

## **Isaiah**

# **When Your World Is Falling Apart**

Lesson #3 for January 16, 2021

Scriptures: Isaiah 7:1-14.

1. Young King Ahaz, the son of Jotham and grandson of Uzziah, had just taken control of the kingdom of Judah. He was an evil king. Notice these words that Isaiah wrote about him.

**Isaiah 7:1-9:** <sup>1</sup> When King Ahaz, the son of Jotham and grandson of Uzziah, ruled Judah, war broke out. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, attacked Jerusalem, but were unable to capture it.

<sup>2</sup> When word reached the king of Judah that the armies of Syria were already in the territory of Israel, he and all his people were so terrified that they trembled like trees shaking in the wind.

<sup>3</sup> The LORD said to Isaiah, "Take your son Shear Jashub, and go to meet King Ahaz. You will find him on the road where the cloth makers work, at the end of the ditch that brings water from the upper pool. <sup>4</sup>Tell him to keep alert, to stay calm, and not to be frightened or disturbed. The anger of King Rezin and his Syrians and of King Pekah is no more dangerous than the smoke from two smouldering sticks. <sup>5</sup>Syria, together with Israel and its king, has made a plot. <sup>6</sup>They intend to invade Judah, terrify the people into joining their side, and then put Tabeel's son on the throne.

<sup>7</sup> "But I, the LORD, declare that this will never happen. <sup>8</sup>Why? Because Syria is no stronger than Damascus, its capital city, and Damascus is no stronger than King Rezin. As for Israel, within 65 years it will be too shattered to survive as a nation. <sup>9</sup>Israel is no stronger than Samaria, its capital city, and Samaria is no stronger than King Pekah.

"If your faith is not enduring, you will not endure."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation\** (2nd ed., Isaiah 7:1–9). New York: American Bible Society.

2. How much does God know about human history? And how much does He get involved?
3. And what led to this message from Isaiah?

**2 Kings 15:37-38:** <sup>37</sup>It was while he was king that **the LORD first sent King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel to attack Judah.** <sup>38</sup>Jotham died and was buried in the royal tombs in David's City, and his son Ahaz succeeded him as king.—*Good News Bible*.\*†

**2 Kings 16:5-6:** <sup>5</sup> King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel attacked Jerusalem and besieged it, but could not defeat Ahaz. <sup>6</sup>(At the same time, the king of Edom regained control of the city of Elath, and drove out the Judeans who lived there. The Edomites settled in Elath, and still live there.)—*Good News Bible*.\*

The kingdoms of northern Israel (Ephraim) and Syria (Aram) ganged up on the smaller country of Judah to the south. This happened when Judah was weakened by attacks from the Edomites and Philistines. In the past, Judah had fought against Israel, but an alliance between Israel and Syria presented an overwhelming peril. It appears Israel and Syria wanted to force Judah to

participate with them in a coalition against the mighty power of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (called "Pul" in 2 Kings 15:19), who continued to threaten them with his expanding empire. Israel and Syria had put aside their longstanding struggle against each other in view of a greater danger. If they could conquer Judah and install a puppet ruler there (Isa. 7:5, 6), they could use its resources and manpower.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Sunday, January 10.<sup>§</sup>

4. Try to imagine yourself in such a hazardous situation. What did Ahaz propose to do about it?

**2 Kings 16:7-9:** <sup>7</sup>Ahaz sent men to Tiglath Pileser, the emperor of Assyria, with this message: "I am your devoted servant. Come and rescue me from the kings of Syria and of Israel, who are attacking me." <sup>8</sup>Ahaz took the silver and gold from the Temple and the palace treasury and sent it as a present to the emperor. <sup>9</sup>Tiglath Pileser, in answer to Ahaz' plea, marched out with his army against Damascus, captured it, killed King Rezin, and took the people to Kir as prisoners.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**2 Chronicles 28:16-17:** The Edomites began to raid Judah again and captured many prisoners, so King Ahaz asked Tiglath Pileser, the emperor of Assyria, to send help.—*Good News Bible*.\*

5. The country of Assyria with its capital in Nineveh was the big bully, trying to conquer all the nations around the Middle East in the days of Isaiah. Sometime later, the nation of Assyria would overrun the country of Judah as well, leaving only the city of Jerusalem with its high walls protected. As we know, later in history, Hezekiah and Isaiah took that problem to the Lord; and the Lord solved it. But, Ahaz decided to send a lot of money taken from the temple treasury to try to convince Tiglath-Pilezer to attack the country of Syria so they would stop attacking him. Tiglath-Pilezer accommodated him very well, and Ahaz's enemies with their unusual alliance were defeated. It might have looked like Ahaz had saved Judah.
6. So, what do we know about the history of Ahaz?

