

When Your World “Crashes”



SABBATH—APRIL 10

FRIENDS OR ENEMIES? One Sabbath, Connie and Roy drove into their driveway after church. A bantam hen¹ flew across the yard in front of them. Something was wrong. The pet birds were supposed to be safe in their pen. Beethoven, the neighbor’s small dog, had also escaped her yard and was down by the pond with Daisy in her mouth. Daisy was a beautiful laying hen with soft white tail feathers. Connie tried to save Daisy, her favorite pet. But it was too late. With a broken neck, Daisy soon died in Connie’s arms. Connie sat down in the yard, held the dead bird, and cried.

A tall, white duck named Waddlesworth saw Connie holding Daisy and thought Connie had killed Daisy. So for the next few weeks, Waddlesworth would pinch Connie painfully with his strong bill. Sometimes it is hard to tell who your friends are and who your enemies are.

This week, we will look at a king of Judah who could not tell who his friends were and who enemies were. We will try to understand why the king made the wrong choices that he did.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK’S LESSON: What dangers was Judah facing, and why? How did King Ahaz² deal with those threats, and why? What great thing did God promise to do for Ahaz, if Ahaz would show faith? What does it mean that “God is with us”?

MEMORY VERSE: “If you do not stand firm [strong] in faith, you shall not stand at all” (Isaiah 7:9).

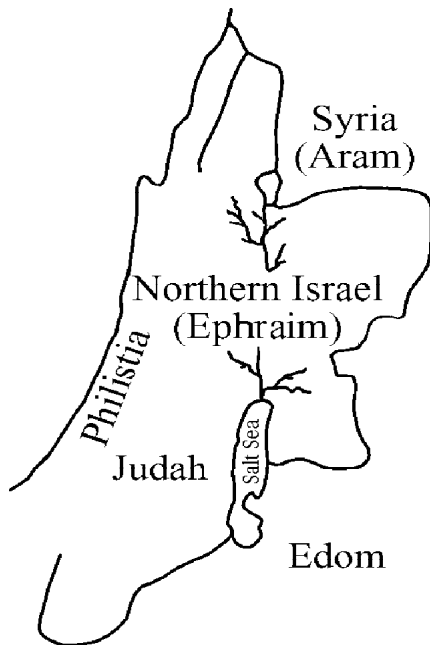
¹bantam hen—a small, fighting female bird.

²Ahaz—Judah’s 12th king.

SUNDAY—APRIL 11

**DANGER FROM THE NORTH
(Isaiah 7:1-9).****What serious problem did King Ahaz face early in his rule? 2 Kings 15:37-38; 2 Kings 16:5-6; Isaiah 7:1, 2.**

The kingdoms of Northern Israel (Ephraim) and Syria (Aram) tried to force Judah to join them. This happened when Judah was weak from attacks by the Edomites³ and Philistines.⁴ In the past, Judah had been on Israel's side. But an agreement between Israel and Syria wanted to force Judah to join with them in fighting against the mighty power of Tiglath-pileser III⁵ of Assyria



³Edomites—the people of Edom living to the south of Judah.

⁴Philistines—the people of Philistia living to the west of Judah.

⁵Tiglath-pileser III—a strong king of Assyria.

⁶puppet ruler—a weak king who rules a nation that is conquered by another nation. The puppet ruler must do what the conquering nation wants him or her to do.

(called “Pul” in 2 Kings 15:19). Tiglath-pileser III continued to threaten Israel and Syria with his growing empire. Israel and Syria had suspended their long struggle against each other with plans to fight Assyria. Israel and Syria planned to conquer (defeat) Judah. Then they would place a puppet ruler⁶ in Judah (Isaiah 7:5, 6). In this way they could use Judah's weapons and soldiers.

What did Ahaz do when the world was crashing down around him? 2 Kings 16:7-9; 2 Chronicles 28:16.

