or wondering if he could actually bring about good? It might be a seemingly insurmountable problem with your finances, or a relationship that's been strained or severed for years, or a sin that you've failed to overcome time after time. Whatever it is God has a word for you this Advent season. God is with you and for you. If God has called you out of death and into life, then you can rest assured that there is nothing you are facing that is beyond God's knowledge or control. Every moment of your life is under the direction of him, and he works in love to bring you closer to his Father's heart, which is one filled with love for you, his child.

This Christmas let us look to the sign God has given us in the birth of Jesus as a sign of his love for us. And as God has given us a sign of his love, let us live our lives to give signs of his love to others in both word and deed.

## LET'S PRAY

# COMMENTARY

## ISAIAH 7:10-12

It is remarkable that God offered a sign to Ahaz and the king refused to ask for one. John A. Martin tells us in his commentary in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* that his response came, not from his piety, but from his lack of faith.

As a means of strengthening his faith Ahaz was told to ask the Lord ... for a sign, an attesting miracle that would confirm God's word. The king could choose any miraculous work he wished, from the deepest depths to the highest heights. This was a figure of speech, a merism, that mentioned two extremes with the intention of including all the areas in between them. With a miracle performed simply for the asking, Ahaz would have visible confirmation that Isaiah's words (vv. 7-9) were truly from the Lord. Ahaz could count on the fact that the northern alliance would not defeat Judah.

But Ahaz refused to request a sign, saying he would not ... test God (cf. Deut. 6:16). This answer sounded pious but probably the way he said it showed he was not believing Isaiah. Perhaps he did not want to believe Isaiah, who had been prophesying about the eventual destruction of Judah if her people did not return to the Lord.

## ISAIAH 7:13

Ahaz was a king in Judah and followed in the lineage of his ancestor, King David. Like David, he should have been ready and willing to hear a word from the Lord, especially one spoken through one of God's prophets. Geoffrey W. Grogan helps us understand God's frustration with the king's attitude toward his word spoken through the prophet Isaiah in his commentary in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

Ahaz is still addressed as "house of David" (cf. v. 2), with the implication of special promises and of a continuing dynasty; but here the prophet speaks of "my God" instead of "your God" (cf. v. 11). Ahaz may be the current occupant of the divinely secured throne of David; but it is incumbent on him to hear the divine word through the prophet, who, unlike him, is in a sensitive and responsive relationship with God. It is that relationship that makes the king's rejection of the prophetic word a trial of God's patience and not simply the prophet's. God is weary of his unbelief.

## ISAIAH 7:14-16

The precise nature of the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14-17 is unclear. In what manner and at what time would God fulfill his promise to Ahaz? Gary V. Smith tackles this question and offers a two-fold approach as an answer in his commentary in *The New American Commentary*.

The interpretation of the Immanuel prophecy in 7:14 has produced an enormous number of books and articles that have proposed quite different interpretations of the sign Isaiah gave to Ahaz. These theories differ in (a) the identification of the woman; (b) the identification of Immanuel; (c) the time when the sign would be fulfilled; (d) the interpretation of curds and honey; (e) the understanding

of the time implied for the child to reject the wrong and choose the good; (f) the evaluation of 7:14-17 as positive, negative, or of dual significance; and (g) the use or non-use of 9:1-7 and 11:1-10 as commentaries that explain and expand on the ideas in 7:14-17. A brief review of some of the main proposals will highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

A. Unknown woman or women who will have sons. W. McKane believes that 7:14-17 contain both promises of salvation (14, 16) as well as threats of judgment (15, 17). The “young woman” of 7:14 refers to any woman or all the women who were pregnant at that time. “Emmanuel” will be the name that these women will give to their children because they believe God will deliver Judah from its attackers. Gray has a similar interpretation of 7:14 but does not consider 7:17 as positive as McKane does, but both interpret the “curds and honey” as positive indications of blessing.

Few hold this view because there is no indication that many godly women called their sons “Emmanuel” during the devastating events surrounding the Syro-Ephramite War and later Assyrian vassalage. The singular noun “young woman” (7:14) and “the lad” (7:15) suggest that the speaker had one woman and one child in mind, though it does not have to be someone standing in the room at the time. It is also unlikely that the splitting of the nations (Judah and Israel), the curds and honey, and the coming of Assyria in 7:16-17 are positive trends. This approach tends to downplay the terrible negative results of Ahaz’s refusal to trust God and ignores the fact that “curds and honey” are negative signs in 7:22.