**2 Kings 16:3-4:** <sup>3</sup>And followed the example of the kings of Israel. He even **sacrificed his own son as a burnt offering to idols**, imitating the disgusting practice of the people whom the LORD had driven out of the land as the Israelites advanced. <sup>4</sup>At the pagan places of worship, on the hills, and under every shady tree, Ahaz offered sacrifices and burnt incense.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

**2 Chronicles 28:2-4:** <sup>2</sup>And followed the example of the kings of Israel. **He [Ahaz] had metal images of Baal made, <sup>3</sup>burnt incense in the Valley of Hinnom, and even sacrificed his own sons** as burnt offerings to idols, imitating the disgusting practice of the people whom the LORD had driven out of the land as the Israelites advanced. <sup>4</sup>At the pagan places of worship, on the hills, and under every shady tree Ahaz offered sacrifices and burnt incense.—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*††</sup>

7. Ahaz was a descendent of King David through the royal line. But, he obviously did not take the same attitude toward God as David did! What about us? When we find ourselves in trouble, do we have sufficient faith to trust God?

**Jeremiah 12:5:** The LORD said,

"Jeremiah, if you get tired racing against people,

how can you race against horses?

If you can't even stand up in open country,

how will you manage in the jungle by the Jordan?"—*Good News Bible*.\*

8. But, something quite unexpected happened in this story. Isaiah took his son and under the direction of God sought out Ahaz to try to correct him from his evil plans. Notice two important things in this passage: (1) God knew exactly where King Ahaz was and what he was doing. (2) With His foreknowledge, God knew that kings Rezin and Pekah would not be able to conquer the land of Judah. They were nothing more than "two smoldering sticks." Did God somehow control the results of these battles?
9. It was their plan to put one of their associates known as Tabeel's son on the throne, and thus, force Judah to join them in an attempt to frighten or destroy the Assyrians. And how was God involved in all of that?

**2 Chronicles 28:5-6,19:** <sup>5-6</sup> Because King Ahaz sinned, the LORD his God let the king of Syria defeat him and take a large number of Judeans back to Damascus as prisoners. The LORD also let the king of Israel, Pekah son of Remaliah, defeat Ahaz and kill 120,000 of the bravest Judean soldiers in one day. **The LORD, the God of their ancestors, permitted this to happen, because the people of Judah had abandoned him....**

**<sup>19</sup>Because King Ahaz of Judah had violated the rights of his people and had defied the LORD, the LORD brought troubles on Judah.**—*Good News Bible*.\*†

10. What was God trying to accomplish? Does adversity bring repentance and change?
11. Isaiah 7:3 tells us that Isaiah was told to take his son with him to see the king. His son had a very unusual name which meant, "a remnant shall return." And what was that supposed to mean? Who were the remnant? Where were they returning from? Was that a message from God about people going into captivity and only a few returning from captivity?
12. It is possible that the word *return* also carried the meaning of repentance. Is that what God was asking for? Looking back from our perspective, it seems clear that the message of God to Ahaz effectively was: "You can take it to mean whatever you think it should mean! If you do not turn from your sins, the children of Judah are going into captivity. It is true that a remnant will return from captivity; but, at this point, the decision is up to you!"
13. We do not know exactly how extensive the conversation was between Isaiah and the king. And we do not know whether Isaiah's son said anything at all. But, Isaiah clearly told King Ahaz: "There is no reason to be frightened; God will take care of things if you will just trust Him." Then, Isaiah went on to tell him that within 65 years, Israel would be shattered, too shattered to survive as a nation. Do you suppose that message also was carried to any of the people of Israel? In any case, Ahaz did not need to be worried about those attacks from Damascus and Samaria. Ahaz needed to turn to someone who reliably could tell him the truth.
14. Try to imagine yourself observing this discussion between the prophet who was a faithful follower of God, and this wicked king who had even sacrificed his own children to pagan gods. The two men were both quite young and should have been able to communicate effectively.
15. So, then, Isaiah went on to give an additional message.

**Isaiah 7:10-13:** <sup>10</sup> The LORD sent another message to Ahaz: <sup>11</sup> “Ask the LORD your God to give you a sign. It can be from deep in the world of the dead or from high up in heaven.”

