

ISA 7:1 Now it came about in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not conquer it. [2] When it was reported to the house of David, saying, "The Arameans have camped in Ephraim," his heart and the hearts of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake with the wind.

ISA 7:3 Then the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway to the fuller's field, [4] and say to him, 'Take care, and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. [5] 'Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, [6] "Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," [7] thus says the Lord GOD, "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. [8] "For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin (now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so that it is no longer a people), [9] and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.'""

## **Trees Shaking in the Wind** *Isaiah 7*

Isaiah 7 contains the great prophesy of a virgin bearing a child which Matthew tells us is Jesus Christ. In this way, chapter 7 gives birth to the child that began as a tiny embryo (seed) at the end of chapter 6. Apparently, it doesn't take long for God's conceptus to be birthed!

To understand **Isaiah 7**, you must understand the historical setting of the prophesy. As you will soon see, the whole story is set up in such a way that the vision of chapter 6 begins to be fulfilled almost immediately. Follow along closely, because if you aren't familiar with the people of the story, you might easily get lost. The major player is **Ahaz king of Judah**. Ahaz makes a covenant with Assyria because **Aram and Israel** are attacking him from the north. This covenant ends up being the beginning of the end for the nation of Jews.

As you might recall, Assyria becomes the nation that in just a few short years takes over the northern kingdom of Israel. The idea of covenant is important to understand for in making a covenant with the blasphemous Assyrians, Ahaz was recognizing the Assyrian gods and admitting that they had lordship over his life instead of Yahweh.<sup>1</sup> Ahaz effectively rips up the biblical covenant and signs a new one. In this way, the countdown to destruction for Judah is set in motion and in a couple hundred more years, she will fall to the Babylonians the same way that Israel fell to the Assyrians. Why? Because while Ahaz may wish the covenant with the Lord didn't exist, God remembers that it does. God will not forget and God will therefore bring the covenant curses even upon Judah. All of this is in God's plan, however, and so what we will see going on in the early parts of Isaiah 7 is that Ahaz is actually hardened by Isaiah's gracious proposal for him to let God control the situation at hand. God sends Isaiah to Ahaz in order to make him even more set against God than he was before the confrontation.

**Isaiah 1:1** tells us that Isaiah prophesied during the reign of four kings. The third of these kings was **Ahaz**. Ahaz is the recipient of the prophesy of Isaiah in this chapter. He was the king of Judah, the southern kingdom of the Jews, the land wherein Jerusalem and the temple were contained. He reigned from 732-715 BC a

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<sup>1</sup> See Oswalt, *Isaiah*, p. 198.

total of 16 years. He was twenty years old when he became king. Though his son was the great Hezekiah, Ahaz was a wicked king “who walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree” (2 Kings 16:3-5). Imagine having to enter the throne room of a king like this and tell him the word of God. You think you might be slightly nervous? Immediately in 7:1 you now begin to see the importance of the vision that takes place in chapter 6. Isaiah is going to need all of the strength that God will give him.

This vision takes place some 10-15 years before the northern kingdom of Israel is brutally attacked and conquered by **Assyria** (what is today northern Iraq and Turkey). At this time the king of Israel was named **Pekah**. Pekah was terrified of the growing threat from the east. Pekah, like all of the northern kings was a very wicked man. But he was not a stupid man. Though he refused to trust in God for his protection, he nevertheless tried to save his own skin. And so he made an alliance with **Rezin the king of Aram**. Aram is the land immediately to the north and east of Israel (today's modern Syria). When you hear or read about Syria in the Bible, this is the same thing as Aram. Both Israel and Aram stood as buffers between Ahaz and the Assyrians (not to be confused with the Syrians). Though it is not mentioned in Isaiah, we read that at some point in time near to this narrative, Ahaz actually made an alliance himself with the Assyrians (2 Kgs 16:7-9) in an attempt to save himself from Pekah and Rezin. This is the covenant we already talked about.