Ahaz failed to recognize that God was the only Friend who could save him and Judah. Instead, he tried to become friends with Tiglath-pileser III. Tiglath-pileser III was the enemy of Ahaz's enemies. Tiglath-pileser III agreed to accept Ahaz's cry for help against Syria and Israel (2 Kings 16:9). The power of the Syrian-Israelite partnership was broken. It looked as if Ahaz had saved Judah, but he really did not.

Ahaz's behavior was no surprise, because he had been one of Judah's worst kings up to that point (2 Kings 16:3-4; 2 Chronicles 28:2-4).

We know what Ahaz's character was like. So we can understand why he behaved as he did. What lesson

can we learn from Ahaz’s behavior? If we are not trusting God now, why do we think we will have the faith to trust Him when real troubles come? James 2:22; Jeremiah 12:5.

MONDAY—APRIL 12

ATTEMPTED ACTION (Isaiah 7:3-9).

Ahaz was thinking about how to meet the threat from Israel and Syria. But God knew some things that Ahaz did not know. God had let trouble come to Ahaz in order to bring him to his senses (2 Chronicles 28:5, 19). Asking Tiglath-pileser III for help seemed to be a good idea. But God knew that help from Tiglath-pileser III would bring Judah under foreign control and that Judah would never be able to escape from this foreign control.

The risks of joining with Tiglath-pileser III were high. So God sent Isaiah to warn Ahaz. Isaiah was to warn Ahaz not to get in touch with Tiglath-pileser III.

Why did God tell Isaiah to take his son Shearjashub with him (Isaiah 7:3)?

Ahaz would be surprised when Isaiah greeted him and introduced his son Shearjashub. *Shearjashub* meant “a remnant⁷ shall return.” Who was the

remnant? And what shall they return from? Shearjashub’s father was a prophet, so the name suggested a serious message from God about people going into slavery. Isaiah’s message also suggested returning to God by way of repenting.⁸ (The verb “return” also carries the meaning of repentance.⁹) The message from God to Ahaz was: Turn from your sins, or go into slavery! And from captivity, a remnant will return. The decision is yours!



Sin turns a person into a slave.

How did God’s message speak to Ahaz’s situation? Isaiah 7:4-9.

The threat from Syria and Israel would pass. Judah would be saved. To Ahaz, Syria and Israel looked like two big, fiery volcanoes. But in God’s sight, Syria and Israel were only “two smoldering [smoking] stumps of firebrands”¹⁰

⁷remnant—a small group of God’s faithful people.

⁸repenting—being sorry for your sins, and turning away from your sins.

⁹repentance—being sorry for your sins, and turning away from your sins.

¹⁰firebrands—pieces of burning wood.

(Isaiah 7:4). There was no need for Ahaz to ask Tiglath-pileser III for help.

Ahaz needed to trust God and His promises. He needed to believe in order to be established¹¹ (Isaiah 7:9). The words for “believe” and “be established” come from the same Hebrew word. This word is also the basis for the Hebrew word for “truth” (reliable¹²) and the word “Amen” (agreeing to what is true/reliable). Ahaz needed to be sure in order to be made sure. He needed to rely (depend) in order to be reliable.

Look at the last part of Isaiah 7:9. Why is faith and belief so important in order to be “established”? What are we to be established in? How does being established affect our daily life?

TUESDAY—APRIL 13

ANOTHER CHANCE (Isaiah 7:10-13).

Ahaz did not accept Isaiah’s warning about having faith. So God gave Ahaz another chance. God told Ahaz to ask for a sign that was “deep as Sheol [the grave] or high as heaven”! (Isaiah 7:11). Isaiah 7:11 is one of the greatest invitations to faith ever given to a human. God was ready and willing to empty all of heaven and earth for the wicked King Ahaz if he would only believe!

¹¹to be established—to be made strong.

¹²reliable—dependable, trustworthy.

¹³compare—show how things are the same.

Why did Ahaz answer the way he did? Isaiah 7:12.

