

## Ahaz's Wrong Choice which Led to Judah's Judgment

## Aram and Israel War against Judah (7:1-9)

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.

7:2 **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.

Vers. 1–9.—The Prophecy given to Ahaz at the Time of the Syro-Israelitish War. The Syro-Israelitish war is touched on both in Kings and Chronicles. In Kings the alliance between the Rezin and Pekah is distinctly declared, as also the fact that they conjointly besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:5). From Chronicles we learn that, before the siege, Ahaz was twice defeated with great loss, once by the Syrians (2 Chron. 28:5), and once by the Israelites (2 Chron. 28:6). He was probably, therefore, reduced to great straits at the time when Isaiah received directions to seek an interview with him, and communicate to him a comforting message from Jehovah.

Ver. 1.—In the days of Ahaz. The reign of Ahaz covered, probably, the space between B.C. 743 and B.C. 727. The march on Jerusalem appears to have fallen somewhat late in his reign (about B.C. 733). **Rezin the King of Syria.** Rezin is mentioned as King of Damascus by Tiglath-pileser II. in several of his inscriptions. In one, which seems to belong to B.C. 732 or 731, he states that he defeated Rezin and slew him. **Pekah the son of Remaliah** (see 2 Kings 15:25). Pekah had been an officer under Pekahiah, the son and successor of Menahem; but had revolted, put Pekahiah to death in his palace, and seized the crown. It is probable that he and Rezin were anxious to form a confederacy for the purpose of resisting the advance of the Assyrian power, and, distrusting Ahaz, desired to place on the throne of Judah a person on whom they could thoroughly depend (see ver. 6). It was not their design to conquer the Jewish kingdom, but only to change the sovereign. **Toward Jerusalem;** rather, *to Jerusalem*. The allies reached the city and commenced the siege (2 Kings 16:5). **Could not prevail against it;** literally, *prevailed not in fighting against it*.

Ver. 2.—**It was told the house of David.** Before the actual siege began, news of the alliance reached Ahaz. It is said to have been "told the house of David," because the design was to supersede the family of David by another—apparently a Syrian—house (see note on ver. 6). **Syria is confederate with Ephraim;** literally, *rests upon Ephraim*. Under ordinary circumstances the kingdoms of Syria and Israel were hostile the one to the other (see 1 Kings 15:20; 20:1–3; 22:3–36; 2 Kings 5:2; 6:8–24; 8:29; 10:32; 13:3, 22, 25). But occasionally, under the pressure of a great danger, the relations were changed, and a temporary league was formed. The inscriptions of Shalmaneser II. show such a league to have existed in the time of Benhadad II., and Ahab ('Ancient Monarchies,' vol. ii. pp. 103, 104). The invasion of Pul, and the threatening attitude of Tiglath-Pileser II., had now once more drawn the two countries together. On the use of the word "Ephraim" to designate the kingdom of Israel, See Hosea, *passim*. **His heart was moved;** or, *shook*. If the two kings had each been able separately to inflict on him such loss (see the introductory paragraph), what must he not expect, now that both were about to attack him together? It is not clear whether Ahaz had as yet applied to Assyria for help or not.

The Pulpit Commentary: Isaiah Vol. I, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 125-26.

7:1–2 The narrative begins by reporting the participants in the Syro-Ephraimite War (734–732 BC), when Syria (Aram) and Israel (Ephraim) joined forces to attack Judah. Based on information in 2 Kgs 15:37, it appears that the initial stages of this political conflict began during Jotham's reign (Ahaz's father). When the young, twenty-year-old Ahaz became king, he continued the policies of non-cooperation with Syria and Israel, so a military conflict was initiated in order to replace Ahaz (7:6). Since Rezin, king of Syria is mentioned first, he probably was the leader who successfully pushed for Israel's assistance and tried to force Judah to join him in opposing Assyria. The Assyrian annals report that the Assyrian army was involved in a campaign of taking control of territory in Philistia in the south and around Tyre and Hamath in the north in the summer of 734 BC, so it was very clear to most of the remaining nations along the Mediterranean Sea that they needed to band together before the next year, or they would each be defeated, one by one, by the much stronger Assyrian army. In 7:1 the narrator summarizes the first segment of this war, then he goes back in 7:2–9 to provide details of what happened in the first few months before the initial attack. The overview simply states that Judah was attacked, but the enemy armies did not overcome the city of Jerusalem immediately.

Supplemental information about these early stages of the war in 2 Chr 28 indicate that God gave Ahaz into the hand of Syria (indicating Syrian leadership in this plan), thereby allowing them to defeat Judah's army in battle and take prisoners (2 Chr 28:5). Israel's army also inflicted heavy casualties on Judah, killing 120,000 troops, the king's son, and the person who was second in command to the king (2 Chr 28:6–8). Nevertheless, the two armies of Syria and Israel were never able to defeat the city of Jerusalem.