B. A wife of the prophet will bear Maher-shalal-hash-baz. This hypothesis has many more followers because it connects the maiden and child who are signs in 7:14 with the prophetess and child in 8:1-4, thus giving the prophecy almost immediate relevance to Ahaz and the people of Judah. The early Jewish commentators Rashi and Ibn Ezra believed this was the best interpretation and many contemporary scholars also connect these two births because of common phraseology like “before the boy knows” in 7:16 and 8:4, and the birth of a son in 7:14 and 8:3-4. Thus the Immanuel sign contains the positive side of God’s message because it predicts the defeat of Judah’s enemies, while the Maher-shalal-hash-baz sign depicts the negative side, for it describes God’s plan to defeat Judah’s two enemies and then Judah itself. This approach often finds both a negative and a positive side to the signs God gave (7:14-17; 8:1-4) and avoids any direct connection between these promises and the son spoken of in 9:1-7.

Nevertheless, other scholars find this view difficult to accept. (a) Isaiah directly connects himself to the other two sons who are signs (7:3; 8:3). Why would he not mention that this would be his own son? (b) How could Isaiah consider his own wife a “maiden, virgin” since she was already married and had one child (it is pure imagination to suggest his first wife died and that this was a new wife)? (c) The “house of David” is being addressed in 7:13-14 so the sign should relate to it, not to Isaiah. (d) The time factors in 7:16 state that the child “knows to choose good and reject evil” (from 12-20 years) but in 8:4 that child “knows how to say ‘my father’ ” (about 2 years), making it highly unlikely that these two boys are the same person. (e) The later description of Judah as “your land, O Immanuel” fits a royal figure rather than the prophet’s son.

C. A wife of Ahaz bears Hezekiah. This popular solution is based on the fact that Isaiah is talking about the future of the royal Davidic dynasty in this oracle (7:2, 6, 13, 17). Isaiah’s emphasis on the need to “believe, make firm” (aman) in 7:9 is reminiscent of the Davidic dynastic promises in 2 Sam 7:16 about “establishing, making firm” (aman) the dynasty of those Davidic kings that are faithful to God. In addition, the dynastic promise to David that “the Lord is with you” (2 Sam 7:3) fits the promise of Immanuel “God is with us” (7:14). The “maiden, virgin” would then be a definite young

woman in the king's harem, probably Abijah, the mother of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:2). The designation of the righteous King Hezekiah as "Immanuel" fits the statement that "God was with him" in 2 Kgs 18:3. Thus the sign (7:14) and its following implications (7:15-17) include both a threat of the end of Ahaz's rule as well as a promise of hope in the future because of the new son Hezekiah.

The main criticism of this solution is that Hezekiah was already born when Isaiah spoke to Ahaz in chap. 7; in fact, most conclude that he was already about nine years old (2 Kgs 16:2; 18:2). It must be admitted that the chronology is not well understood in this period because of some conflicting information; nevertheless, this is an almost insurmountable problem for this interpretation. Consequently, J. H. Walton concludes that this young woman was another woman in the harem and that Immanuel should not be identified with Hezekiah. Yet, it would also seem highly unlikely that the wicked idolatrous King Ahaz would allow one of his wives to name their child "God is with us" at the same time he was refusing to trust God (7:9). This would be highly ironic.

D. The birth of Jesus. The fourth theory is best known from the New Testament identification of Jesus as the one who was born of the virgin Mary in Matthew 1:18-24. This interpretation views the "young girl" as a virgin and connects "Immanuel" with the messianic ideal described in more detail in 9:1-7 and 11:1-9. Since Ahaz rejects God's offer of a sign, E. E. Hindson claims that the sign was not primarily directed to Ahaz, yet the time factors in 7:15-17 did apply as a sign to him and the rest of the house of David.