Isaiah chapter 7 takes place with this as the background. Pekah and Rezin are attacking Ahaz in hopes that by conquering it they might become a formidable foe (a triple alliance) to keep the Assyrians at bay. It turns out that these two kingdoms are not able to overtake Ahaz. Scripture says, they “waged war against it, they could not conquer it” (7:1). Here now is something very ironic. Ahaz makes an alliance with an evil empire that he did not need to make. God wasn't going to let Israel and Aram conquer Judah in the first place. You have to remember, at this point in time, Judah was still able to ward off the hand of God's wrath through repentance (ala Hezekiah and Josiah). It was *Israel* who was doomed in Isaiah's day, not Judah. Thus, it still remained possible from a human perspective to the kings of Judah that if they would just trust God that nothing would overtake them. That was a major part of the covenant God made with Moses and Joshua. This verse indirectly demonstrates how in the face of such sin as Ahaz' sin, it was the Babylonians who were ultimately to conquer Judah, not Israel or Syria. But this verse also shows in the wickedness of Ahaz how chapter 6 is already beginning to be fulfilled. God is sending his word to harden the king.

Aside from the purpose of the word to harden (God's perspective), there is still a human perspective that Ahaz sees. The word “trust” will become the overarching theme of chapters 7-39. The question posed in this section of Isaiah is this: who will you trust? Will it be God who controls all of the nations or will it be those wicked nations who throw their fist in God's face?

## 7:2

You can see how trust in God is nearly completely gone as the story gets underway in verse 7:2. If verse 1 sets the stage, verse 2 begins the play. A word is reported to the "house of David." What is David's house? David's house is *Judah*. Isaiah is making fun of Ahaz by calling him the house of David, for David was the greatest of all good kings while Ahaz was one of the most wicked of the wicked kings. So the word that comes to the house of David is a report that [Aram has camped in Ephraim](#). (Another geography lesson) Ephraim was one of the sons of Jacob. All of these sons received a territory in Israel. Ephraim's territory was on the southern border of Israel. [In this way, the picture is that Aram and Israel are best friends preparing to make war against Judah.](#)

Can you see then? The word that comes to Ahaz now makes it clear to Ahaz that Israel and Aram are preparing to attack (as we learned in verse 1). The nearness of the attack now sends waves of terror throughout the hearts of the people of Judah. How wretched David's mighty throne has become. Ahaz has destroyed the very faith of God's people by acting faithlessly as their king. "House of David" becomes a taunt to the wicked Ahaz. Trust in God has completely disintegrated. All the people are left with is shaking as ["the trees of the forest shake with the wind."](#) This is what faithlessness in God gets you when the going gets tough. And this is hardly the sort of people who are going to be able to overthrow a mighty army.

So here is what I want you to see. There is a cycle here that is only feeding itself. Ahaz (and other kings before him) increasingly rebel against God. In turn, the faith of the people is weakened. In turn, more faithless acts are committed. In turn, the people lose even more trust in God. The point comes when no one is able to trust any longer. And this is all God's plan for the people.

## 7:3

Now, it is exactly because no one has faith to trust in God anymore, because it seems like the only thing to do is reach out to what one can see – the mighty hand of Assyria, that God commands Ahaz to trust in him. This is what we get when we come to verse 3. But we remember in the back of our minds that in sending forth this word, God is only going about the business of hardening Ahaz. Ahaz will not trust in God because he is too busy doing human sacrifices to appease the gods of the pagans. So, ["The Lord said to Isaiah, 'Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and your son Shear-jashub, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway of the fuller's field.'"](#) The location is one of the places of Jerusalem's water supply. Evidently, Ahaz is preparing to protect the water from attack, for at this time Judah had no dependable source of water within its walls.