This crisis was a direct threat to the house of David, to "Ahaz and his people" in the royal court. The reference "to the house of David" (*lĕbĕt dāwīd*) is not a common way of referring to the king in Isaiah (used also in 7:13, 17), so special attention is being drawn in this chapter to the problem of the continuation of the Davidic dynasty. A question is raised by these events: Will the promise of a king to sit on the throne of David (2 Sam 7) now be interrupted because of this war, or will the king trust God and continue the Davidic line of rule in Jerusalem? The talk about war became very real one day when a messenger came and told the royal court that Aram (Syria), who was allied with the northern nation of Israel, was invading Judah. Naturally, this caused fear among the leaders of Judah, for they knew that many people would die in the coming war and Judah would be far outnumbered by the two armies coming against them. There would be internal political pressure to join the anti-Assyrian coalition rather than fight it and the leaders of "the house of David" probably would lose power and might lose their lives if they did not win this war. The imagery of shaking like a leaf illustrates the level of fear and panic that pervaded Judah's leaders. It seemed that they were doomed, so their courage was severely undermined. (E. Ray Clendenen, *New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39*)



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,

**J. Vernon McGee on Isaiah 7:3**

There are several things we need to look at in this verse. First of all, Isaiah is to meet Ahaz "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool." The place where he is to meet the king is suggestive. It is from this conduit that the life-giving waters pour for thirsty Jerusalem. It is here that the people can quench their thirst. You can't get much satisfaction from a pipe filled with water – you must have a spigot on it somewhere. You must go to the place where the water comes out of the pipe.

Now this is symbolic of the fact that you are not going to get any blessing out of that house of David, but way down at the end of his line One is coming as the "water of life." That One was the Lord Jesus Christ. He came in the line of David to bring the water of life.

Isaiah is to meet the king at the upper "pool." The word for "pool" is *berekah* from the root word meaning "blessing." I can assure you that in that land a pool of water is a blessing. This same word used in Psa\_84:6, "...the rain also filleth the pools [*berakah*]," everywhere else is rendered "blessing." This is a very interesting thing.

Notice also that it is "the upper pool." *Upper* is the word used over thirty times for the Most High. You may recall that it was said of the one who came out to minister to Abraham that he was the priest of the Most High God (see Gen\_14:18). Now the blessing of the Most High God was given "at the end of the conduit" when Jesus came into the world.

"In the highway of the fuller's field." The highway is a path which is elevated above the surrounding land to keep the traveler's feet clean. The spiritual application of the word *highway* is made clear in Pro\_16:17: "The highway of the upright is to depart from evil..." This highway is the way of holiness... Isaiah will use this same figure in Isa\_35:8: "And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness..." This very interesting symbolism refers to the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. The psalmist wrote in Psa\_84:5: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them." That is, blessed is the one who has the One who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Notice also that the meeting was to take place in the "fuller's field." The fuller's field was the place where folk went to wash their clothes. It was the laundry of that day. Applying this to our own lives, if we want to get our lives cleansed, we must come to the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, "...ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (Joh\_15:3).

So you see, it is no accident that Isaiah is sent to this very interesting place for his meeting with Ahaz. It has a wonderful spiritual meaning for us.

Isaiah is told to take his son Shear-jashub with him. That is quite a name for a boy, but it is nothing compared to the second son whom we shall meet in chapter 8. *Shear-jashub* means "a remnant shall return." The interesting thing is that God has always had a remnant that was true to Him.

**Keil and Delitzsch**

King Ahaz was there, on the west of the city, and outside the fortifications - engaged, no doubt, in making provision for the probable event of Jerusalem being again besieged in a still more threatening manner. Jerusalem received its water supply from the upper Gihon pool, and there, according to Jehovah's directions, Isaiah was to go with his son and meet him. The two together were, as it were, a personified blessing and curse, presenting themselves to the king for him to make his own selection. For the name *Shear-yāshub* (which is erroneously accentuated with *tiphchah munach* instead of *merchah tiphchah*, as in Isa\_10:22), i.e., the remnant is converted (Isa\_10:21-22), was a kind of abbreviation of the divine answer given to the prophet in Isa\_6:11-13, and was indeed at once threatening and promising, but in such a way that the curse stood in front and the grace behind. The prophetic name of Isaiah's son was intended to drive the king to Jehovah by force, through the threatening aspect it presented; and the prophetic announcement of Isaiah himself, whose name pointed to salvation, was to allure him to Jehovah with its promising tone.



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- 7:4 **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.**
- 7:5 **'Because Aram, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has planned evil against you, saying,**
- 7:6 **"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,"**

Ver. 6.—**Make a breach therein.** The word employed means properly “making a breach in a city wall” (2 Kings 25:4; 2 Chron. 32:1; Jer. 39:2; Ezek. 26:10), but is used also in a metaphorical sense for injuring and ruining a country (see especially 2 Chron. 21:17).

**The son of Tabeel;** or, *Tabél*. “Tab-él” appears to be a Syrian name, founded upon the same pattern as Tab-rimmon (1 Kings 15:18), the one meaning “God is good,” the other “Rimmon is good.” We cannot, however, conclude from the name that the family of Tabeel was monotheistic (Kay), for El was one of the many Syrian gods as much as Rimmon (see Max Müller, ‘Science of Religion,’ pp. 177, 178).

Ver. 7.—**Thus saith the Lord God;** literally, *the Lord Jehorah*, as in ch. 28:16; 40:10; 48:16, etc. It shall not stand; *i. e.* “the design shall not good, it shall not be accomplished.” Rezin and Pekah have planned to set aside the issue of David, to which God had promised his throne (2 Sam. 7:11–16; Ps. 89:27–37), and to set up a new line of kings unconnected with David. They think to frustrate the everlasting counsel of God. Such an attempt was of necessity futile.