<sup>12</sup> Ahaz answered, “I will not ask for a sign. I refuse to put the LORD to the test.”

<sup>13</sup> To that Isaiah replied, “Listen, now, descendants of King David. It’s bad enough for you to wear out the patience of people—must you wear out God’s patience too?”—*Good News Bible*.\*

**16. Can you imagine such an offer! Basically, Ahaz could have asked for anything! Shouldn’t Ahaz have jumped at that opportunity? Couldn’t he just have asked God to take away the Syrians and the Israelites and the Assyrians?**

17. There are other times mentioned in the Bible when kings made remarkable offers to people under them. Sometimes, they offered as much as half of their kingdom! That offer was made twice to Esther (Esther 5:6; 7:2) and also to Salome. (Mark 6:23)

18. But, Ahaz, stubborn as usual, answered: “I will not ask for a sign. I refuse to put the Lord to the test.” Doesn’t this sound like a pious and respectful answer? We are not supposed to put God to the test. Are we?

19. The ancient Israelites on their journey through the wilderness had put God to the test on several occasions.

**Exodus 17:2:** They complained to Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses answered, “Why are you complaining? Why are you putting the LORD to the test?”—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Deuteronomy 6:16:** “Do not put the LORD your God to the test, as you did at Massah.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

20. But, what about us? Are we ever supposed to “test” God?

**Malachi 3:10:** [The LORD said:] “Bring the full amount of your tithes to the Temple, so that there will be plenty of food there. Put me to the test and you will see that I will open the windows of heaven and pour out on you in abundance all kinds of good things.”—*Good News Bible*.\*‡

**Isaiah 7:13:** Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?”—*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*.\* (1989). (Isaiah 7:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

21. So, what should we learn from this experience? Could we ever be so blind and foolish as Ahaz was? Or, are we so completely surrendered to God that we would never make such a mistake? Do you think that if Ahaz had actually chosen a sign for God to do and God had done it, Ahaz would have sincerely believed in the true God?

22. By far the most important passage for us in this chapter is Isaiah 7:14.

**Isaiah 7:14:** “Well then, the Lord himself will give you a sign: a young woman who is pregnant will have a son and will name him ‘Immanuel.’”—*Good News Bible*.\*  
[Footnote in *GNB*\*: *young woman*: **The Hebrew word here translated “young woman” is not the specific term for “virgin”, but refers to any young woman of marriageable age.** The use of “virgin” in Mt 1.23 reflects a Greek

translation of the Old Testament, made some 500 years after Isaiah.] [Footnote in *GNB*\*: *Immanuel*: This name in Hebrew means “God is with us”.]<sup>†‡§</sup>

23. So, God went a second mile and said to Ahaz through Isaiah: “If you won’t suggest a sign, then I will!” What would you have asked for if God had made that kind of an offer to you? Think of what God is capable of doing! (Isaiah 55:9; 1 Corinthians 2:9)
24. And so, what did God suggest as a sign? The sign was the birth of a son. So, how could a young woman bearing a child and calling him *Immanuel* be a sign of biblical proportions? Can you think of other times when biblical characters asked God to give them a sign? The story of Gideon and the two fleeces is one example. (Judges 6:36-40)
25. We know that Matthew, recorded in Matthew 1:23, quoted Isaiah 7:14 as a prediction of the virgin birth of Jesus to Mary. What is the relationship between that prophecy and the fulfillment? Several suggestions have been made as to who that young woman might have been. Many scholars think that it was a reference to Isaiah’s wife. (Isaiah 8:3) A few verses later, Isaiah did record the birth of a son to his wife, “the prophetess.” Remember that Isaiah’s wife was, in a sense, a prophetess as she gave birth to those prophetically-named children. Remember that Isaiah’s first son, Shear Jashub, had a name which means “a remnant shall return.” Shortly after this encounter with Ahaz, Isaiah’s wife gave birth to a second son, Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which means “quick loot, fast plunder.” What could that mean?

**Isaiah 8:1-4:** <sup>1</sup>The LORD said to me, “Take a large piece of writing material and write on it in large letters: ‘Quick Loot, Fast Plunder’. <sup>2</sup>Get two reliable men, the priest Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah, to serve as witnesses.”

