

**ISAIAH 7: 1-9**  
*(Reading: Isaiah 6:1-7:9)*

**Without God's Light It's All Dark!**

Chapter 7 is certainly different than chapter 6. And yet even in its first nine verses there are some strong connections.

One way we could see how the two chapters relate is by using the analogy of Sunday and Monday. Because they certainly are different days for us, aren't they? And yet how many connections don't they have!

It is Sunday which starts off the rest of the week. And how much didn't Isaiah's commissioning in chapter 6 really start off what He's was going to do the rest of his life. A long, eventful life. A life which truly epitomised the prophetic calling.

You see, many of us will know of Isaiah. He is the one whose prophecies were so stunningly fulfilled in the New Testament. For of all the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah was the one most full of the Messiah!

Indeed, our text begins a part of the book of Isaiah which is 'The Immanuel Book.' The chapters 7 till 12 tell with the most vivid and accurate words who the Messiah was and what He would do.

And it all starts in chapter 6. Well, actually, it begins before that too. But it's chapter 6 specifically which sets the framework for what follows. There we see the commissioning of the Lord's prophet.

**The Background To This**

We will come back to the role of the prophet in a moment. But now, let's see first of all, THE BACKGROUND TO THIS.

This is where we very much meet Monday, because this is where we meet the world. The world which in Isaiah's time was just as political as the one we live in now. For there was the great world power – in that case Assyria. And there were the local regional powers jostling for a piece of the action – Israel, also known as Ephraim, and Syria, also known as Aram. Then there was little old Judah. Judah which had already suffered in a bad way during the reign of previous kings. And now they're being put through the ringer again.

You see, Syria and Israel – the northern ten tribes - wanted to form an alliance against Assyria. And so they approached all the neighbouring countries to join together to overthrow the big bully. Because that's what Assyria certainly was in the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C.. Of all the major powers this world has ever seen the Assyrians were the most barbaric. Worse even than the Japanese during World War 2!

They were cruel. What they did to the nations they over-ran you don't want to hear about! And who has a clue where the Ten Tribes of the northern kingdom ended up after they were comprehensively defeated?

The destruction and dispersion of Israel is still yet to come, however. In the time of the text it's Judah which is under the hammer. The Edomites had raided the land and taken away prisoners. The Philistines had attacked on the other side, sacking towns in the foothills and in the Negev. Israel had captured a major port town on the coast.

For Ahaz, a weak and indecisive ruler, there seemed to be a rapidly diminishing number of options. He had done something, though. He had sent an appeal to Assyria for help, but that help would be a while away. And knowing the Assyrians that help could also turn against him

as much as be for him. For now, though, Jerusalem was the only thing in Judah holding out against the Alliance.

Ahaz was far from being a true son of David. For while he may be a descendant of that godly king there was little faith in him. In fact, what we hear about Ahaz suggests quite a pagan king. For he later worshipped Moloch. 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 16 verse 3 records the time he sacrificed his son in the fire as part of that most detestable religion. And in 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 28 verse 23 he is worshipping the gods of Syria.

In that same 28<sup>th</sup> chapter of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles, verse 22 has a very telling comment about Ahaz. It says that “in his time of trouble King Ahaz became even more unfaithful to the LORD.” And later it describes how he closed the temple and took away all its furnishings.

It seems we find him at the beginning of this process in chapter 7. He hasn't got as bad as he would become. There is a glimmer of hope for Ahaz. In a situation where there's so much insecurity, where the whole nation is so upset, there's the opportunity for reform. And it's Isaiah, Yahweh's prophet, who confronts him with the word of the Lord.

The place they meet tells us a lot about the fearful situation. Verse 3 tells us it was at the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. Ahaz was there for the purpose of securing Jerusalem's water supply in the event of a long siege. He was involved in checking every possible part of Jerusalem's defence. He's grasping every possible physical help he can get!

### **The Place Of The Prophet**

It's at this point that we come back to the role of Isaiah. In the words of the second aspect, we see now THE PLACE OF THE PROPHET.

It is quite a change from where Isaiah was in the previous chapter. That was the most phenomenal time of being in the presence of the King of kings Himself! He who had been completely shown up as the sinful man that He is was yet commissioned to speak for the Most High and glorious God!

And now Isaiah meets one of the lowest of the earthly kings. How far from glory Ahaz is and will ever be. Yet God will use such a man too. He is the King of kings!

And we note again where they meet. For it is at Jerusalem's most vulnerable point. At its weakest link God secures it the strongest way of all.

Ah, but is Ahaz really listening? Will he humble himself and come round? Whichever way he goes, though, there is only one way the Lord can go. In the words of 2 Timothy 2 verses 11 till 13, about Yahweh, the covenant God, “If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” This is the God Isaiah serves. This is the Lord declaring His Word to Ahaz.

And here we note another unique aspect about Isaiah. For he, of all the prophets, has a contact with the kings of Judah which means he brings the Word directly. He has the connections that bring Yahweh to the most powerful earthly positions.