Ver. 8.—**For the head of Syria is Damascus,** etc. Syria and Ephraim have merely human heads—the one Rezin, the other (ver. 9) Pekah; but Judah, it is implied, has a Divine Head, even Jehovah. How, then, should mere mortals think to oppose their will and their designs to God’s? Of course, their designs must come to nought.

The Pulpit Commentary:

7:3–6 The solution to Judah’s fear was provided by an oracle of salvation that God gave to the prophet Isaiah. The text only reveals what God told Isaiah to do and say. It does not describe what actually happened when Isaiah met the king by this pool of water. The king appears to be occupied with securing one of the city’s water supplies in preparation for a long siege. The reader assumes that Isaiah did what God told him to do sometime before the conflict began. There is also no description of Ahaz’s immediate response to the good news Isaiah provided the king.

God instructed Isaiah and his son Shear-Jashub to go to the end of the aqueduct that draws water from an upper pool. Likely, this pool was on the northern, higher side of the city, rather than a pool that was south of the Gihon spring in the lower Kidron valley, south of the city of David. On the north side of the city there is relatively flat ground for the officers of the Assyrian army to set up a large encampment for thousands of troops and to prepare their attack on Jerusalem (the Kidron Valley has little room). Although Shear-Jashub was instructed to go with Isaiah, God never addresses the significance of his being there. Thus he appears to play a very minor role in the narrative. His name means “a remnant will return,” which probably complemented Isaiah’s positive message of hope. Since the story never reveals how Shear-Jashub’s name was employed in this conversation, the most appropriate thing for the interpreter to do is to admit that no one knows how his presence actually assisted in communicating God’s message to Ahaz.

The two related messages Isaiah spoke to Ahaz were clear promises of salvation. The first encouragement begins with four imperatives that admonish Ahaz to “be careful, keep calm, don’t be afraid, do not lose heart.” The fourfold repetition of words of assurance to calm Ahaz’s fear indicates that the king needed a lot of encouragement and that God made it very clear to Ahaz that his enemies would not be victorious. Isaiah would try to persuade Ahaz not to act with a normal response of fear, but to rest in God’s promises, even though he was a wicked king and did not deserve God’s grace. These were words of assurance to calm his fears, but they also challenged Ahaz to respond appropriately by accepting God’s knowledge of the future and by trusting in God’s deliverance from the two enemy armies that were about to attack Judah. Ahaz needed to “watch himself, guard his ways” (*hiššāmēr*) lest he jump to the wrong conclusion or foolishly make a premature decision. Obviously there was some panic in Jerusalem, so the king probably had advisors suggesting a multitude of possible options. Some were likely promoting a move to join the coalition against Assyria in order to avoid being attacked by Syria and Israel, while others were encouraging him to call on the Assyrians to rescue them. He needed to “be calm” (*hašqēh*) and think through the consequences of each choice of action. The greatest danger was to be controlled by fear and discouragement, so Isaiah exhorts him to “not be afraid” and “not lose heart.” The admonition to “not fear” (*hiššāmēr*) is used elsewhere in war oracles (Deut 20:3; Jer 51:46) while the exhortation “be still and see the salvation of the Lord” was what the Israelites needed to do when they were trapped beside the Reed Sea (Exod 14:14). These exhortations called Ahaz not to look at this war through the perspective of human eyes but from God’s perspective. The justification for adopting this astonishing response of confidence in the face of such a severe danger was the divine promise that these two kings were mere smoldering sticks (a metaphor for the angry kings) that cannot do much damage to Ahaz. They wanted to overthrow Ahaz (“your ruin” NIV; lit. “evil,” *hiššāmēr*, in 7:5) and replace him with Tabeel, but God promised that this plan would not succeed. The quotation of their plans in 7:6 indicates that the enemies were about to begin the war. They were determined to “go up” (*hiššāmēr*) to attack Jerusalem, to confidently carry out their goal of spreading terror, in order to break into the city and carry out their own plans.<sup>265</sup>

Surprisingly, Isaiah does not condemn Ahaz for worshiping other gods or any of the other things mentioned in 2 Kgs 16:1–4, nor does he interpret this war as a punishment from God as in 2 Chr 28:5. Isaiah focused on God’s instructions for him to guide and direct Ahaz to the place where he could trust God with his kingdom. If he would act out of fear of defeat by stronger military forces, Ahaz would not be trusting in what God promised. If Ahaz would summon needless help from other nations to protect himself from Syria and Israel, then he would not be trusting in God’s strength to deliver him. Ahaz needed to believe in God’s faithfulness to the house of David and his promise to the king on that throne (2 Sam 7). He had to decide: Is God sovereign enough to protect his people and his plans for the Davidic dynasty, or will God allow these two small states to enact their plans to usurp the Davidic ruler on the throne by installing the imposter Tabeel? No one knows who this man was or where he was from. He may be an associate of Rezin from Syria or a Hebrew from Judah who supported the idea of joining a coalition against Assyria. (E. Ray Clendenen, New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39)

## Aram and Israel War against Judah (7:1-9)

7:7 thus says the Lord GOD, "It shall not stand nor shall it come to pass.  
 7:8 **"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),**  
 7:9 **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."**"

7:7-9 The second part of God's message for Ahaz contains a promise of victory and a challenge to believe God. The "it" which will not take place in 7:7 is usually related to the "evil" plan in v. 5 (translated "ruin" in NIV), but the parallel structures of 7:7-9 suggest that the prophet is predicting

- it will not stand (implying Syria will fall—7:7b)
- even though the head of Damascus is Rezin (7:8a),
- it will be shattered (implying Ephraim will fall—7:8b)
- even though the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son (7:9a).

