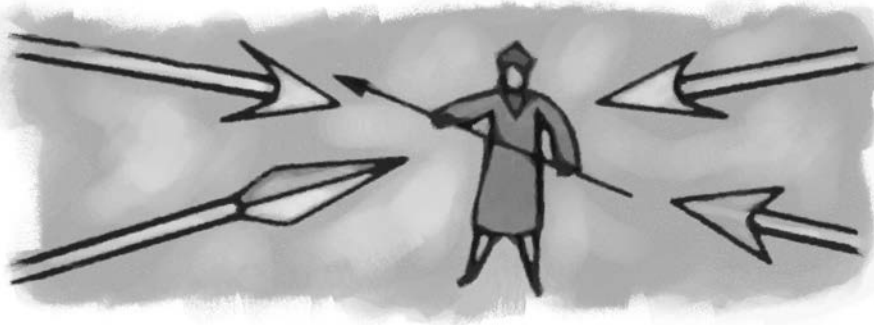


When Your Life Falls Apart



SABBATH—JANUARY 9

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 7:1–14; 2 Kings 15:37, 38; 2 Kings 16:5–9; 2 Chronicles 28:16; James 2:22.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘ ‘If your faith is not strong, then you will not have strength to last’ ’ ” (Isaiah 7:9, ICB).



Waddlesworth thinks Connie has killed Daisy.

ROY AND CONNIE pull into their drive after church on Sabbath. One of their pet hens flies in fear across the yard in front of them. Something is wrong. Their hens were safely locked in their pen when Roy and Connie left for church. But now they are out. Soon Roy and Connie learn the sad reason. The neighbor's small dog, Beethoven, escaped her yard. Now she is down by the pond with Roy and Connie's hen Daisy in her mouth. Daisy is a beautiful hen with fluffy white tail feathers. Connie is too late to save Daisy. Connie's precious pet soon dies in her arms. Connie sits down in the yard. She holds the pet and cries.

Another pet is deeply upset. A tall, white duck named Waddlesworth sees Connie holding Daisy. Waddlesworth thinks Connie has killed Daisy. So, for the next few weeks, Waddlesworth attacks Connie whenever he sees her. He bites and pinches her hard with his strong bill. Sometimes it is as hard for us as it is for Waddlesworth to know our friends from our enemies.

This week we will look at a king of Judah who also had this problem. We will try to understand why he made the wrong choices he did.

DANGER FROM THE NORTH (Isaiah 7:1–9)

What scary experience does Ahaz have while he is king? For the answer, read 2 Kings 15:37, 38; 2 Kings 16:5, 6; and Isaiah 7:1, 2.

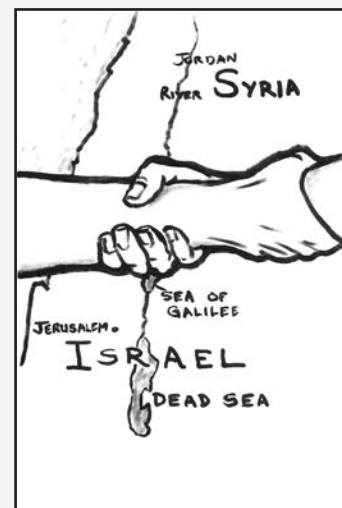
The kingdoms of northern Israel (also named Ephraim) and Syria (also named Aram) fight against the smaller country of Judah in the south. Judah is weak from attacks by the Edomites and Philistines. In the past, Judah fought against Israel. But now that Israel joins with Syria, Judah will be in big trouble. Bible experts believe that Israel and Syria want to force Judah to join them to fight against the mighty king of Assyria. Assyria's king is Tiglath-pileser the Third (named "Pul" in 2 Kings 15:19). Tiglath-pileser's kingdom keeps growing. His power is a threat to Syria and Israel. So, Israel and Syria put away their disagreements with each other. For many years, the two countries fight each other. But now, they join together. If they can beat Judah, then they can put a "puppet" king on the throne (Isaiah 7:5, 6), a king they can control.

