



God Promises

Since God is sovereign, His people can trust His promises.

ISAIAH 7:7-17

“Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth” is an odd idiom. A person can tell the age and quality of a horse by looking at its teeth. To look at the teeth of a horse given as a gift shows a lack of appreciation. The idiom means do not reject a gift someone gives you. In Isaiah’s day, God offered King Ahaz a gift, a sign guaranteeing God’s protection. But Ahaz thought it was better to trust in Assyria instead of God—a decision that would have devastating consequences.

Why are people sometimes prone to believe they can do better than what God offers them?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

ISAIAH 7:1–12:6

The event that precipitated Isaiah's message in Isaiah 7:1–12:6 was what biblical scholars call the Syro-Ephraimite War (735–733 BC). King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria posed a threat to the entire ancient Near East. Eventually, he would turn his attention west toward Israel and Judah. So Pekah, the king of Israel, joined Rezin, the king of Syria, with the hope of forming a coalition of all the kingdoms in the region to defeat the Assyrian invasion.

When King Jotham of Judah and his son, Ahaz, who succeeded him, were called to join the anti-Assyrian pact, they both refused. Therefore, Syria and Israel waged war on Judah to replace Ahaz with a Syrian/Aramean prince and to secure Judah's participation in the alliance against Assyria. Ahaz was shaken by the threat of the Syrians and Israelites. So the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to Ahaz with a message. The message was for Ahaz to stay calm and not fear the threat of Syria and Israel. Ahaz could trust in the Lord to defeat Judah's enemies.

Even though the Lord promised to give Ahaz a sign to prove He would bring down the coalition, Ahaz refused to believe. Instead, Ahaz sent messengers with silver and gold from the Lord's temple and the king's palace as a bribe to Assyria's King Tiglath-pileser. (See 2 Kings 16:7.) Therefore, Judah became a vassal of Assyria. Tiglath-pileser deployed his armies and invaded Syria, deporting the survivors into exile and executing King Rezin. The Assyrians also began their invasion of Israel but stopped when the people of Israel overthrew Pekah. Tiglath-pileser installed Hoshea, a pro-Assyrian king, on Israel's throne and exacted a heavy tribute from them. Ironically, because Ahaz refused to believe God and turned to the Assyrians for help, the Assyrians would eventually turn on Judah and decimate its land and population.

As you read Isaiah 7:7–17, note the contrast between God's kindness to Ahaz and Ahaz's stubbornness. Why is it dangerous to fail to believe God's promises?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GOD INTERVENES (ISA. 7:7-9)

⁷ This is what the Lord GOD says: It will not happen; it will not occur. ⁸ The chief city of Aram is Damascus, the chief of Damascus is Rezin (within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people), ⁹ the chief city of Ephraim is Samaria, and the chief of Samaria is the son of Remaliah. If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all.

VERSE 7

When King Ahaz of Judah refused to join the alliance formed by *Rezin*, king of *Aram* (also called Syria), and Pekah, king of Israel, to go to war with Assyria, the allied kingdoms decided to go to war with Judah. Rezin and Pekah's goal was to replace Ahaz with someone who would support the anti-Assyrian coalition. When this news reached Jerusalem, Ahaz and his people "trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind" (Isa. 7:2). Consequently, God sent Isaiah to assure Ahaz he was safe and could trust in the Lord's plan.

When the word **LORD** or **GOD** is in capital letters in English translations, it indicates Israel's covenantal, personal name of God, "Yahweh." Literally, Isaiah shared what "Lord Yahweh says." By using His personal name, God communicated that the threat against His people was a personal affront to Him. Yahweh's message was clear and concise. The enemies said they would conquer Judah, but the Lord emphatically declared, ***It will not happen; it will not occur.*** The issue before Ahaz was clear: Would he listen to his enemies or would he listen to the Lord?

Second Kings 15:37 and 2 Chronicles 28:5 indicate that the Lord sent Rezin and Pekah against Ahaz because Ahaz "did not do what was right in the LORD's sight ... and made cast images of the Baals. He ... burned his children in the fire, imitating the detestable practices of the nations the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites. He sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree" (2 Chron. 28:1b-4). Ahaz led Judah into committing spiritual adultery against the Lord by his idolatry and murderous sacrifices. So the Lord's message of deliverance to Ahaz through His prophet Isaiah was a demonstration of God's mercy and grace.