Thus the oracle in 7:7 would be better translated, "It (meaning Syria) will not stand." It will not exist "even though" (7:8) Damascus is the head or most important city of Aram (Syria) and powerful Rezin is the head or most important person (the king) of Damascus. Instead, the plan of God will be accomplished (14:24; 46:10; Prov 19:21). This reading implies that these so called important people who rule as kings of other nations are not that important or significant in God's eyes. Who is Rezin? What power does he have? The indication that the nation of Israel/Ephraim will not exist in 65 years parallels 7:7, yet it provides little immediate assurance to Ahaz (he will not be alive in 65 years). This date should not be seen as an attempt to date when Israel would actually go into exile. That date was 721 BC, only 13 years after 734 BC. Although one cannot put exact dates on when the last Israelites were taken from Palestine, Ezra 4:2 and 2 Kgs 17:24-33 probably refers to Israelites being exiled and foreigners imported into the land about 65 years later during the time of Esarhaddon (ca. 670 BC).

Since neither Syria nor Israel will last, the leaders in the Davidic court (the verbs are plural) must "stand firm," or they too "will not stand" (they will end up like Rezin and Syria). The verb that means 'believe, stand firm' occurs twice in 7:9b. The first instance relates to the need for the Davidic house to stand firm in its faith in God, while the second refers to Judah's political survival. Isaiah's wording of this challenge suggests that Ahaz's response will affect the continuation of God's Davidic promise (2 Sam 7:16) that "your house and your throne will endure (lāman, "stand firm") forever before me, your throne will be established forever." Thus the stakes are not limited merely to Ahaz's selfish desires or fears. Rather his faith will affect one of the key theological foundations of the nation, its divinely approved Davidic future. Isaiah's persuasive call to faith is strengthened by reminding Ahaz about what will be lost if he does not turn from his wicked ways and trust God. At this point Ahaz's intentions are unknown. Will he trust God or follow some other plan? The risks of simply trusting God are tremendous because Judah's armies could not match the power of the combined armies of Syria and Israel. Does trusting God mean that a person is totally passive and does nothing? Does God want people to (a) do the best they can; (b) trust and do the best they can; or (c) just trust and do nothing?

(E. Ray Clendenen, New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39)

7:8 This tribe represented all the northern 10 tribes. The prophet predicted the coming demise because of idolatry (cf. Hos 4:17). In 65 years they would cease to be a people, first through the captivity of most of them in 722 B.C. (2Ki 17:6) and then with the importation of foreign settlers into the land in ca. 670 B.C. (2Ki 17:24; 2Ch 33:11; Ezr 4:2).

*John MacArthur*

Within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, etc. If this prophecy was delivered, as we have supposed, in B.C. 733 (see note on ver. 1), sixty-five years later would bring us to B.C. 669. This was the year in which Esar-haddon, having made his son, Asshur-bani-pal, King of Assyria, transferred his own residence to Babylon, and probably the year in which he sent from Babylonia and the adjacent countries a number of colonists who occupied Samaria, and entirely destroyed the nationality, which, fifty-three years earlier, had received a rude blow from Sargon (comp. Ezra 4:2, 9, 10, with 2 Kings 17:6-24 and 2 Chron. 33:11). It is questioned whether, under the circumstances, the prophet can have comforted Ahaz with this distant prospect, and suggested that in the present chapter prophecies pronounced at widely distant periods have been mixed up (Cheyne); but there is no such appearance of dislocation in ch. 7, in its present form, as necessitates any such theory; and, while it may be granted that the comfort of the promise given in ver. 8 would be slight, it cannot be said that it would be *nil*; it may, therefore, have been (as it seems to us) without impropriety added to the main promise, which is that of ver. 7. The entire clause, from "and within" to "not a people," must be regarded as parenthetic.

Ver. 9.—If ye will not believe, etc. Translate, *If ye will not hold this faith fast, surely ye will not stand fast.* Full faith in the promise of ver. 7 would have enabled Ahaz to dispense with all plans of earthly policy, and to "stand fast in the Lord," without calling in the aid of any "arm of flesh." Distrust of the promise would lead him to take steps which would not tend to "establish" him, but would make his position more insecure (see 2 Kings 16:7-18; 2 Chron. 28:16, 20).

The Pulpit Commentary: Isaiah Vol. I, ed. H. D. M. Spence-Jones (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 126-27.

7:10 Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz, saying,

7:11 "Ask a sign for yourself from the LORD your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven."

7:12 But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!"

**David McKenna on Isaiah 7:10-12**

Ahaz has good reason to quake like a leaf in the wind. As King of Judah and responsible for the safety of his people, the sight of the Syrians and Ephraim surrounding the city would cause him to explore every alternative for survival. We know that he took this responsibility seriously by conducting a personal inspection of the Upper Pool in order to gauge the time that the city could hold out before the need for water did what military power had failed to do. Leaders who carry such a weight of responsibility are also persons with a high need for control. They are decision-makers who get things done. Imagine then how radical Isaiah's proclamation must have seemed to Ahaz. He would have been quick to respond to the command, "Don't just stand there, do something." Instead, God reversed all the systems and said, "Don't do something, just stand there."