Do you notice anything strange about what Isaiah is told to do? He is to take his son. The word is going to come to Ahaz in the form of a living object lesson. Children will play an important part in [chapters 7-9](#). We have ["Shear-jashub"](#) in [7:3](#), [Immanuel](#) in [7:14](#); [8:8](#), [Maher-shalal-hash-baz](#) in [8:3](#), [Isaiah's children](#) in

8:18; and the royal child in 9:5.”<sup>2</sup> The obvious reason why is that God is going to show his power to the mighty kings of the world by using little, helpless babes to do his bidding.

And so we must learn this lesson about God’s ways. This is a lesson that repeatedly comes out in Isaiah. God’s ways are not our ways. We trust in what we can see. God works through the foolish things of this world. For our part, we must never let what we see on TV or on hear in the news or what we read in polls determine what we will trust in. We likewise must not let our circumstances take our eyes off of God’s plan, whether it be our sicknesses, our source of income, the difficult transitions of life, the suffering we endure for Christ or anything else. We must place our trust in God who we cannot see, but who nevertheless is concerned for this world, who works intimately in its affairs, who loves his children more than any human father and mother loves their own, and who is powerful enough to make all that he wishes come to pass.

The child mentioned in 7:3 is Shear-jashub. This is Isaiah’s son. It is the meaning of his name that tells us why God sent him. **His name means “a remnant will return.”** In bringing this boy to the king, Ahaz was to glean something of God’s purposes in the future. In bringing this boy, God begins to tell Ahaz that he must trust in God for his protection. The boy acts like a prophesy. Isaiah had named this boy before any destruction took place. Isaiah had foreseen the destruction prophesied in his own message and God was pleased to have this be the name of the boy as a constant reminder of his covenantal faithfulness. We have seen remnant language already in this book. “Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom” (1:10). The idea is that God is going to leave some survivors, though he will wipe out the rest of the nation. Listen to what it says in chapter 10. “Now it will come about in that day that the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, Only a remnant within them will return; A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness” (10:20-22). Ahaz is to understand from this gospel boy that Judah will not be totally wiped out. God is being kind to Ahaz though he knows Ahaz will not return the favor.

7:4-9

That the message seen in the appearance of the boy is to be good news is made clear in the next verse. As God always does, his object lessons (sacraments?) are accompanied by a sermon. Isaiah is to say to Ahaz, “Take care, and be calm, have no fear and do not be fainthearted because of these two stubs of smoldering firebrands, on account of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. ‘Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying, ‘Let us go up against Judah and terrorize it, and make for ourselves a breach in its walls, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 195.

it,' thus says the Lord God, 'It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. 'For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin (now within another 65 years Ephraim will be shattered, so that it is no longer a people), and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you will not believe, you surely shall not last'" (7:4-9).

God is promising Ahaz that he has absolutely nothing to fear, despite everything that his senses tell him. He is needlessly meandering around the water pool to protect it from harm, because no harm will fall upon him if he will only believe in God. **Take care. Be calm. Have no fear. Do not be fainthearted.** Ahaz was obviously doing none of these things. That's why he is commanded to do them. He was worried sick and terrified of the nations around him. He had already experienced losses from these same people as well as others in wars previous to this. A biting metaphor is used to tell Ahaz how powerful Israel and Aram are compared to God. They are nothing but smoldering ends of sticks where a bonfire has been. They are all bark and no bite. God is the mighty one and he promises that despite the plans of Pekah and Rezin that their plans will come to nothing. Behold, the promise is sure. "**It shall not stand. It shall not come to pass**" (vs 7).

How pitiful it is when men have a word from God and yet refuse to believe. We only show our depravity and blindness at such times. History is the witness to the prophesy. Ahaz was not conquered by this plot. God did not lie. As punishment for turning against his brother, Israel was led into final captivity just a few years later, along with Aram for his part in the conspiracy. Such is predicted here. Such is the way it actually came to pass.

Because of the sinful way that Ahaz responded to God here, we must understand this promise to be unconditional. Because it is unconditional, this message is **gospel** to Ahaz. It is nothing but pure crisp clean good news. There was nothing that Ahaz could do to thwart this promise. Not even making an alliance with Assyria (a spiritually devastating act) could turn God's hand of mercy away. Understand, then, the nature of all of God's good news.

