

Faith – The Choice is Ours

Isaiah 7:1–17 (NKJV)

¹Now it came to pass in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to make war against it, but could not prevail against it.

²And it was told to the house of David, saying, “Syria’s forces are deployed in Ephraim.” So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.

- *The wonderful Messianic prophecy found in Isaiah 7 is prefaced with the historical context in which it was given.*
- *Ahaz, the king of Judah, was an ungodly and unfaithful king who worshipped false pagan gods and ruled unrighteously.*
- *Ahaz’ unrighteousness resulted in God withdrawing His protection. The enemies of Judah, Syria, and the northern kingdom of Israel attacked with the intention of deposing Ahaz and destroying Judah.*
- *“So his heart and the heart of his people were moved as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind.” – The report that Syria and Ephraim were coming against Judah caused Ahaz and all the people of Judah to tremble with fear and to shake like a leaf.*
- *God had a redemptive purpose for allowing this attack to happen. He wanted to turn the hearts of Ahaz and Judah back to Himself.*

³Then the Lord said to Isaiah, “Go out now to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-Jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct from the upper pool, on the highway to the Fuller’s Field,

⁴and say to him: ‘Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and the son of Remaliah.

- *The Lord sent Isaiah and his son, Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz with an important message.*
- *Isaiah’s name in Hebrew is “Yeshayah” and it means “salvation of the Lord” or “the Lord saves.” It is closely linked with another name Yehoshua which means “salvation” and that is the name Joshua or Jesus.*
- *Isaiah’s son, Shear-Jashub means “a remnant shall return” and it is an ominous warning.*

Isaiah and his son Shear-Jashub stood before King Ahaz as a prophetic analogy with a message from the Lord and a choice that Ahaz must make: either the Lord will save, or only a remnant will be left.

- *The message the Lord had for Ahaz was meant to comfort and strength him and Judah, “Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear or be fainthearted for these two stubs of smoking firebrands.”*

- *What wonderful words of grace, “take heed and be quiet and do not fear or be fainthearted for God has shown up to save you.”*
- *God describes the two great armies who came to destroy Judah as nothing more than just a little bit of smoke.*

⁵Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying,

⁶“Let us go up against Judah and trouble it, and let us make a gap in its wall for ourselves, and set a king over them, the son of Tabel”—

⁷thus says the Lord God: “It shall not stand, Nor shall it come to pass.

⁸For the head of Syria is Damascus, And the head of Damascus is Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be broken, So that it will not be a people.

- *God gave a wonderful promise concerning the impending plot that Syria and Ephraim devised against Judah and King Ahaz. “It shall not stand, nor shall it come to pass,” and within sixty-five years Ephraim will no longer be a nation and Syria will no longer be a threat.*
- *What a wonderful promise and what wonderful words of comfort from the God of Israel to an unfaithful king and a backslidden nation.*
- *Truly God’s mercy and loving-kindness extends to us even in the midst of our failures!*

⁹The head of Ephraim is Samaria, And the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son. If you will not believe, Surely you shall not be established.

- *“If you will not believe, Surely you shall not be established.” - There was one condition for this promise of Judah’s deliverance to become a reality – they needed to put their faith in the Lord and completely trust Him.*
- *“Just simply believe and trust God” - Such a simple request for God to ask of Ahaz and wonderful promises would be manifested.*

The absolute necessity of having total confidence in God for Ahaz and Judah to receive this deliverance is underlined by Isaiah’s statement, “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all” (ESV), “If you will not believe, you surely shall not last.” (NASB).

¹⁰Moreover the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying,

¹¹“Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.”

- *The Lord wanted to help Ahaz to fulfill this simple requirement to fully trust Him, and the Lord said, “ask for any sign or miracle no matter how great and wonderful and I will do it, so you will be able to truly believe.”*

¹²But Ahaz said, “I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!”

- *Ahaz’ response, “I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord” sounds so pious and virtuous, but in reality it was the most rebellious and defiant answer he could have given.*

¹³Then he said, “Hear now, O house of David! Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will you weary my God also?”

- *“will you weary my God also?” - Isaiah’s response to Ahaz’ answer really exposes the wickedness and rebellion in Ahaz’ heart.*
- *Ahaz didn’t really want to believe God and put his faith in Him. He wanted to continue to serve his idols and his fleshly desires.*

Ahaz didn’t want to see a miracle, because then he would have to face the fact that the God of Israel is the true and living God and there is no other.

- *In like fashion, God wants to prove Himself faithful to us, but we must be willing to seek, ask, and knock and take note of His wonderful faithfulness to us.*
- *If we never invest time with God in prayer and walk with Him we will never grow in our faith or see His faithfulness manifested in our lives. We will remain skeptics regarding the power and miracles of God.*

¹⁴Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

- *Since Ahaz refused to ask for a sign from God, Isaiah said the Lord Himself would choose a sign proving that He would deliver His people.*
- *“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” - This verse is one of the most marvelous Messianic prophecies found in the Bible, but it is also one of the most problematic one for unbelievers.*
- *The Hebrew word for “virgin” used here in the Hebrew is “almah” and it can mean “virgin” but it also can mean “a young woman of marriageable age, a newly married woman.”*
- *Isaiah could just as easily have used another Hebrew word for virgin, which would have meant specifically virgin and would have eliminated any ambiguity, but he didn’t.*
- *God has a purpose in His choice of the Hebrew word “almah.”*

Matthew 1:23 (NKJV)

²³“Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which is translated, “God with us.”