DID YOU KNOW?

Israel is sometimes referred to in the Old Testament as *Ephraim*, the Northern Kingdom's most prominent tribe. (See Isa. 11:13; Jer. 7:15; Hos. 5:9-14.) Accordingly, the alliance formed between Syria and Israel to defend against the expansion of Assyria is known as the Syro-Ephraimite war.

VERSES 8-9

By pointing out that *Damascus* was the *chief* or capital of *Aram*, and that *Samaria* was the *chief city* of Israel (*•Ephraim*), God was saying they would not have another capital in Jerusalem. Moreover, they would not have another king in Jerusalem. God had promised David that He would establish David's dynasty forever (2 Sam. 7:11-13). Consequently, God was not going to allow anyone to cut off David's line.

It was just a matter of time before Aram would fall and Rezin would be executed. Also, Israel's time was short; the Assyrians destroyed Samaria in 722 BC and carried off the Northern Kingdom's survivors into exile, never to become an organized people again. If the *sixty-five years* refers to the following sixty-five years from this point, then the reference is to 671 BC when the Assyrians transported conquered foreigners into the region of the former Northern Kingdom. These people became what are known as the Samaritans in the New Testament. Thus, the people of the Northern Kingdom were deprived of their land. So the Lord foretold, *Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people*. As a whole, the unholy alliance between Israel and Aram would be destroyed. Therefore, Judah had no reason to fear the coalition's threats.

However, Isaiah's message served as a warning to Ahaz. Putting his trust in political alliances, such as with Assyria, would be Judah's downfall. Ahaz sat on a throne that was established by the Lord, established on His promises to David and the people of God. David's sons who sat on the throne were to stand firm in the same faith that David had in the Lord. Judah's faith in God was the foundation of their very existence and essential to their identity. But Ahaz was at a point of no return. Therefore, Isaiah said, *If you do not stand firm in your faith, then you will not stand at all*.

How is God our source of hope? What might one conclude about people who appear to be without hope?

BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary.*

Make a list of the kings mentioned in Isaiah 7. Using a Bible dictionary, read the articles about each king listed and make notes on each. What lessons can you learn from what you read? How does each king's life illustrate the need for trusting in God and His plans?

GOD EXPECTS (ISA. 7:10-13)

¹⁰ Then the LORD spoke again to Ahaz: ¹¹ “Ask for a sign from the LORD your God — it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.”

¹² But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the LORD.”

¹³ Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God?”

VERSES 10-11

God offered Ahaz an opportunity to see *a sign* from God that He was willing and able to protect His people. It is amazing God would make such a generous offer to such an ungodly king as **•Ahaz**. And it is surprising the Lord spoke to Ahaz twice. This demonstrates Yahweh's patience, mercy, and loving kindness toward His sinful people. Since Ahaz failed to believe what he had heard of God's power, God was willing to show him. God offered to show Ahaz whatever sign he desired, from the deepest depths of the underworld, *Sheol*, to the highest heaven. If Ahaz still chose to reject God's message, he would be without excuse and would have

no one to blame but himself when he reaped the consequences of his unbelief.

VERSES 12-13

Ahaz's response appeared to be quite pious on the surface. Deuteronomy 6:16 commands: "Do not test the LORD your God." This command speaks of the unbeliever who says, "I will not trust God until He shows me He is worth trusting." It is treating God as if He is to put on some kind of dog and pony show to impress them. Jesus experienced this when the Pharisees and Sadducees tested Him to show them a sign, but He refused to do so. The clearest sign was already standing before them, the Lord Himself. Yet they chose to reject Him and deny His resurrection. (See Matt. 12:38-42; 16:1.)

Ahaz's response was insincere piety. How could he be testing God if it was God who offered to give him a sign? He didn't want a sign because he was unwilling to believe. A sign would force Ahaz to openly admit his stubborn unbelief in Yahweh. Ahaz's mind had already been made up, having already chosen Assyria over the Lord.

Isaiah saw through Ahaz's pious ploy. But the prophet's response addressed the *house of David* in the plural saying, "All of you have wearied the people and have wearied God." The Davidic kings were supposed to shepherd their people in faithful service to God. Instead, all of them fell short, and most of them violated their trust by using the throne as a means to feed their own appetites. God was faithful to His promise to David, but the house of David had not produced kings who shepherded His people as God intended. After hundreds of years and many generations, God's *patience* was wearing thin.

