

## GOD PROMISES

Isaiah 7:7-17

Sometimes getting discouraged is very easy to do. It could be a series of small setbacks that accumulate and we get the impression that everything is going wrong. At other times, it could be just one big happening that goes wrong. We see the unrest in large cities, we have gone through the pandemic situation of the year 2020 and we hear the false claims and accusations that go along with political campaigns and it causes concerns. Many things can buffet our lives and if we are not careful, we can easily get discouraged. In situations such as these we need a word of hope and encouragement or something to give us some assurance that things are going to work out. I know each of us has experienced some low times in our lives, times when we have needed assurance that things were going to get better. One source of such assurance is the word of God. Many people find strength during such times in the promises of God and the knowledge that victory over every enemy and situation belongs to God and to those who belong to God. We can see examples of such trying times and the needed assurance in the history of the Jewish people.

When problems occur or times are difficult, how do most people respond to the situation? Do they try harder? Do they turn to the government? Do they look to their insurance policy or their bank account?

You may have noticed in some of the newer movies of the past several decades, the beginning of the movie is difficult to follow because they are introducing so many different characters. It is especially difficult when they have unfamiliar names. What was happening in Judah around the decade of 740 to 730 BC is somewhat like that in there are a lot of different characters involved. At this time the king of Judah was named Ahaz. He became king at age 20 when Jotham died. At this time in the history of the Middle East there were several empires vying for power and control. The various players of significance were

Aram (also known as Syria) with its capital of Damascus. The leader of Aram at this time in history was Rezin. Israel (also referred to as Epharim) with its capital of Samaria. The leader of Israel at this time was Pekah (generally referred to as the son of Remaliah).

Assyria with its capital of Nineveh and at this time was led by Pul who was also known as Tilgath-Pileser III.

Ahaz was a very rebellious king. He practiced idol worship and burned incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel. Because of these practices, the Lord had allowed Aram to attack Judah and many of the Jews had been carried away to Damascus as captives. Not long after that, Israel attacked Judah and killed 120,000 soldiers and carried 200,000 people back to Israel. These were released because a prophet of the Lord named Oded intervened and the Jews were taken back to Judah. All of these problems did not cause Ahaz to repent and seek the Lord. Instead, he attempted to make an alliance with the king of Assyria. This is the background for Isaiah 7. In this study we will be looking at how God intervened in what was happening even though Judah's leaders were looking for solutions in the wrong places, had their confidence in other nations rather than in God, and were lacking in integrity and faithfulness.

In the first part of this chapter we find that Aram and Israel were fearful of the rising power and aggressiveness of the Assyrians and they formed their own alliance and determined that they needed the resources and army of Judah to resist the advances of Assyria against them. So they came together and planned to go up against Jerusalem to besiege the city but they would not be successful in conquering Judah. The prospects of these two nations working together were terrifying to king

Ahaz and to the Jews. After all, when they attacked Judah separately in the past, they had done a lot of damage.

The problem was that the only spiritual basis Ahaz had was with idols and pagan deities and these did not provide any solutions to the problems of life. His grandfather (Uzziah) and his father (Jotham) had failed to prepare him for the job of being king. These men had trusted in God and yet they had failed to instill such faith in Ahaz. He probably was somewhat of a playboy going to all the wrong places and doing all the wrong things with no sense of responsibility as he was growing up. Then, all of a sudden, when he was twenty years old, his father died and he was thrust into the responsibility of being king. When problems arose he had no basis for looking past the problems and seeing a way out of them. All he could see were physical realities and the threats these were to him. He had nothing in his arsenal of resources that was bigger than the problems he faced. How many people does that describe in today's world? I fear that most people do not have the spiritual foundation that will allow them to focus on anything other than the problems they have and, consequently, look for man-made solutions.

### God Intervenes – 7:7-9

<sup>7</sup>thus says the Lord GOD: “It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass. <sup>8</sup>“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), <sup>9</sup>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.” ’ ’ ’ Isaiah 7:7-9 (NASB95)

Ahaz and Judah were ready to give up concluding it was in vain to make any resistance. The reason for this state of mind was the sense of guilt and the weakness of their faith. They had made God their enemy, and did not how to make him their friend, and therefore their fears ruled them. This is far different from those whose consciences are clear.