Ahaz is completely wicked and evil. Human sacrifice and pagan rituals are nothing to this heretic. Ahaz has actively conspired against God by making an alliance with what will one day become his worst nightmare. And yet, God holds out the unconditional promise to this man and God fulfills his promise in the face of Ahaz's faithlessness.

This gospel message was a physical manifestation of a spiritual reality. In the covenant that God had promised to Abraham, to make him into a great and mighty nation, even blasphemous murdering rebels would not fail to inherit the land and experience unmerited favor from God. All of the generations up to this point including Ahaz himself is the recipient of this special grace in physical form. These physical blessings of land and a kingdom and priests and descendants all pointed forward typologically to the spiritual reality that is found in Jesus Christ alone.

God still has a physical people today. God's physical people have changed in some ways. They no longer make up a single nation, but rather make up peoples from all parts of the globe. We call these people "the church." Many new things have taken place in the church age since the time of Ahaz. Christ's coming has now taken away the sins of people that were before only passed over. Christ's death on the cross allowed for God to justify people without forsaking his justice. Christ's resurrection has brought a life to the people of God that was not experienced even by the great saints of the Old Testament. All those who trust in Christ are united to Christ and thus experience the fullness of the blessings that were not available to the Jew.

And yet, in spite of all that which is new now, one thing is not yet completed. It will not be completed until Christ returns. This one thing is the fact that as in Ahaz's day, this same church – the physical people of God – do not yet perfectly overlap the spiritual elect. Wheat and tares currently grow together. Sheep and goats live amongst each other. People in the church who are not regenerate, who in fact reprobate, participate in physical blessings of hearing the word preached, of participating in the sacraments in spite of the best efforts of the church to ensure that unbelievers do not do such things, of receiving prayers, or singing with God's people, and of hearing the word read. These physical blessings actually make the *temporary* lives of the unbeliever better, because as God's word goes forward, it eradicates many sins that beset cultures, it creates much joy in the hearts of the elect that are contagious even to those who are not saved, and it provides a framework for life that unbelievers can work within and use in order to make their own lives at *this time* better.

This is what happened to Ahaz. He is the example. He was not destroyed though he was very evil. There are some of you sitting here today who know that you are a type of Ahaz. You know that you do not trust God's word at all. You know that you mock him in your heart. You know that you live by site and not by faith. You know that you think God is a phony and a phantom, despite what you may say to make others around you happy. You know that you are currently taking advantage of God's mercy, perhaps thinking that you have years and years of foolish living ahead of you before it finally catches up to you. You are Ahaz.

And yet, deep down inside, you know that the enemy is encamped at *your* doorstep. The Bible says, "**The last enemy to be destroyed is death**" (1 Cor 15:26). You know that you will soon die, despite everything your life seems to show to others. You know that you greatly fear your own death and you tremble like a tree in a mighty wind at the thought of the unknown darkness that awaits you on the other side of the grave. You are Ahaz.

There is a warning for you in this text. It is the same warning given to Ahaz in verse 9. After explaining to the king that the other nations are led by mere men (when he says that the head of Aram is Rezin and the head of Ephriam is Pekah), God presents Ahaz with himself. Notice this in verse 8. Originally this did not hit me. But then I got to thinking about it. In saying that the head of Ephraim is Pekah ("the son of Remaliah), God is telling Ahaz that the head of Israel is NOT

God! If God can forsake Israel, he can surely do it to Judah and Ahaz as well. And so He says, "If you will not believe, you surely shall not last." As we have been saying, Ahaz did last through the siege of Israel and Aram. But he did not last as an individual even as Judah did not last as a nation.