As always, God is not insensitive to Ahaz's dilemma. Contrary to His usual prohibition against humans putting Him to the test by asking for a sign, God takes the initiative and invites Ahaz to ask for a miraculous sign that He will show in either the depths of the sea or in the heights of the heavens (Isa\_7:10). No one can ever claim that God is unfair. When He asks us to "stand firm in our faith" against the evidence of circumstances and our natural impulses, He will also give us a sign of His faithfulness.

Ahaz knows the Scriptures. Turning God's own words against Him, the king answers, "I will not ask, nor will I test the LORD!" His answer comes directly from Deu\_6:16 where God warns, "You shall not tempt [test] the LORD your God as you tempted [tested] Him in Massah." The reference is to the time when the children of Israel set out across the desert under the command of the Lord and camped at Rephidim. When they discovered that the camp had no water, they demanded that God give them water as a sign of His continuing presence. After a bitter quarrel, Moses caved in to their demand and struck the rock with his staff. The water flowed, but Moses named the place Massah as a memorial to faith that requires a sign and thereby becomes the sin of unbelief.

Under the pretense of obeying God, Ahaz is actually trying to justify a decision he has already made. History is witness to his sin. He not only entered into an unnecessary alliance with Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, but he also compromised his faith by swearing allegiance to Assyria's idols and modifying the altar in the temple at Jerusalem to accommodate pagan worship. As so often happens, a political alliance with the secular world includes a spiritual allegiance to its gods.



## The Child Immanuel (7:10-16)

- 7:13 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?"
- 7:14 "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.
- 7:15 "He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good.
- 7:16 "For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.
- 7:17 "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."

## Assyria to Judge Judah (7:17-25)

### Albert Barnes

Of both her kings - Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the temple, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria. Induced by this, the king of Assyria marched against Damascus and killed Rezin, 2Ki. 16:9. This occurred but a short time after the threatened invasion of the land by Rezin and Remaliah, in the "third" year of the reign of Ahaz, and, consequently, about one year after this prophecy was delivered. Pekah, the son of Remaliah, was slain by Hoshea, the son of Elah, who conspired against him, killed him, and reigned in his stead. This occurred in the fourth year of the reign of Ahaz, for Pekah reigned twenty years. Ahaz began to reign in the seventeenth year of the reign of Pekah, and as Pekah was slain after he had reigned twenty years, it follows that he was slain in the fourth year of the reign of Ahaz - perhaps not more than two years after this prophecy was delivered; see 2Ki. 15:27, 30; 16:1. We have thus arrived at a knowledge of the time intended by Isaiah in Isa. 7:16. The whole space of time was not, probably, more than two years.

### The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Within about three years (nine months for the pregnancy and two or three years until the boy would know the difference between good and evil) the alliance would be broken. It was broken in 732 B.C. when Tiglath-Pileser III destroyed Damascus. After Tiglath-Pileser had defeated Aram and put Rezin to death Ahaz went to Damascus to meet the Assyrian monarch (2Ki. 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 had been broken by Tiglath-Pileser Judah had no peace. Though Assyria did not defeat Judah, she had to pay Assyria a heavy tribute. Isaiah foretold the consequences of Ahaz's attitude (Isa. 7:17-25).

**7:15 curds and honey.** Curds result from coagulated milk, something like cottage cheese. This diet indicated the scarcity of provisions which characterized the period after foreign invaders had decimated the land. (John MacArthur)

The identity of the woman having the child is unknown. The author uses the term *almâ*, "young woman," a root that does not specifically address the issue of virginity in young women, or "young men" (1 Sam 17:56; 22:20), or as an abstract concept "youth" (Job 20:11; 33:25; Ps 89:45; Isa 54:4). G. J. Wenham's study of *bêtûlá* suggests that a parallel Hebrew term also primarily means "young woman," not "virgin," so youthfulness (which implies virginity) is the focus of both terms. The definite article on "the young woman" could signify that a definite and specific woman was in mind, but Hebrew can even use the article for a definite unidentified person. The enigmatic nature of this sign, the avoidance of naming this woman, and the absence of modifiers like "your wife, your young woman, this young woman" argues against this being either Ahaz's or Isaiah's wife. Suggestions that identify this as a new wife of Isaiah or Ahaz are just guesses that try to pinpoint a specific woman based on interpreting the definite article "the/this," yet the text refuses to identify her. All one knows is that she is young, will become pregnant, and will name her child Immanuel. "God is with us." In light of these facts it appears that his name is the significant part of this sign, not the unknown young woman becoming pregnant. Isaiah does not say what this child will do or why his mother will call him Immanuel, but God's earlier repeated promises to "be with" the dynastic line of David (2 Sam 7:9; 1 Kgs 1:37; 11:38; Ps 89:22,25) caused Wildberger to conclude that this son would be a king in the line of David. If so, this will be a godly king who will bring God's blessing on the nation, so he is primarily a sign of hope to the godly people in Judah. Indirectly, this new king is also a threat to replace the wicked and unbelieving Davidic administration of Ahaz because Ahaz refused to act in faith (7:9).