- *Matthew clearly quotes from Isaiah 7:14, using the Greek word for virgin and citing it is a Messianic prophecy fulfilled at the birth of Jesus.*
- *Jewish scholars, who do not believe that Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, point to Matthew’s quote in Isaiah as an improper translation.*

It is interesting and very significant to note that the Septuagint, the Greek Translation of the Old Testament, which was completed by Jewish scholars in the second century BC having no inclination or influence from Christianity, since Jesus had not yet been born, chose to translate the Hebrew word “almah” as virgin!

The Jewish scholars who translated the Septuagint clearly understood this verse to be a Messianic prophecy even though the concept of the virgin birth probably eluded them as to what it actually meant and how it would become a reality.

Another piece of this prophetic puzzle is found in the parameters that Ahaz’ sign encompassed. - “Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; ask it either in the depth or in the height above.”

- *Since Ahaz failed to ask for a sign, God Himself was going to choose the sign of His deliverance and His sign would incorporate everything from the depths below to the heights above.*
- *If the sign was simply a young woman giving birth to a child, even though the gift of life is miraculous, it does not encompass the immensity of the miracle that God envisioned to instill unshakeable faith.*
- *The great miraculous sign that would signify that God would deliver His people from their sins was the virgin birth of the Son of God.*

Matthew 1:21 (NKJV)

²¹And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

- *Matthew 1:21 repeats the promise offered to King Ahaz, which he rejected, but all those who hear and believe this sign will be established.*

How is Jesus Christ’s birth a sign that is as deep as the depths and as high as the Heavens?

John 16:28 (NKJV)

²⁸I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”

- *Jesus Christ, the Son of God, left the heights of Heaven and was born as the Son of Man on this earth. He was crucified and went to the depths of Hell for us, and after the third day was raised from the dead and sits at the right hand of the Father.*

We see how Christ’s marvelous virgin birth beautifully fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, but that still does not fully explain why God used the Hebrew word “almah” which can be translated as “virgin” or “young woman.”

- *Another characteristic of many biblical prophecies is that they possess both an immediate fulfillment and also a far-off or ultimate fulfillment.*
- *The ultimate fulfillment was the birth of Christ, but there was also the immediate need facing Ahaz and Judah with the invasion of the armies of Ephraim and Syria.*

¹⁵Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.

¹⁶For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.

- *God was saying that a child is going to be born and before the child can eat curds and honey, in other words before the child is weaned from his mother, the kings of Ephraim and Syria would be removed.*

Isaiah 8:3–4 (NKJV)

³Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, “Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz;

⁴for before the child shall have knowledge to cry ‘My father’ and ‘My mother,’ the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria.”

- *We see in Isaiah 8:3-4 the first or immediate fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah’s wife bore a son whose name means, “speed the spoil, hasten the prey,” signifying how quickly the removal of Judah’s enemies, Ephraim and Syria would take place.*
- *Because Ahaz did not want a miraculous sign, no miraculous sign would be given to him.*

Therefore we see that Isaiah’s prophecy encompassed two situations that required deliverance – one from the immediate enemies of Judah, but also the ultimate enemy, which are our sins.

- *However, there is a third reason that the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 contains an apparent ambiguity.*

- *God gives each person the freedom to choose to either to find faith in Christ or to reject faith in Christ.*
- *A central aspect of God's character is that He does not force us to have a relationship with Him, He gives us the choice.*

Isaiah 45:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵Truly You are God, who hide Yourself, O God of Israel, the Savior!

- *If God overwhelmed us with His presence and "proof" of Himself then we would not have any choice but to believe in Him, but He is the God who hides Himself and He delights to reveal Himself to those who are willing to seek Him.*

God spoke to King Ahaz through the prophet Isaiah and offered to give him any sign as high as the Heavens or as deep as Hell, but Ahaz refused and chose to stay in unbelief.

- *Famed atheist Richard Dawkins was once asked, "What if after you died you ran into God, what would you say?" Dawkins reply was, "Why did you go to such lengths to hide yourself?"*
- *I think a good response would be, "Why didn't you ever look for Me and why didn't you want to consider the things I already showed you."*
- *God provides ambiguities and subtleties through His Word, through Creation, and even in our daily experiences, so that we can find Him if we choose to seek Him. At the same time He does not force Himself on anyone.*
- *Subtleties and ambiguities allow room for unbelief, but also allow room for faith to grow.*
- *God is obscure to those who are unbelieving, but believers can learn to have faith in God and trust Him in spite of circumstances.*

As we spend time in His Word, in prayer, and abiding with Him throughout the day, the reality of His presence and power becomes more and more evident to us.

- *King Ahaz regrettably chose not to seek to believe in God. He chose to cling to his idols and his unbelief.*
- *King Ahaz, instead of trusting in God to vanquish Ephraim and Syria, took events into his own hands and desecrated and pillaged the Temple of God in Jerusalem. He gave the gold and treasures to the King of Assyria so he would attack Ephraim and Syria and deliver Judah from them.*

Ahaz chose not to trust God to vanquish his enemies and by doing it himself, he brought terrible suffering upon himself and Judah.

- ¹⁷The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house— days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.”
- *Initially his plan seemed to work, but ultimately Assyria, whom he had trusted, became the one who oppressed him and brought destruction on Judah.*
- *Ahaz did not believe God's Word with the result that he was not established and his life ended in disgrace.*
- *Isaiah 7 prophesies about the incarnation of Christ (His humanity).*
- *Isaiah 9 prophesies about the attributes of Christ (His Divinity).*
- *Isaiah 11 prophesies about the ministry of Christ.*
- *Isaiah 53 prophesies about the sacrifice of Christ – His suffering, death, burial, and resurrection.*

Isaiah 55:6–7 (NKJV)

⁶Seek the Lord while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.

⁷Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, And He will have mercy on him; And to our God, For He will abundantly pardon.

- *God will reveal Himself to those who seek Him and call upon Him.*