<sup>3</sup> Some time later my wife became pregnant. When our son was born, the LORD said to me, “Name him ‘Quick-Loot-Fast-Plunder’. <sup>4</sup>Before the boy is old enough to say ‘Mummy’ and ‘Daddy’, all the wealth of Damascus and all the loot of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.”—*Good News Bible*.\*

26. Other scholars have suggested that *Immanuel* was Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, who became the next king. But, nowhere in the Bible is the name *Immanuel* applied to Hezekiah.
27. Others have suggested that *Immanuel*, “God With Us,” applies exclusively to the Messiah to be born 700 years later. Clearly, that part of Isaiah’s prophecy referred to the future Messiah.

**Isaiah 9:6:** A child is born to us!

A son is given to us!

And he will be our ruler.

He will be called, “Wonderful Counsellor”,

“Mighty God”, “Eternal Father”,

“Prince of Peace”.—*Good News Bible*.\*

**Isaiah 11:10:** A day is coming when the new king from the royal line of David will be a symbol to the nations. They will gather in his royal city and give him honour.—*Good News Bible*.\*

28. Is it a possibility that a natural birth to an unmarried woman of marriageable age resulting in an illegitimate child, through illegal promiscuity, could be a sign from God? There certainly was not another “Jesus” born in the days of Isaiah! So, such a child would have had to be illegitimate. Why would such a child be a sign to inspire faith? (Deuteronomy 22:20-21) But,

the translators of the *King James Version* influenced by what they knew of Matthew's words, translated this verse in Isaiah using the word *virgin*.

29. As we know, Matthew 1:21-23 makes it very clear that Mary was a virgin when she gave birth to Jesus, the Son of God.

**Matthew 1:21-23:** <sup>21</sup> [An angel of the Lord said:] "She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus—because he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup> Now all this happened in order to make what the Lord had said through the prophet come true, <sup>23</sup> "A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called Immanuel" (which means, "God is with us").—*Good News Bible*.<sup>\*†</sup>

30. And there are many other verses suggesting that Jesus was the divine Son of God and of the royal line of David. (Matthew 3:17; Isaiah 11:1,10; Revelation 22:16)
31. Shortly after the *Revised Standard Version* came out about 70 years ago, there were so many questions about Bible translation that the General Conference Committee took an action to establish a special committee on problems in Bible translation. They worked on this problem for about two or three years and produced a book entitled *Problems in Bible Translation*.
32. Notice these words of conclusion: **Summary and Conclusions**
1. The doctrine of the virgin birth is implicit throughout the Scriptures, and would stand firm, even if it did not appear in Isa. 7:14 and Matt. 1:23.
  2. The word '*almah*, "virgin" denotes simply a "young woman" of marriageable age, whether engaged or not, married or not, virgin or not.
  3. The word *bethulah* is the Hebrew word for "virgin." Isaiah uses it repeatedly and the Holy Spirit would have guided him in the choice of *bethulah* in ch. 7:14 if it had been essential to express what had been revealed to him. [The Christian translators of the *KJV* looked at Matthew's words and chose the word *virgin* even though that was not the real meaning of the Hebrew word used in Isaiah.]
  4. Isaiah and his sons were "signs" divinely ordained to accompany Isaiah's prophetic ministry, the chief object of which was to hold Judah steady as the northern kingdom collapsed and went into captivity.
  5. The '*almah* translated "virgin" in Isa. 7:14 was evidently Isaiah's own wife, and "Immanuel" was to have been the name of their son. But God instructed Isaiah to name the child "Mahershalalhashbaz" instead of "Immanuel," as a result of the refusal of Ahaz to submit to God. Thus, the prophecy of Isa. 7:14 had a local and literal fulfillment in the days of Isaiah.
  6. By inspiration, Matthew was led to see in the historical circumstances and prophetic message of Isa. 7:14 a prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah, and to use the word *parthenos* in quoting the prophecy.
  7. The prophecy of Isa. 7:14, thus viewed, is a dual prophecy having an immediate and primary application to the days of Isaiah, and a secondary and later, but nevertheless a meaningful and vital, application to the birth of the Messiah.—General Conference Committee, *Problems in Bible Translation* 160-169. (1954).<sup>‡§</sup>

33. We have already noticed that Isaiah's first son, Shear-jashub, had a name which means "a remnant shall return." Maher-shalal-hash-baz, his second son, had a name which means "swift is booty, speedy is prey." It is also true that *Immanuel* has a meaning translated literally from the Hebrew is "with us God." But, we know from looking at other names in Hebrew that the verb *to be* is often omitted and is supplied by English translators. So, in this case, we should translate it, "God is with us." What greater promise could we claim than to have God with us.