If ever someone needed a word of encouragement and assurance, it was king Ahaz. The Lord sent His prophet to deliver that word. When God sent Isaiah, He told him to take his son with him. Isaiah's son had an interesting name. The name Shear-jashub means "a remnant will return." His name represented part of Isaiah's overall message theme to the nation of Judah. By taking his son with him, Isaiah was not only going to remind Ahaz of the consequences of not obeying and trusting God, but also that he could find comfort in the hope that God would rebuild the nation.

Ahaz was out checking the water supply to the city when the message from God came to him through Isaiah. God told Isaiah where Ahaz was and gave him the message that he was to deliver. God expected Isaiah to stop whatever he was doing and to immediately go and take care of the Lord's business. We all need such a sense of urgency in doing what God tells us to do. Sometimes we get a sense that we ought to call someone to check on them and we think that it is not convenient and we neglect to do it at all. Because we don't have that sense of urgency, we miss opportunities to really influence the lives of others in a positive way. Consequently, we miss the blessings in our own lives that come with such ministries.

God's message to Ahaz was simply “calm down (be quiet) and don't be fearful.” The whole nation was shaking like a tree in a strong wind. Maintaining calm confidence is good advice in any stressful situation. We can let our emotions run away and get out of control. When that happens, rational thinking and the ability to deal with the difficult are lost. The other part of the message was useful information that Ahaz needed. This information was that the threat from Syria and Israel was all smoke and no fire. Israel and Syria would have so much trouble defending themselves against Assyria that they could not sustain a war against Judah.

The reason for this temporary salvation of Judah was not the goodness of Judah, but was

related to the sin and disobedience of Syria and Israel. Again, there was the message to Judah that for them to avoid what was going to happen to Syria and Israel, they should trust in and obey God. The final part of Isaiah's message to Ahaz was "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all."

### God Expects – 7:10-13

<sup>10</sup>Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying, <sup>11</sup>"Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make *it* deep as Sheol or high as heaven." <sup>12</sup>But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" <sup>13</sup>Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? Isaiah 7:10-13 (NASB95)

We do not know for certain when this second message came to Ahaz. It may have been immediately after the first message or after Ahaz tried to make an alliance with Assyria. Apparently, Ahaz did not accept what Isaiah told him. This could have been from a lack of confidence that God could or would do what He promised to do or maybe he just did not accept Isaiah as God's messenger. In his pride, he listened to his own council rather than what God had to say.

In an effort to bring Ahaz back to Himself, God was willing to give him a sign as a means to get Ahaz to have faith in God. Ahaz refused to cooperate by saying that he did not want to test God. The real reason he didn't was that he was afraid that all reasonable doubt would be removed as to God's sovereignty and he would have no excuse for his disobedience. This same refusal still happens even today. People reject the possibility of miracles and will not ask for help from God because they will have no excuse for disobedience when God's power and presence are validated in miracles or signs. It was almost as if Ahaz was saying that all this talk about God was just so much silliness and he would not show any respect for it by asking for a sign. This is likely to be exactly the kind of response you would get today if you went to any government official and made them the same offer.

We probably have known some folks who would try our patience. I would imagine young Ahaz was that sort of person. Now, his action of rejecting the offer from God to exercise some faith was an affront to God. God, through the prophet, was going to provide a sign so that Ahaz (and all those like Ahaz) would be without excuse. The prophecy that Isaiah was about to give would apply to the time in which they lived and it would apply to centuries later – it is also a sign with eternal significance.

### God Announces – 7:14-15

<sup>14</sup>"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. <sup>15</sup>"He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows *enough* to refuse evil and choose good. Isaiah 7:14-15 (NASB95)

There are several different views as to the interpretation of this prophecy. One thing that the various views agree upon is that it certainly applies to the virgin birth of the Messiah some 700 plus years later. Most commentators also agree that there was a definite application to a birth that would happen immediately after Isaiah prophesied this message to Ahaz.