In 7:15 Isaiah informs Ahaz about this child's diet and moral behavior. Although eating curds and honey can have a positive sense of much good food (Gen 18:8; Deut 32:13-14; Judg 5:25; Joel 3:18), Isaiah uses these terms to describe a return to a nomadic lifestyle, rather than a settled farming context. In light of the negative use of this same terminology in 7:21-22, it is better to interpret curds and honey in 7:15 as a sign that this son will live in a time of deprivation (Judah was dependant on a strong agricultural economy). The reason for this negative setting is not explained immediately, but the later reference to a similar situation in 7:21-22 suggests that it will be the result of a military conquest of Judah, specifically the invasion of the Assyrians (7:17b). Instead of focusing on the reason for the nation's devastated condition (Ahaz's lack of trust in God in 7:9), 7:15 emphasizes the moral development of the young son. This son will live in a difficult era (very different from the luxury of Ahaz) "in order that/so that" (not "when" as in NIV) he will make good and just decisions (in contrast to the evil decisions of the dynasty of Ahaz) and reject evil choices. This implies that this godly son will reject Ahaz's wicked and faithless life and rule the nation following the ideal of justice. This information about the child Immanuel in 7:14-15 provides hope for the future of the Davidic dynasty but no hope for Ahaz.

(E. Ray Clendenen, New American Commentary: Isaiah 1-39)



At this moment, I would like to deal with one issue that troubles many people: where do babies or young children go when they die? From Isaiah 7:15-16, we learn that there are the two stages in a young child's life: (1) before he knows how to refuse evil and choose good, and (2) after he knows how to refuse evil and choose good. Some terms used to describe the first are *"the age of innocence"* and the second, *"the age of responsibility"*.

Now read the following Scriptures and underline the statements that pertain to this issue. Then write down some conclusions you can draw.

#### Isaiah 8:3-4

<sup>3</sup>So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; <sup>4</sup>for before the boy knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."

#### Deuteronomy 1:39

'Moreover, your little ones who you said would become a prey, and your sons, who this day have no knowledge of good or evil, shall enter there, and I will give it to them, and they shall possess it.'

#### 2 Samuel 12:22-23

<sup>22</sup>And he (king David) said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.'  
<sup>23</sup>But now he has died; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

#### Jonah 4:11

"And should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

#### Romans 9:10-12

<sup>10</sup>And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; <sup>11</sup>for though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him who calls, <sup>12</sup>it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger."

Read these few paragraphs taken from the website mentioned below. They summarize a view that I also hold, i.e., that babies and young children who die while in *the age of innocence* will be found in heaven, likewise with some mentally retarded people. Do note that in the wilderness wandering in Numbers 14:28-29, *the age of responsibility* was twenty years and above and when one criteria for punishment of sin is "where there is greater knowledge, there is greater responsibility and hence greater judgment" (see Matthew 11:22,24; James 3:1). Whatever else I cannot understand, I can trust our loving Father who commended His love to us while we were yet sinners, ungodly, hostile, and enemies. You too must take your own stand. Write down whether you agree or disagree with what I said or with what is written below.

<http://www.portlandchristians.net/2009/05/01/is-there-an-age-of-accountability/>

The Bible doesn't speak of a particular age when a child becomes knowledgeable of good and evil because it varies from child to child. To exercise this choice, one must be able to make certain distinctions. One must be aware they have chosen to do wrong and be able to repent of that rebellious lifestyle and therefore stand in need of salvation. This requires the ability of transferring trust to Jesus as their Savior and Lord and being willing to pattern their life after the example of Christ (Rom. 10:9-14). It should be obvious that an infant or young child cannot make these distinctions and therefore cannot be responsible for making such choices.

Interestingly, Jesus determined that He needed to be about His Father's business at the age of 12. At this age, His Father's will was more important to Him than the will of His parents (Luke 2:41-52). In Jewish law and tradition, a boy who turns thirteen is known as a Bar Mitzvah ("one to whom the commandments apply"), and is from that point obligated to fulfill Jewish commandments. Similarly, a girl who reaches the age of twelve is known as a "Bat Mitzvah". The general practice among Conservative and Reform Jews is to mark this event with a religious service essentially the same as that held for boys. Also, in modern culture, a thirteen-year old Jew is not truly treated as an adult (for example, in Israeli law, as in that of most other countries, he or she is still considered a minor for several additional years).

There comes a time in the life of each child when that boundary of responsibility to God is crossed. A child invariably sins (Romans 3:23) and stands in need of Christ. However, it is impossible to set a particular age when this will occur. Indeed, each child will vary in reaching that time. Various factors influence spiritual maturing. Since children mature at different rates, some will be spiritually aware at a younger age. They also receive a varied religious education because of parents, teachers, and other significant adults to whom they are exposed. Children exposed to television and other modern technology will mature at a faster rate because of the teaching ability of such technology.

Of course, some never reach the age of accountability. Some are born with mental handicaps that leave them child-like throughout their lives. Nehemiah speaks of an assembly of those able to understand (Nehemiah 8:2-3). However, most come to understand their responsibility to live right during their teenage years.

## Where do Babies or Young Children Go when They Die?

7:18 And it will come about **in that day**, that the LORD will whistle for the fly that is in the remotest part of **the rivers of Egypt**, and for the bee that is in **the land of Assyria**.

7:19 And they will all come and settle on the steep ravines, on the ledges of the cliffs, on all the thorn bushes, and on all the watering places.