**Psalms 23:4:** Even if I go through the deepest darkness,

I will not be afraid, LORD,  
for you are with me.

Your shepherd's rod and staff protect me.—*Good News Bible*.\*

"God says: 'When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you' (*Isa. 43:2*).

"Where was the Lord when the Babylonians threw Daniel's three friends into the fire? With them (*Dan. 3:23-25*). And where was the Lord during the time of Jacob's trouble when he wrestled until daybreak? In Jacob's arms, as close as he could get (*Gen. 32:24-30*).

"Even when the Lord does not appear in physical form on earth, He goes through the experiences of His people with them. Where was the Lord when the mob condemned Stephen? 'Standing at the right hand of God' (*Acts 7:55*). But when Jesus ascended to heaven, He 'sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high' (*Heb. 1:3*). Why did He stand when Stephen was in trouble, about to be stoned to death? As Morris Venden has said, 'Jesus wasn't going to take that sitting down!'"—Roy Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 1996), p. 66.—[as quoted in *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* for Thursday, January 14].<sup>§</sup>

34. So, if you are facing some real problems, is it helpful to know that God is with you? Even if He does not intervene in any way?

"His name shall be called Immanuel, ... God with us." "The light of the knowledge of the glory of God" is seen "in the face of Jesus Christ." From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was "the image of God," the image of His greatness and majesty, "the outshining of His glory." It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God's love,—to be "God with us." Therefore it was prophesied of Him, "His name shall be called Immanuel."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*\* 19.1.

35. So, what was the conclusion with Ahaz?

Well would it have been for the kingdom of Judah had Ahaz received this message as from heaven. But choosing to lean on the arm of flesh, he sought help from the heathen. In desperation he sent word to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria: "I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me." 2 Kings 16:7. The request was accompanied by a rich present from the king's treasure and from the temple storehouse.—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*\* 329.2.

36. What should we learn from this lesson? Should we ask for a sign from the Lord to guide us? It is always appropriate to ask for God's guidance and help; but, to ask for a specific sign in many cases would be presumptuous. We need to have enough faith to allow God to assist us or not, apparently, in the way He chooses. Ahaz apparently chose not to believe God and, thus, alienated himself from the kingdom of God.
37. Are we ever inclined to forget that God is constantly present and looking after us?
38. Did Isaiah and/or Ahaz ever have any idea that a Messiah born to a virgin would come about 700 years later? Did either of them think that Isaiah 7:14 was a prophecy of that future birth?
39. God coming and reaching out to Ahaz should remind us of the story of Adam and Eve in the garden after their sin. In fact, God is reaching out to each of us.
40. It is not easy to just keep calm when a panicky situation is before us. But, that is sometimes what God tells us to do.

“Take heed, and be quiet” (*KJV*) and “Be careful, keep calm” (*NIV*). In the Hebrew language, the clause “take heed, and be quiet” consists of two words, *hiššāmer w<sup>e</sup>hašqet*. The first word comes from the verbal root *šmr*, which, in this case, could be translated as “to be on one’s guard, be attentive, take care.”—Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 4, p. 1584.

... “to keep the peace . . . to keep oneself quiet” (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 4, p. 1641) or “to show quietness” (David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* [Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011], vol. 8, p. 550).—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 41].<sup>§</sup>

41. In other words, a possible translation for *šmr* could be “look quietly.” Are we able to do that in our chaotic times?

“Isaiah condemns two things in Ahaz: his fear, for it is needless; his faith in material resources—here typified by a secure water supply in time of siege; the only faith that will secure the real solidity of the state is faith in Yahweh.”—George B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, I-XXVII, *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), vol. 1, p. 118.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*\* 42].<sup>§</sup>

42. Let us conclude with these words from Ellen White.

You may be perplexed in business; your prospects may grow darker and darker, and you may be threatened with loss; but do not become discouraged; cast your care upon God, and remain calm and cheerful. **Pray for wisdom to manage your affairs with discretion, and thus prevent loss and disaster. Do all you can on your part to bring about favorable results. Jesus has promised His aid, but not apart from our effort. When, relying upon our Helper, you have done all you can, accept the result cheerfully.**—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*\* 122.2.<sup>†</sup> Compare *Review and Herald*, February 3, 1885, par. 5.

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