At the time of Isaiah's prophecy a woman who was then a virgin would get married and have a child (the normal way) and certain events would occur within a given number of years following that birth. Not all the writers agree about the identity of this woman. Warren Wiersbe has written that it is likely that Isaiah's first wife died soon after the birth of their first son and that this young woman was Isaiah's second wife (who was a virgin at the time of the prophecy). We know that Isaiah's second son was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz ("swift is booty, speedy is prey"). Wiersbe

states that he was also called Immanuel by his mother.

If we compare Isaiah 8:1-4 with the prophecy regarding the virgin birth in chapter 7, then we can see the possibility of this being the case.

There are two time periods mentioned in the prophecy given while Isaiah was speaking to Ahaz and that involved a time **after** and a time **before** the boy would know the difference between good and evil. This was generally thought to be at age two or three. Some writers (Matthew Henry for one) think that what Isaiah said was “before THIS boy - meaning the son that was with him then - was old enough to know.”

Two things would happen: Sometime after he would reach the age of knowing the difference in right and wrong, he would be eating curds and honey. This is in reference to problems with the agricultural industry during that predicted time so that the only “natural foods” (rather than cultivated crops) were available for the people. During the time of Ahaz, the Edomites and the Philistines invaded Judah. In 2 Chr 28:19 we see “For the LORD brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he made Judah naked, and transgressed sore against the LORD.”

Some writers think that would apply to an even later time when Hezekiah was king when the Assyrians under Sennacherib attacked Judah. According to Walvoord:

**The abundance of . . . milk** was a distressful factor, not a good one. With many animals dying, a farmer’s **young cow and two goats** would have no young to nurse, and so the milk (and **curds** from it) would be plentiful for the people. **Honey** would also be abundant because wild flowers would grow in the desolate fields and bee swarms would be more plentiful. All this would fulfill the sign given Ahaz by Isaiah (Isa. 7:15): he **will eat curds and honey**. Also the farmers would have no crops because of the ruined farmland. The vineyards would be ruined along with the cultivated **land**, and only **briers and thorns** (mentioned three times in 23-25) would grow. The land would be good only for grazing by **cattle** and **sheep**.

### God Judges – 7:16-17

<sup>16</sup>“For before the boy will know *enough* to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken. <sup>17</sup>“The LORD will bring on you, on your people, and on your father's house such days as have never come since the day that Ephraim separated from Judah, the king of Assyria.” Isaiah 7:16-17 (NASB95)

The other time period was before the boy would reach age two or three. The land of Israel and Syria (grouped together because of their alliance with each other) would be forsaken. Ahaz became king in 743 BC and this prophecy was given around 734. By 732, Assyria had waged successful campaigns against Israel and Syria. Both Pekah and Rezin were no longer a factor.

In spite of all the evidence that God was in control, Ahaz refused to put his trust in the Lord and instead relied on alliances with the king of Assyria. After Tiglath-Pileser had defeated Aram and put Rezin to death, Ahaz went to Damascus to meet the Assyrian monarch (2 Kings 16:7-10). Ahaz liked an altar he saw in Damascus, and had a sketch of it drawn so a similar altar could be set up in Jerusalem. No wonder Isaiah and God were angry with Ahaz. Even after the alliance (of Israel and Aram) had been broken by Tiglath-Pileser Judah had no peace. Though Assyria did not defeat Judah, she had to pay Assyria a heavy tribute. In adopting the altar of other gods and in looking to other nations for help, Ahaz was rejecting God and His revealed truth.

We should learn from the terrible experience and outcome of Judah when considering the affairs of our nation. All around us, we see evidence that many are rejecting the principles upon which our nation was founded. We have adopted an anti-Christ attitude and are attempting to embrace all “religions” as the politically correct thing to do. We are abandoning the tried and true principles of what made us successful and are adopting those ways that have failed in other countries. The outcome is predictable. We must get back to the truth of the word of God and bring purity back to our nation or we too shall fall.