**Albert Barnes on Isaiah 7:18**

The following description, by Bruce, of a species of flies in Abyssinia and the adjacent regions, will give an idea of the character of this calamity, and the force of the language used here:

'This insect is called Zimb<sup>[2]</sup>; it has not been described by any naturalist. It is, in size, very little larger than a bee, of a thicker proportion, and has wings, which are broader than those of a bee, placed separate, like those of a fly: they are of pure gauze, without color or spot upon them; the head is large, the upper jaw or lip is sharp, and has at the end of it a strong pointed hair, of about a quarter of an inch long; the lower jaw has two of these pointed hairs; and this pencil of hairs, when joined together, makes a resistance to the finger, nearly equal to that of a strong hog's bristle; its legs are serrated in the inside, and the whole covered with brown hair or down. As soon as this plague appears, and their buzzing is heard, all the cattle forsake their food, and run wildly about the plain, until they die, worn out with fatigue, fright, and hunger. No remedy remains, but to leave the black earth, and hasten down to the sands of Atbara; and there they remain, while the rains last, this cruel enemy never daring to pursue them further.

Though his size be immense, as is his strength, and his body covered with a thick skin, defended with strong hair, yet even the camel is not capable to sustain the violent punctures the fly makes with his pointed proboscis. He must lose no time in removing to the sands of Atbara, for when once attacked by this fly, his body, head, and legs, break out into large bosses, which swell, break, and putrefy, to the certain destruction of the creature. Even the elephant and rhinoceros, who, by reason of their enormous bulk, and the vast quantity of food and water they daily need, cannot shift to desert and dry places as the season may require, are obliged to roll themselves in mud and mire, which, when dry, coats them over like armor, and enables them to stand their ground against this winged assassin; yet I have found some of these tubercles upon almost every elephant and rhinoceros that I have seen, and attribute them to this cause.

All the inhabitants of the seacoast of Melinda, down to Cape Gardafan, to Saba, and the south coast of the Red Sea, are obliged to put themselves in motion, and remove to the next sand, in the beginning of the rainy season, to prevent all their stock of cattle from being destroyed. This is not a partial emigration; the inhabitants of all the countries, from the mountains of Abyssinia northward, to the confluence of the Nile, and Astaboras, are once a year obliged to change their abode, and seek protection in the sand of Beja; nor is there any alternative, or means of avoiding this, though a hostile band were in their way, capable of spoiling them or half their substance. This fly has no sting, though he seemed to me to be rather of the bee kind; but his motion is more rapid and sudden than that of the bee, and resembles that of the gad-fly in England. There is something particular in the sound or buzzing of this insect; it is a jarring noise together with a humming, which induces me to believe it proceeds, at least in part, from a vibration made with the three hairs at his snout.'

**The uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt** - The remotest part of the land - that is, from the whole country. Egypt was watered by a single river; the Nile. But this river emptied into the Mediterranean by several mouths; and from this river also were cut numerous canals to water the land. These are intended by the "rivers" of Egypt; see...Isa 19:6-7. Those canals would be stagnant for no small part of the year; and around them would be produced, as is usual near stagnant waters, great quantities of flies. **This prophecy was fulfilled by the invasion of the land in subsequent times by the Egyptians;** 2Ki 23:33-34; 2Ch 35:20, 24; 36:1-2.

**And for the bee** - That is, for the "army." An army is compared to "bees" on account of their number; perhaps also on account of the pungency and severity of the sting. The comparison is common; see Deu 1:44; 7:20; Psa 118:12. The Chaldee has rendered this verse, "The Lord shall call to a people girded with the armies of the brave, who are numerous as flies, and shall bring them from the ends of the land of Egypt; and strong armies, strong as bees, and shall bring them from the land of Assyria." **No prophecy was ever more completely fulfilled than this by the successive invasions of Pharaoh-Necho, Esarhaddon and Nebuchadnezzar;** see Isa. 36; 37; 2Ch 36:7-21.

<sup>[2]</sup> The zimb, also known as tsaltsalya (Ethiopian) or seriut (Arabic), is any horse-fly of the genus *Pangonia* found in Ethiopia. The genus is more widespread and contains many species, but only those from this region are given the name "zimb". They are similar in feeding habits to the tsetse fly but completely unrelated. It is large, and destructive to livestock; though its bite is painful, it is not venomous, contrary to many sources of misinformation on the internet (Wikipedia).



Keil and Delitzsch on Isaiah 7:18-19

The Egyptian nation, with its vast and unparalleled numbers, is compared to the swarming fly; and the Assyrian nation, with its love of war and conquest, to the stinging bee which is so hard to keep off (Deu 1:44; Psa 118:12). The emblems also correspond to the nature of the two countries: the fly to slimy Egypt with its swarms of insects (see Isa 18:1)<sup>[1]</sup>, and the bee to the more mountainous and woody Assyria, where the keeping of bees is still one of the principal branches of trade.

<sup>[1]</sup> Note: Egypt abounds in gnats, etc., more especially in flies (*muscaria*), including a species of small fly (*nemath*), which is a great plague to men throughout all the country of the Nile (see Hartmann, *Natur-geschichtlich-medicinische Skizze der Nilländer*, 1865, pp. 204-5.)