What is Ahaz's answer to the problem when everything falls apart around him? For the answer, read 2 Kings 16:7–9 and 2 Chronicles 28:16.

Ahaz does not trust that God is the only Friend who can save his country. Ahaz tries to make Tiglath-pileser the Third his friend. Tiglath-pileser is the enemy of the enemies of Ahaz. So, Tiglath-pileser is happy to help Judah against Syria and Israel. Ahaz gives Tiglath-pileser a large bribe, or gift of money, for his help. This gives Tiglath-pileser the perfect excuse to take over Syria, which he does (2 Kings 16:9). The friendship between Ahaz and Tiglath-pileser breaks Israel's partnership with Syria. So, it looks as if Ahaz saves Judah.

We should not be surprised by what Ahaz does here. He is one of the worst kings ever to sit on the throne of Judah. (Read 2 Kings 16:3, 4; 2 Chronicles 28:2–4.)

When we read about Ahaz, we can see why he solves the problem of his country the way he does. What personal lesson is there for us? If we are not obeying the Lord now, what makes us think we will have the faith to trust Him when bad things happen? (Read James 2:22 and Jeremiah 12:5.)



The kingdoms of northern Israel (also named Ephraim) and Syria (also named Aram) fight against the smaller country of Judah in the south.

ISAIAH GOES TO MEET THE KING (Isaiah 7:3–9)

While Ahaz comes up with a plan to save Judah, God knows some things that Ahaz does not. For one thing, God is the One who lets the trouble happen. Why? God wants to help Ahaz to see his mistakes and turn to Him (2 Chronicles 28:5, 19). Also, God knows that if Ahaz accepts help from Assyria, it will be a bad thing. Then Judah will be under the control of a foreign power. Judah will never be the same again. So, God sends Isaiah to meet the king, who is on his way to check on the water of the city. The job of Isaiah is to convince the king not to contact the Assyrian leader.

Why does the Lord tell Isaiah to take his son, Shear-jashub, with him (Isaiah 7:3)?

Of course, Ahaz must be surprised when Isaiah greets him and introduces his son, whose name means “a remnant shall come back.” A remnant is a small group that is removed from a larger group. The name of the boy will raise many questions in the mind of the king. Who is this remnant? Where shall they come back from? The father of the boy is a prophet, or special messenger. So, maybe his name is a warning from God that the Jews will become slaves. Or maybe the name of the boy shows that the people of God must turn back to Him. (The verb “come back” also can mean turning back to God.) The message from God to Ahaz is: The name Shear-jashub means what you make it mean. Turn from your sins, or your enemies will carry you away to their country. From there, a small group of Jews will come back to Judah. The choice is yours!



Isaiah greets Ahaz and introduces his son, whose name means “a small group shall come back.”

How well does the message of God meet the needs of the king? For the answer, read Isaiah 7:4–9.

The danger from Syria and Israel will pass. Powers that look the same as big, scary volcanoes to Ahaz are nothing in God’s eyes. They are the same as “ ‘two burning sticks’ ” (Isaiah 7:4, ERV). There is no need for Ahaz to ask Assyria for help. But if Ahaz wants to make the right decision, he needs to trust the Lord and His promises. Ahaz must “ ‘stand firm’ ” (Isaiah 7:9, NIV) in his faith and “ ‘believe’ ” (ERV) that God will save him. The words for “stand” and “believe” come from the same Hebrew word that also means “truth” and “amen.” When we say amen, we are saying that we trust in God. So, Ahaz needs to trust in God. Then he will stand strong.