Ahaz was a man of faithlessness and trust only in himself and other men. After pretending to be a man of faith for so long, his evil finally caught up with him. He could not control it anymore than he could control Assyria. In order to appease the Assyrian army, he decided to have the priest (in his day it was Uriah) reconstruct several things in the temple of God to appease the gods of these Turks. Listen final account of the life of Ahaz in 2 kings 16.

So Uriah the priest built an altar in accordance with all the plans that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus and finished it before King Ahaz returned. When the king came back from Damascus and saw the altar, he approached it and presented offerings on it. He offered up his burnt offering and grain offering, poured out his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his fellowship offerings on the altar. The bronze altar that stood before the LORD he brought from the front of the temple--from between the new altar and the temple of the LORD--and put it on the north side of the new altar.

King Ahaz then gave these orders to Uriah the priest: "On the large new altar, offer the morning burnt offering and the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offering and his grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land, and their grain offering and their drink offering. Sprinkle on the altar all the blood of the burnt offerings and sacrifices. But I will use the bronze altar for seeking guidance." And Uriah the priest did just as King Ahaz had ordered.

King Ahaz took away the side panels and removed the basins from the movable stands. He removed the Sea from the bronze bulls that supported it and set it on a stone base. He took away the Sabbath canopy that had been built at the temple and removed the royal entryway outside the temple of the LORD, in deference to the king of Assyria. (2 Kings 16:11-19).

The sins of Jereboam I found Ahaz. And Ahaz defiled himself and God's people in many great ways. In essence, the grace that God had bestowed upon this king became the very means that God used to harden him. That was God's side of it, even as it was predicted in chapter 6. As for Ahaz's part, he took the grace of God and used it as a means to create much evil. This evil was particularly horrible because it corrupted the worship of God and destroyed any chance that Judah had (physically speaking) for salvation from future exile.

If you are sitting here this morning thinking that you can take advantage of grace, then it is time for you to heed the warning of Ahaz. "If you will not believe, you surely shall not last." Hebrews 6 puts it another way. It is a way that is especially pointed to those who persist in calling themselves Christians when they are in fact not. "It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted

the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace" (Heb 6:5-7).

Though this warning cannot ever be true for God's spiritually elect people, it is nevertheless true for many who are in the church. It is not hypothetical to everyone. If you are like Ahaz, your sin will find you out. You cannot share in the blessings of the gospel mentioned above without doing irreparable harm to your own soul. The longer you sit in church in unbelief, the more you are actually hardening your self against him. You may very well find that you really have become Ahaz in such a way that you will never repent.

Fortunately for you, Jesus Christ has not returned yet. In the same way that Christ's return is the great hope for the Christian, it is the fact that he has not returned yet that is the great hope of the unbeliever. Today is still the day of salvation. Because you still sit here this morning, you have obviously not fallen away and God may still have mercy upon you. The warning of Ahaz is now presented to you as a command. It is a simple word that you have heard over and over again. Believe! Believe in God's promises. Trust in his faithfulness. Believe in Jesus Christ as the only way to the father. Please do not delay. The longer the clay sits in the sun, the harder it is to mold so that ultimately it will only break.

May the Holy Spirit give you all the power to believe upon Christ this morning. May he increase the faith of those of you who do believe. May he strengthen you as you consider Ahaz the unbeliever and the nation of trees that teeter too and fro from fear and lack of faith, for to you has been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven and you are not alone in this word. May you once again be renewed in your own faith in the midst of your struggle. Continue to believe in him and do not let the worries of life crowd out your faith, lest you prove yourself faithless. And may we all remember this lesson from living, real, historical events that occurred around 735 BC. If we will not believe, we will not last. God is merciful and patient and tolerant. But not forever. If you sense the great urge at this time to call out to God for mercy, then do so. He is always there and one does not need anyone other than Christ to plead their case. Take your case to God in prayer and trust in Christ to plead for you because he shed his blood to take away sin.

May God bless the hearing of his word this morning and may he be pleased to grant us all a Spirit to sustain us and keep us from falling to his glory and honor.