**The bee that is in the land of Assyria.** The choice of the terms "bee" and "fly," to represent respectively the hosts of Assyria and Egypt, is not without significance. Egyptian armies were swarms, hastily levied, and very imperfectly disciplined. Assyrian were bodies of trained troops accustomed to war, and almost as well disciplined as the Romans.

The Pulpit Commentary



- 7:20 **In that day** the Lord will shave with a razor, hired from regions beyond the Euphrates (*that is, with the king of Assyria*), the head and the hair of the legs; and it will also remove the beard.
- 7:21 **Now** it will come about **in that day** that a man may keep alive a heifer and a pair of sheep;
- 7:22 and it will happen that because of the abundance of the milk produced he will eat curds, **for** everyone that is left within the land will eat curds and honey.
- 7:23 And it will come about **in that day**, that every place where there used to be a thousand vines, *valued at a thousand shekels* of silver, will become briars and thorns.
- 7:24 *People* will come there with bows and arrows **because** all the land will be briars and thorns.
- 7:25 And **as** for all the hills which used to be cultivated with the hoe, you will not go there for fear of briars and thorns; **but** they will become a place for pasturing oxen and for sheep to trample.

Ver. 21.—A man shall nourish a young cow, and two sheep; literally, *two ewes*. A stop having been put to cultivation, men shall return to the pastoral life, but shall not possess more than two or three head of cattle apiece, the Assyrians having swept off most of the beasts. Tiglath-Pileser, in his inscriptions, mentions his carrying off horned cattle and sheep to the amount of many thousands from the countries which he overran or conquered (Records of the Past, vol. v. pp. 49, 52).

Ver. 22.—For the abundance of milk that they shall give. The small number of the cattle will allow of each having abundant pasture. Hence they will give an abundance of milk. He shall eat butter; rather, *curds*—the solid food most readily obtained from milk (comp. above, ver. 15). Curdled milk and wild honey should form the simple diet of the remnant left in the land. (The Pulpit Commentary)

Adam Clarke on Isaiah 7:20

To shave with the hired razor the head, the feet, and the beard, is an expression highly parabolical, to denote the utter devastation of the country from one end to the other; and the plundering of the people, from the highest to the lowest, by the Assyrians, whom God employed as his instrument to punish the Jews. Ahaz himself, in the first place, hired the king of Assyria to come to help him against the Syrians, by a present made to him of all the treasures of the temple, as well as his own. And God himself considered the great nations, whom he thus employed as his mercenaries; and paid them their wages. Thus he paid Nebuchadnezzar for his services against Tyre, by the conquest of Egypt, Eze 29:18-20. The hairs of the head are those of the highest order in the state; those of the feet, or the lower parts, are the common people; the beard is the king, the high priest, the very supreme in dignity and majesty. The Eastern people have always held the beard in the highest veneration, and have been extremely jealous of its honor. To pluck a man's beard is an instance of the greatest indignity that can be offered. See Isa 50:6. The king of the Ammonites, to show the utmost contempt of David, "cut off half the beards of his servants, and the men were greatly ashamed; and David bade them tarry at Jericho till their beards were grown," 2Sa 10:4, 6. Niebuhr, *Arabie*, p. 275, gives a modern instance of the very same kind of insult. "The Turks," says Thevenot, "greatly esteem a man who has a fine beard; it is a very great affront to take a man by his beard, unless it be to kiss it; they swear by the beard." *Voyages*, i., p. 57. D'Arvieux gives a remarkable instance of an Arab, who, having received a wound in his jaw, chose to hazard his life, rather than suffer his surgeon to take off his beard. *Memoires*, tom. iii., p. 214. See also Niebuhr, *Arabie*, p. 61.

David McKenna on Isaiah 7:18-25

Even more vividly, Isaiah sees the Lord using Assyria as a "hired razor" to shave the last whiskers of dignity from the beard of Judah. In the Middle East, a beard is a symbol of masculine identity. No humiliation is greater than to have the beard forcefully shaved by a conquering enemy. Only the bittersweet food of "curds and honey," and the fear of "briars and thorns" in once fertile fields, will remain. Judah will be victim of the three D's of judgment: deprivation of food, depopulation of the people, and desolation of the land. The price of Ahaz's sin is a cost that cannot be counted. Yet, through it all, there is the shred of promise that God will be present with those who are faithful as their comfort, and equally present with those who are wicked as their judge – all to the working of His redemptive purpose.

Adam Clarke on Isaiah 7:21-25

The remaining verses of this chapter, Isa 7:21-25, contain an elegant and very expressive description of a country depopulated, and left to run wild, from its adjuncts and circumstances: the vineyards and cornfields, before well cultivated, now overrun with briars and thorns; much grass, so that the few cattle that are left, a young cow and two sheep, have their full range, and abundant pasture, so as to yield milk in plenty to the scanty family of the owner; the thinly scattered people living, not on corn, wine, and oil, the produce of cultivation; but on milk and honey, the gifts of nature; and the whole land given up to the wild beasts, so that the miserable inhabitants are forced to go out armed with bows and arrows, either to defend themselves against the wild beasts, or to supply themselves with necessary food by hunting.

7:19 steep ravines ... ledges of the cliffs. Not even inaccessible areas of the land were free from the invading armies.

7:21, 22 a heifer and a pair of sheep. The foreign invasion would cause a change from an agricultural economy to a pastoral one. Not enough men would remain in the land to farm. It was to be a time of great poverty. (John MacArthur)