The main critique of this Messianic approach is that it appears to read back into the Isaiah passage a meaning that is difficult to develop from the words in 7:14. It almost seems that this interpretive conclusion is controlled by theological beliefs derived from the New Testament rather than exegetical evidence in Isaiah 7. It proposes an interpretation that will be fulfilled 700 years after the time of Ahaz, thus many feel that it has little practical relevance to Ahaz's situation.

E. Two fulfillments: both a local birth and the future birth of the Messiah. These interpreters believe there is a need for the prophecy to have meaning for Ahaz, but they cannot deny the authoritative interpretation of the New Testament. Thus, they conclude that the first fulfillment was either Isaiah's son or Ahaz's son, and that Christ is a later complete fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. J. T. Willis categorizes these two-fold fulfillment theories according to how they explain the second fulfillment by using the hermeneutical technique of (a) allegory; (b) accommodation; (c) analogy; (d) a primary and secondary meaning; (e) typology; (f) midrash; (g) peshet; or (h) *sensus plenior*.

This two-fold approach provides an easy way out of a difficult problem because it enables the reader to maintain contemporary relevance for Ahaz as well as the New Testament perspective on the fulfillment of these verses. Yet most of these double fulfillment approaches (except the analogy view) have the fundamental hermeneutical weakness that they suggest two different meanings for 7:14. It seems fundamentally illegitimate to claim that God inspired Isaiah to say things that meant one thing (the meaning he was aware of), and then suggest that these words also mean something different from what Isaiah understood them to mean (the New Testament meaning). It seems that if a two-fold meaning is proposed, then that two-fold understanding of a verse must be supported from the exegesis of that verse in Isaiah. Otherwise one would be attributing a meaning to a verse (the second meaning) that was not revealed to the prophet and there would be no legitimate authoritative basis for the second meaning. It would be more legitimate to hypothesize that the New Testament authors under divine authority found a "new significance" to the words in an older text through progressive revelation, but in that case the older text would not be prophesying the "new significance" (the birth of Jesus) that the New Testament supplies through a progressive revelation. The New Testament

would be adding a “new significance” in the light of later information and new spiritual insights, so that meaning should not be attributed to the Old Testament passage.

In the process of examining the meaning to the words and phrases in the exegesis of 7:10–17 it will become clear which of these approaches makes the most sense. In that context two key hermeneutical issues will be addressed: (a) the issue of interpreting passages based solely on their immediate historical and literary context (7:1–25); and (b) the importance of interpreting this text within its broader literary context (including later revelation after this event in chap. 9), which the prophet knew at the time he put chaps. 6–12 into a written form. Although God may introduce some ideas without a full explanation (7:14), more evidence from later progressive revelations (9:1–7) may clarify what was meant in the earlier passage. In such cases one must honestly admit a limited level of understanding in the first revelation, with greater understanding once the second expanded and clarified revelation was received.

### **ISAIAH 7:15–17**

In his commentary in The ESV Study Bible John C. Ortland Jr. helps the reader understand the devastating consequences for Judah because of Ahaz’s lack of faith and how will work to keep the Davidic line of kings going beyond the disaster that is coming on Judah and its people.

These verses indicate that the Syro-Ephraimite threat will soon pass; it will not last longer than the time it takes for the boy (possibly in the sense of “any boy”) to reach an age when he can refuse the evil and choose the good. In fact, Syria did fall to Assyria in 732 b.c. and Israel fell in 722. But the agent of deliverance—the king of Assyria—was a worse disaster for Judah. Ahaz forsook “the King, the Lord of hosts” (6:5) for a dreaded earthly king. He foolishly hired the military support of Assyria (2 Kings 16:5–9), for in his spiritual blindness he could not discern between his true ally and his true enemy. Ahaz’s unbelief doomed the Davidic dynasty to loss of sovereignty under foreign domination. Now God must restore the throne of David and save the world.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

John Calvin and William Pringle, *Isaiah*, Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah.

D.A. Carson, *Isaiah*, NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible.

Geoffrey W. Grogan, *Isaiah*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Proverbs-Isaiah.

Matthew Henry, *Isaiah*, Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible.

John A. Martin, *Isaiah*, The Bible Knowledge Commentary.

John C. Ortland Jr., *Isaiah*, The ESV Study Bible.

Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, The New American Commentary.

R.C. Sproul, *Isaiah*, The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version.