ANOTHER CHANCE (Isaiah 7:12)

Ahaz turns away from the invitation of Isaiah to trust in God. God is full of mercy. He gives Ahaz another chance. God tells Ahaz to ask Him for a miracle or sign. “ ‘The sign can come from a place as deep as Sheol [the grave] or as high as the skies’ ” (Isaiah 7:11, ERV). Here is one of the biggest invitations to believe that God ever gave to a human. God puts no limits on the sign. God does not limit His offer to the half of His kingdom, as human kings do in Bible times. That is the most that human kings ever offer (read Esther 5:6; Esther 7:2; and Mark 6:23). God is ready to empty all of heaven and earth for an evil king if only he will believe! As a sign, Ahaz can ask for God to give him a lot of gold. Or he can ask for as many soldiers as there are specks of sand by the Mediterranean Sea.

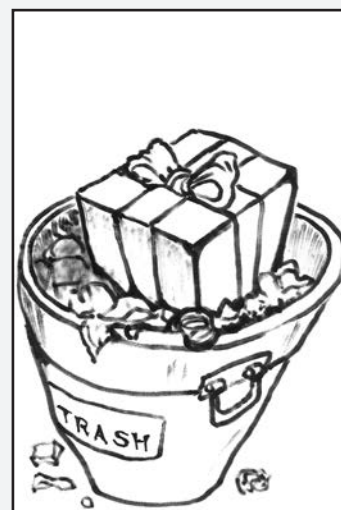
Why does Ahaz answer the way he does? For the answer, read Isaiah 7:12.

When we first read it, the answer of Ahaz looks holy and filled with respect for God. Ahaz will not put God to the test, as the Israelites did many hundreds of years ago in the desert (Exodus 17:2; Deuteronomy 6:16). What was different then? God **invites** Ahaz to put Him to the test (compare Malachi 3:10). God does not do that for the Israelites in the desert. So, if Ahaz accepts this wonderful gift, God will be pleased. It will not wear God out or upset Him. But Ahaz does not want God to help him believe. Ahaz shuts faith out of his heart.

Read Isaiah 7:13. What is Isaiah saying in this verse?

Isaiah tells Ahaz that he is making God tired and weary by refusing to put God to the test. The worst part is that Isaiah says that God is “my God” (Isaiah 7:13, KJV), but not the God of the king. That is very different from Isaiah 7:11, just two verses earlier. In Isaiah 7:11, Isaiah asks the king to ask for a sign from the Lord “your God.” Why the change? When Ahaz refuses God’s offer, he rejects the Lord as his God. This shows that the Lord is the God of Isaiah, and not of Ahaz.

What does our study today teach us about how patient God is with us?



If Ahaz accepts this wonderful gift, God will be pleased. But Ahaz does not want God to help him believe.

THE SIGN OF A SON (Isaiah 7:14)

God offers to give Ahaz a sign that “ ‘can come from a place as deep as Sheol [the grave] or as high as the skies’ ” (Isaiah 7:11, ERV). But Ahaz does not accept the offer of God. So, God comes up with a sign (Isaiah 7:14). We can expect this sign to be wonderful beyond anything we can ever think of (compare Isaiah 55:9; 1 Corinthians 2:9).

Surprise! The sign is a son. But how can a young woman having a baby and naming him “Immanuel” be a big sign?

Who is the woman? Who is her Child?

The Bible does not say that this sign or promise ever happens in Old Testament times. The other signs that God gives in the Old Testament all come true in Old Testament times. One example is the sign Gideon asks for (Judges 6:36–40). So, let us look at some possible guesses for when this promise may have happened in Old Testament times:

1. The word for “young woman” in the Old Testament means a young woman who is old enough to be married. So, many Bible thinkers believe that this young woman is a married woman living in Jerusalem. Maybe she is the wife of Isaiah. She is named the “woman prophet [special messenger from God].” But the name of her son is Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isaiah 8:1–4), not Immanuel.

2. Some Bible thinkers believe that Immanuel is Hezekiah, Ahaz’s son. Hezekiah becomes king after Ahaz. But the Bible never uses the name Immanuel for Hezekiah.