The word which Isaiah brings today has an encouraging theme. Because the two key countries threatening Judah now soon won't be around. They'll be completely destroyed! So those who right now are advancing on Judah, those who even now have their own man sorted to become the new king of Judah – the son of Tabeel – they are going to get a bit of their own medicine back on them. Because it's not up to them what's going to happen. It's what the Sovereign LORD says which matters! Indeed, God will be proved to be this God through what He now says, because it will come true. When verse 8 says “within 65 years” He knows what He's saying. For He will be the One doing it!

With words that are the most gracious, especially considering the apostasy of Ahaz, the Lord tells him not to be afraid. Rezin and Pekah are only “two smouldering stubs of firewood.” While Ahaz was shaking in his boots because of their threat they are nothing but cigarette stubs! They’re absolutely nothing before God!

Indeed, within three years Syria is crushed. In 732 BC she is annihilated. Israel loses her northern territories a year later, in 734 BC. In 12 years time, 722 BC, she’s totally wiped out as a nation. And by the time the 65 years is up as described in verse 8, Israel through a series of deportations and repopulating “will be too shattered to be a people.”

Without God’s light it is all dark, isn’t it? But when things are at their blackest, God’s light still shines for His own. Isaiah wasn’t blind! But now through him God was giving the glasses for Ahaz to see it too!

That’s why Ahaz is told in verse 4 not to be afraid and lose heart. He’s being pointed back to what he should be. He must trust God like David did. And like David he should be a faithful shepherd of his sheep.

Psalm 78 has an apt description of that. In the verses 70 till 72 we read that the Lord “chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pen; from tending the sheep he brought him to be shepherd of his people Jacob; of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them.”

But this was exactly the way Ahaz was not going to go. So Isaiah leaves him at the end of our text with a clear warning. Clear because it uses the Hebrew way of repeating things to make it stronger. For in verse 9 he ends, “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”

We know the subsequent history. Ahaz goes his way. And he ends up putting Judah under Assyria’s control and taxation for close on a hundred years!

### **The Remnant Which Will Remain**

But there is still another strand in our text. One that might not seem so obvious. Still, it is certainly there – and not only because chapter 6 has ended with it!

You might remember the way chapter 6 ended. It described a remnant that would remain.

Small and weak though it might seem, the Lord would keep a witness to His grace still.

Indeed, it would be through that remnant that one day the Messiah would come.

So this aspect is about THE REMNANT WHICH WILL REMAIN – our third aspect. An aspect which is seen here in a symbolic way.

Now you’re wondering! What is pictured instead of spoken? Where is the sign here?

Well, let me test your recall of the text. Don’t look at your Bible! Tell me, who was with Isaiah when he met Ahaz?

Ah, you’re thinking, it was his son! A son with an interesting name – Shear-Jashub. And being a name in the Old Testament it meant something. That meaning was “a remnant will return.”

So this was one sermon Isaiah didn’t need to preach. For there he is with his young son, a lad who would have been about three years old. The fact of his being with his dad in the first place says something. But then to know what his name meant is something else again! Ahaz is being directly confronted with the covenant. The covenant he was breaking. The law of God he was despising. The love of God he was hating. And doesn’t someone who knows better really show their antagonism?

There was Isaiah’s little man. A wee chap. Just like those who truly believed numbered so little. And yet the Lord would bring them through. He would keep them – to his glory and honour. In those words of Isaiah 6 verse 13, “the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”

And let's not forget the way the New Testament understands the word "seed." For not only does it apply them to those of the household of faith, it also draws in the One through whom there is faith.

Galatians 3 describes this line. In verse 16 it says, "The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ."

Ahaz knew the child's name. Otherwise it being mentioned here is meaningless. And he would have known that Isaiah's name itself meant "the Lord is salvation." It was clear, without saying a word, that Ahaz must let the Lord be his salvation and be a part of the remnant that would survive. That would be looking to the Lord's promise in faith. That would be saying his "Amen" to what Isaiah says in verse 9.

You see, the Hebrew word "Amen" means to have faith, to be firm, to be established." And verse 9 definitely speaks about standing firm in the faith. But it's not what Ahaz is going to do. He will not do what the prophets demanded. He will not believe in the covenant God. He will not live in obedience to Yahweh. And He won't seek justice rather than do things his own selfish way.

So it will be in a different way that this king will be used by the King of all kings. God will yet work out His reign, though. That's what we will see further in this chapter. Even a crooked stick he can use.

So if the Lord could work his will despite such openly corrupt rulers as Judah had then, we shouldn't worry that He isn't working out His purposes now. What we are experiencing in our country and in world is nothing new. Throughout history men and women have been set against the Lord and His Word. Those who have known the gospel from very young can be its bitterest enemies. And they don't see the terrible things they do to themselves and everyone else around them. They blindly pursue that path of least resistance. But that's not the narrow path.

Let's realise that what led up to Christ's first coming is what also challenges us as we wait for his second coming. For the scoffers of 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter chapter 3 are even louder now. They are saying what Ahaz and so many others have said through the ages. They jeeringly say, "Where is 'this coming' he promised?" They taunt us about this day.

But they are going to have their day. And even now the Lord is showing them up in their way. For what Paul in Philippians 3 verse 19 says is so true. You see, while "their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame," it is yet never outside what God is working out.

And when His Day does come it will be those who stood in their faith whom will reign with Him for all eternity. Are you going to be one of those kings?