Ahaz’s answer seems honorable and respectful to God. He will not test God in the same way the Israelites tested God during their wilderness wanderings (Exodus 17:2; Deuteronomy 6:16). But God invited Ahaz to put Him to the test (compare¹³ Malachi 3:10). God did *not* invite the Israelites to put Him to a test. To accept God’s very generous gift would please Him, not test His patience. But Ahaz was not even willing to let God help him believe. He closed and bolted the door of his heart to shut out faith.

What is Isaiah saying in Isaiah 7:13?

Isaiah explained that pretending not to wear out God’s patience actually did wear out God’s patience! The most troubling part of Isaiah 7:13 is the fact that Isaiah speaks about “my [Isaiah’s] God.” But in Isaiah 7:11, Isaiah asked Ahaz to ask for a sign from the Lord “your [Ahaz’s] God.” When Ahaz refused God’s offer, he refused to accept God as his God. So God was the God of Isaiah, but not of Ahaz.

What does today’s lesson teach us about God’s patience and willingness to bring all of us to salvation? What does today’s lesson tell

us about how blind and hard the human heart is when it refuses to surrender to God? Suppose Ahaz had asked for a sign and had received that sign. Do you think he then would have believed? Explain your answer.

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 14

SIGN OF A SON (Isaiah 7:14).

An offer of a sign as “deep as Sheol [the grave] or high as heaven” (Isaiah 7:11) did not help Ahaz to believe. So when God says He Himself will come up with a sign (Isaiah 7:14), we expect that sign to be very surprising (compare Isaiah 55:9; 1 Corinthians 2:9).

But the sign is a young woman giving birth to a Son and calling Him “Immanuel.” How could this sign be a great promise from God?

Who is the woman, and who is her Child?

No verses in the Old Testament show a fulfillment of this sign. But following are some of the possible fulfillments, based on the Old Testament:

1. The word for “young woman” means a young woman who is old enough to marry. For this reason, many Bible scholars¹⁴ think she is a married woman living in Jerusalem, and that

she is the wife of Isaiah. Isaiah 8 does show the birth of a son to Isaiah by “the prophetess,” meaning Isaiah’s wife. Her prophetic messages are about her children (compare Isaiah 7:3; Isaiah 8:18). But this son was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Isaiah 8:1-4), not Immanuel. The signs of the two boys are almost the same: By the time they are old enough to choose good or evil, Syria and northern Israel would be destroyed (Isaiah 7:16; Isaiah 8:4).

2. Some Bible scholars suggest that Immanuel is Hezekiah, son of Ahaz. Hezekiah was a good king. But the Bible does not show that people use the name Immanuel to mean Hezekiah.

3. This Son Immanuel is mysterious. The name *Immanuel* means “God with us.” So He could be the special Son prophesied in Isaiah 9 and 11. If this Son is the “Mighty God” (Isaiah 9:6, TEV) and “from the royal line of David” (Isaiah 11:10), then He is more than just a good human king, like Hezekiah.

4. A natural birth to an *unmarried* woman who is old enough to be married would result in an illegitimate¹⁵ child (Deuteronomy 22:20, 21). Why would God use such a child as a sign to inspire faith?

None of these Old Testament explanations are very good. So we must look to the New Testament to help us understand Isaiah 7:14. The New Testament points to Jesus as Immanuel (Matthew 1:21-23). Jesus was born miraculously¹⁶ and with purity to an un-

¹⁴scholars—people who earn a living studying one particular subject.

¹⁵illegitimate—a child born out of wedlock.

¹⁶miraculously—being the result of a miracle.

married, betrothed (engaged) virgin. Jesus is God’s Son (Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 3:17). He is “from the royal line of David” (Isaiah 11:1, 10; Revelation 22:16). Perhaps an earlier “Immanuel” served as a forerunner (earlier example) of Jesus. We do not know. But we do know that “when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother” (Galatians 4:4, TEV). God did this to help us understand that He is with us.

How does Jesus’ becoming a human to live with us comfort us in this often cold, uncaring world?

THURSDAY—APRIL 15

“GOD IS WITH US”! (Isaiah 7:14).