3. Immanuel is a bit of a mystery. His name means “God with us.” It shows us that God will be with His people. So, this tells us that Immanuel may be the same person as the special Son talked about in Isaiah 9 and 11. If so, what Isaiah says about Him in Isaiah 11:10 goes far beyond anything the Bible ever says about good King Hezekiah.

4. An unmarried woman who chooses to have a child outside of marriage has sinned (Deuteronomy 22:20, 21). How can she, then, be a sign to fill people with faith?

The New Testament tells us that Jesus is Immanuel (Matthew 1:21–23). His birth is a miracle. His mother is everything Isaiah talked about. Maybe a real person named Immanuel lived in King Ahaz’s day who is a symbol of the future Savior. We do not know. But what we do know is that “when the right time came, God sent his Son, who was born from a woman” (Galatians 4:4, ERV). This is Jesus, or God with us.



Ahaz does not accept the offer of God. So, God comes up with a sign (Isaiah 7:14).

“GOD IS WITH US”! (Isaiah 7:14)

Isaiah’s sons are named Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz. These names have special meaning. Shear-jashub, as we saw, means “a small group of people shall come back.” Maher-shalal-hash-baz shows that soon Damascus and Samaria will be robbed by the King of Assyria. In the same way, Immanuel has meaning. The exact meaning is “with us God.” But most Bibles write it as “God with us.” This wording misses something important. Do you see that the meaning of Immanuel is missing a verb? That is because many Hebrew names do not include the “to be” verb. We must put it in because it is not written in Hebrew. So, the name Immanuel must be written as “God **is** with us” (compare the same words in Isaiah 8:10). In the same way, the Greek name Jesus (which is short for the Hebrew Joshua) means “The LORD **is** the One who saves me.” Again, we need to add the verb (compare the name Isaiah, which means “God’s saving plan”).

But the name “Immanuel” is not just an idea. It also is a promise that happens right now: “God **is** with us”!

God is with us. What does this promise mean?

This is the strongest message of comfort that God can ever give us. God does not promise that we will not suffer pain and hard times. But God promises to be with us when we do. The psalmist says: “Even if I walk though [in] a valley as dark as the grave, I will not be afraid of any danger, because you are with me” (Psalm 23:4, ERV).

“Where is the Lord when the Babylonians throw Daniel’s three friends into the fire? With them (Daniel 3:23–25). Where is the Lord when Jacob fights all night with the Stranger? In Jacob’s arms as close as He can get (Genesis 32:24–30).

“When the Lord comes to help us, He often does not come in a body that we can see. But He is there helping His people. He shares our experiences. Where is the Lord when the angry crowd accuses Stephen? He is ‘standing at God’s right side’ (Acts 7:55, ERV). But when Jesus went back to heaven after waking up from the dead, He ‘sat down at the right side of God’ (Hebrews 1:3, ERV). Why does Jesus stand when Stephen is in trouble and about to be killed with stones? Because Jesus is not going to take that sitting down!”—Roy Gane, *God’s Faulty Heroes* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), page 66, adapted.



The name Immanuel means “God is with us.”

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “ “She will have a son, and she will name him Immanuel” ’ [Isaiah 7:14, ICB]. God’s ‘light gives us the light to know God’s glory. His glory is shown in the face of Christ [Jesus]’ (2 Corinthians 4:6, NlrV). Before time started, the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father. ‘Christ is the one who is exactly like [the same as] God’ [2 Corinthians 4:4, ERV]. Jesus shows the power of God and royal glory to us. Jesus came to this earth when it was made dark with sin. He came to show us the light of the love of God. He came to be ‘God with us.’ That is why Isaiah said that ‘he will be called [named] Immanuel’ [Isaiah 7:14, NlrV].” —Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 19, adapted.