What do people who display a false piety to God reveal about themselves? What are some ways people try to disguise their unbelief?

KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His incarnation, Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:18-23).

GOD ANNOUNCES (ISA. 7:14-15)

¹⁴ Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. ¹⁵ By the time he learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating curds and honey.

VERSES 14-15

Isaiah declared that God would provide *a sign* despite Ahaz's unbelief: a *virgin* would give birth to a child *and name him Immanuel*. *Immanuel* means "God is with us." The name of the child would be a reminder of God's presence, bringing comfort to those who trusted God and destruction to those who failed to trust God. What could have served as a sign of God's tender mercy for Ahaz instead would serve as a sign of God's indignation.

The Hebrew word, *alma*, refers to a young woman of marriageable age and has the specific meaning of "virgin." An example of this is in the description of Rebekah, soon to be the bride of Isaac (Gen. 24:14,16,43). Certainly, Matthew understood this meaning as he used the more precise Greek word, *parthenos*, meaning "virgin" to cite Isaiah 7:14 (Matt. 1:22-23). What is clear is that this virgin would conceive and bring forth a son in the future.

Virtually all conservative, evangelical scholars affirm that verse 14 refers to the birth of Jesus to the virgin Mary. Some scholars, however, see a more immediate near-future fulfillment of this prophecy and then a grander future fulfillment in Jesus as cited by Matthew. Some assert that in the immediate context this woman would be Isaiah's wife and that the birth is recorded in Isaiah 8:1-4. This idea of double-fulfillment would uphold the notion that Ahaz actually saw the sign God promised.

Many scholars, however, hold that Isaiah's prophecy pertains only to Jesus the Messiah based on Isaiah's other references to Immanuel. The "entire land" belongs to Immanuel (Isa. 8:8). Immanuel would be the reason the nations' plans to defeat God's people would fail (8:10). Immanuel would be named "Mighty God" and "Eternal Father," and His "reign on the throne of David" would never end (9:6-7). Based on these declarations, Immanuel would refer to the Lord Jesus Christ and no one else.

Curds and honey was the food of the impoverished. So the boy would be born into poverty and experience the full weight of a foreign power ruling over his people. Whether or not it would be

the Assyrians or the Romans, the ambiguity of who this ruling power would be speaks to both Ahaz's immediate situation and the birth and childhood of Christ. Either way, Immanuel would experience and understand the hardships of His people.

How does God's keeping His promise to send the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, affect our trust in God in other matters?

GOD JUDGES (ISA. 7:16-17)

¹⁶ **For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned.**

¹⁷ **The LORD will bring on you, your people, and your father's house such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah: He will bring the king of Assyria."**

VERSES 16-17

Isaiah revealed to Ahaz that God would bring a change in leadership because of the king's failure to trust God. The Lord is faithful to His promises; in a short time, He would eliminate the threats of Pekah and Rezin. The Aramean kingdom of Rezin was destroyed in 732 BC. Tiglath-pileser reduced the size of the Northern Kingdom of Pekah in 733 BC, and the king was assassinated and replaced by Hoshea. Eventually, the Northern Kingdom was totally defeated in 722 BC, which was about thirteen years after the Immanuel prophecy.

The Lord would also use **Assyria** as His instrument of judgment against **Judah**. Isaiah compared the judgment coming to the days when the Northern Kingdom separated from Judah in 928 BC. (See 1 Kings 12.) By rejecting the Lord and seeking help from Assyria, Ahaz would fall. God used Ahaz's source of security as the source of his demise.

What sources of security do people turn to today as a substitute for trusting God?

APPLY THE TEXT

- God’s plans are a source of hope for His people.
- God expects His people to respond in faith.
- God is faithful to keep His promises, with the birth of Jesus Christ being the ultimate proof.
- God brings judgment on those who fail to trust Him.

As a group, discuss ways following God’s plan produces hope. How can the group remind each other of the hope found in following God’s plan when a person’s faith is challenged?

In what areas of your life is God asking you to trust Him in a deeper way? How would you describe your response? How can you address any sources of hesitation you may be experiencing?

Memorize Isaiah 7:14. Reflect on the promise of God that He would be with us. How does the promise of God’s presence instill hope in you? Thank God for sending His Son to “be with us” in this world.

PRAYER NEEDS