The names of Isaiah’s children have meaning. *Shearjashub* means “a remnant shall return.” *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* means “swift [very quick] is booty,¹⁷ speedy is prey.”¹⁸ The name *Immanuel*, too, has a meaning. *Immanuel* means “with us God.” But the common translation “God with us” misses something important. Other Hebrew names like “with us God” do not have verbs.¹⁹ The verb “to be” must be added because it is not written in Hebrew. So *Immanuel* must be translated “God is with us” (read the same words

in Isaiah 8:10). For example, the name *Jesus* (Greek for the Hebrew name *Yehoshua* [Joshua]) means “the Lord is salvation.” Again, the verb is added.

So the name *Immanuel* is not just a name telling us where God is. The name is also a strong promise that is fulfilled now: “God is with us”!

What does it mean to you personally that God is with us now?

There is no stronger promise and comfort. God does not promise that His people will not have hardship and pain. But He promises to be with His people when they do have hardship and pain. The psalmist²⁰ says: “Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me. Your shepherd’s rod and staff protect me” (Psalm 23:4, TEV).

God says: “When you pass through deep waters, I will be with you; your troubles will not overwhelm [crush] you. When you pass through fire, you will not be burned; the hard trials [troubles] that come will not hurt you” (Isaiah 43:2, TEV).

“Where was God when the Babylonians threw Daniel’s three friends into the fire? God was with them in the fire (Daniel 3:23-25). And where was God when Jacob wrestled until dawn? In Jacob’s arms, as close as He could get (Genesis 32:24-30).

¹⁷booty—things taken from an enemy in a war.

¹⁸prey—an animal that is being hunted.

¹⁹verbs—words that show action.

²⁰psalmist—person who wrote a psalm.



God was in Jacob's arms!

“God may not appear in person on earth, but He goes through the experiences of His people with them. Where was God when the mob threw stones at Stephen? ‘Standing at the right hand of God’ (Acts 7:55). But when Jesus went to heaven, He ‘sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high [God]’ (Hebrews 1:3). Why did Jesus stand when Stephen was in trouble, about to be stoned to death? As Morris Venden has said, ‘Jesus was not going to take that sitting down (doing nothing)!’”—Adapted from Roy Gane, *God's Faulty Heroes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1996), p. 66.

We have the promise that “God is with us.” But what difference does

that promise make if we still suffer? What good does knowing that God is with us do for us?



God is with us.

FRIDAY—APRIL 16

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “His name shall be called Immanuel, . . . ‘God with us.’ People see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. From the days of eternity,²¹ Jesus was one with the Father. He was ‘the image [copy] of God,’ the image of God’s greatness and majesty, the image of God’s glory. Jesus came to this earth to show us God’s glory. He came to earth to show us God’s love. Jesus came to be ‘God with us.’ So prophecy pointed to Jesus when Isaiah 7:14 said, ‘His [Jesus]’ name shall be called Immanuel.’ ” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

²¹eternity—life without end.

“It would have been good for Judah if Ahaz had accepted God’s message. But Ahaz chose to get help from non-believers. Ahaz felt hopeless, so he sent word to Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria: ‘I am your devoted [faithful] servant. Come and rescue [save] me from the kings of Syria and of Israel, who are attacking me’ (2 Kings 16:7, TEV). Ahaz gave Tiglath-pileser III an expensive present from his treasure and from the temple storehouse to pay him for his help.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 329.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. When you are ready to make a decision, is it proper to ask God for a sign? Why might it be dangerous to ask God for a sign?

2. It is good to have human help. But how can we recognize the limits of human help?
3. Russian author Leo Tolstoy argued that “once a man has understood that death puts a stop to everything, then there is nothing worse than life.”—Adapted. How does our knowledge that “God is with us” answer Tolstoy’s argument?

SUMMARY: God brought faithless King Ahaz to a situation where he had to choose to believe God. God offered Ahaz any sign that his imagination could invent in order to help him choose God. But Ahaz refused even to let God show why he should believe in Him. Ahaz chose Tiglath-pileser III to help him instead of God.