“If Ahaz accepted this message from heaven, things would have been better for the kingdom of Judah. But Ahaz chose to trust in human help. He asked for help from people who worshiped false gods. Ahaz lost all hope. That caused him to do something very foolish. He sent a message to Tiglath-pileser, the king of Assyria: ‘ “I am your servant. I am like [the same as] a son to you. Come and save me from the king of Aram [Syria] and the king of Israel. They have come to fight me” ’ [2 Kings 16:7, ERV]. Ahaz also sent the King of Assyria an expensive present from his treasure house and from the storehouse in the temple of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 329, adapted.



“Ahaz chose to trust in human help.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What if you need to make a big decision? When is it right to ask God for a sign? What are the dangers of doing that?
- ② It is good to have human help. But how do you understand that human help has limits?
- ③ Russian writer Leo Tolstoy wrote to a friend: “When a man understands that everything ends in death, then nothing is worse than life.” How does our knowledge that “God is with us” answer Tolstoy?

Summary: King Ahaz has no faith in God. God puts King Ahaz in a tough spot so that he must make a difficult decision: to believe or not believe in God. The Lord offers Ahaz any sign that his mind can think of. God does this to help Ahaz have faith. But Ahaz refuses to let God show him why he should believe. In the end, Ahaz chooses as his “friend” the king of Assyria.

FLOATING RED BOOK

Toroni Kumar Tripura is excited to get a Bible with a beautiful red cover. Toroni lives in a faraway village in southeast Bangladesh. Toroni just finished doing some Bible lessons by mail. His Bible teachers sent him the Bible as a gift.

Toroni must be careful.

His father is the religious leader in a non-Christian religion for their family. For sure, Father will not be pleased that his son has a Bible about the God of heaven.

Toroni is not worried. He studies the Bible lessons every night while his parents sleep. He wants to read the red Bible at night too.

This plan works. At least, for a while.

Toroni takes care of the family cows during the day. Then he comes home at night. Toroni waits for his parents to fall asleep. Then he turns on a small flashlight and reads about God.

After a while, Father catches Toroni reading the Bible. Father is very angry. The next day, after Toroni leaves the house, Father takes the red Bible. Then he throws it into the muddy Chengi River.

Toroni is upset when he finds out that his red Bible is missing. He knows right away that Father got rid of the Bible.

What can Toroni do? He cannot afford to buy another Bible. The Bible school may not want to send him a second Bible. Toroni wants to read the Bible so badly. He wants to read more about God.

Some time goes by. Then Toroni goes swimming in the Chengi River. He sees something floating in the water. Toroni often sees plastic bottles and other trash floating in the river. But this thing looks different.

Toroni swims closer to look at it.

He reaches out and grabs it. Then he swims to the beach and climbs out of the water. Toroni raises his hand to see that he is holding a dripping red Bible.

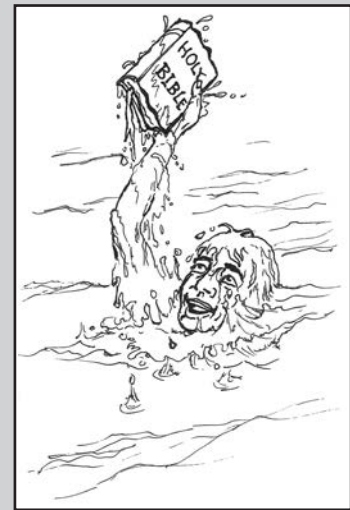
Toroni cannot believe it. He is holding his missing Bible!

Toroni puts the book on the grass in the hot sun to dry. The Bible takes 14 days to dry in the sun. Then Toroni starts to read it again. As he reads, he falls in love with God.

Toroni takes a risk reading the Bible again. He knows it will make Father angry. But Toroni cannot keep his new love for God to himself. Toroni tells other villagers about the God of the red Bible that did not sink in the river. The villagers are surprised and excited. They ask Toroni to tell them more about God. Today, most of the villagers and many of Toroni's family members worship the God of the red Bible.

INSIDE *Story*

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



Toroni raises his hand to see that he is holding a dripping red Bible.

