

3. When Your World is Falling Apart (1Q 2021—Isaiah)

Biblical Material: Isa. 7:1–9, Isa. 7:10–13, Isa. 7:14.

Quotes

- Fear is the glue that keeps you stuck. Faith is the solvent that sets you free. *Shannon L. Alder*
- We must cease striving and trust God to provide what He thinks is best and in whatever time He chooses to make it available. But this kind of trusting doesn't come naturally. It's a spiritual crisis of the will in which we must choose to exercise faith. *Charles R. Swindoll*
- The more you believe and trust God, the more limitless your possibilities become for your family, your career - for your life! *Rick Warren*
- Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. *Corrie Ten Boom*
- Faith is a reasoning trust, a trust which reckons thoughtfully and confidently upon the trustworthiness of God. *John R. Stott*
- If you wish to know God, you must know his Word. If you wish to perceive His power, you must see how He works by his Word. If you wish to know His purpose before it comes to pass, you can only discover it by His Word. *Charles Spurgeon*

Questions

What is significant here in all this political intrigue and shifting alliances? What do we know of Ahaz and his character? What role does God play in the life of the people at this time? What is the tempting alternative to trusting in God? Is there also not the danger of presumption? How does God come across in this very human catalogue of war, conspiracy, and mistrust?

Bible summary

The chapter deals with the threat of an allied attack on the southern kingdom of Judah by a coalition of the Arameans and the northern kingdom of Israel. God instructs Isaiah to tell King Ahaz of Judah not to be worried. (Isa. 7:1–9). God then promises to give Ahaz a sign, but Ahaz refuses, apparently trying to be pious by “not putting the Lord to the test,” but in reality not want to deal with God in any way, it seems. (Isa. 7:10–13). The promise of Immanuel is readily taken to point forward to Jesus, (Isa. 7:14) but we must not dismiss some contemporary fulfillment. The rest of the chapter however warns Ahaz about a future Assyrian attack, the very ally he was considering. This is for study next week.

Comment

The choice for Ahaz was between relying on human assistance (Assyria) or divine aid. For those who are used to the ways of the world, it is usually easier to place confidence in “realities,” in “practicalities,” and to see religious ideas as “unrealistic.” While you might “trust God,” you made sure to keep your powder dry! We all have a tendency to want to take matters into our own hands, to run our own lives, and only call on God when no alternatives are left.

Isaiah reminds Ahaz that there is no alternative to God—especially at this time of national crisis—and that he should look for a personal relationship with God immediately. Ahaz responds with pretentious piety that he will not ask for a test, even though God offers. In other words, he really doesn't want to know! In his response, God gives assurance for the present

crisis, but also points to the greater assurance of his presence and salvation—the coming of Immanuel. In the immediate context the participants would not see the promise of Jesus’ coming in much detail, but God blends the events so as to give hope beyond the pressing crisis.

As the lesson points out (Monday), Isaiah’s words to Ahaz could be taken in different ways. Were they a promise of redemption before or after slavery? What was the remnant? And so on. What would happen was contingent on Ahaz’ response, as is so often the case. God always wants to save and redeem, but he needs our right response.

God also makes it clear in his message that while Ahaz was terrified at the threat of the Arameans and the northern kingdom of Israel engaging in an alliance against him, he should have been far more worried about the spiritual state of his country and God’s warning that Assyria would soon come to attack it. Sometimes we worry about things and don’t see the bigger danger! Ahaz was trying to choose between an alliance with Assyria or with Egypt, forgetting about the “divine option.”

What is the personal application here? Is this God saying “Do as I tell you, or else?” Or are these the words of a loving Father who seeks to help his rebellious children? Remember Ahaz was one of the worst kings, and the final crisis and exile of Judah is not far ahead. God waits patiently, and works for our best, but if we persistently refuse, he has no option but to let us go our own way to our destruction. Respecting our freewill and personal choice, God still does all he can to lead us, and to help us to make wise decisions that will lead to eternal life.

God wants to convince us—even being willing to stoop to our level and give us signs and proof. How should we respond? Like Ahaz, who claims very piously that he doesn’t want a sign? Why not? Because he doesn’t really want to have to deal with God anyway! So in the end God gives the signs, the proof, and the consequences anyway...

Ellen White comments

Had Ahaz and the chief men of his realm been true servants of the Most High, they would have had no fear of so unnatural an alliance as had been formed against them. But repeated transgression had shorn them of strength. Stricken with a nameless dread of the retributive judgments of an offended God, the heart of the king “was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind.” Isaiah 7:2. In this crisis the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, bidding him meet the trembling king and say:

“Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted . . . [Isaiah 7:4-7, 9 quoted]

Well would it have been for the kingdom of Judah had Ahaz received this message as from heaven. But choosing to lean on the arm of flesh, he sought help from the heathen. In desperation he sent word to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria: “I am thy servant and thy son: come up, and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me.” 2 Kings 16:7. The request was accompanied by a rich present from the king’s treasure and from the temple storehouse.

The help asked for was sent, and King Ahaz was given temporary relief, but at what a cost to Judah! The tribute offered aroused the cupidity of Assyria, and that treacherous nation soon threatened to overflow and spoil Judah. Ahaz and his unhappy subjects were now harassed by the fear of falling completely into the hands of the cruel Assyrians. {PK 328-9}

Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing. {DA 330.1}