

“Stand Firm in Faith”  
Isaiah 7:1-9  
by Pastoral Jason Van Bommel

In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but could not yet mount an attack against it. <sup>2</sup> When the house of David was told, “Syria is in league with Ephraim,” the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

<sup>3</sup> And the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. <sup>4</sup> And say to him, ‘Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. <sup>5</sup> Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, <sup>6</sup> “Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it,” <sup>7</sup> thus says the Lord GOD:

“It shall not stand,  
and it shall not come to pass.

<sup>8</sup> For the head of Syria is Damascus,  
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.

And within sixty-five years  
Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.

<sup>9</sup> And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,  
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.  
If you are not firm in faith,  
you will not be firm at all.”

- Isaiah 7:1-9, ESV

***When Life Feels Impossible . . .***

Joni Erickson Tada has rightly been an inspiration for millions of people for most of my life. Since the release of her first book, *Joni*, in 1978, her story has brought hope, joy, and perspective to many believers struggling with various kinds of suffering. Joni grew up in Maryland and at the age of 17 suffered a tragic accident when she dove into shallow water in the Chesapeake Bay and hit her head, rendering her a quadriplegic for the rest of her life.

She spent a very long time in the hospital recovering and going through rehabilitation therapy, trying to regain as much strength and movement as she possibly could. During these days, she often despaired and wanted to die and did not understand why God would allow this to happen to her.

Her 1978 book focuses on Joni's remarkable painting, which she did by holding paint brushes in her mouth. Since the release of her book, over the past 44 years, Joni has been a singer, a radio host, a featured speaker at conferences, a prolific author, and the founder of a worldwide ministry that serves people with disabilities by providing them with wheelchairs and other adaptive equipment as well as with summer camp opportunities that many of them would not be able to enjoy otherwise.

In recent years, Joni had to fight cancer and COVID. She was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer in 2010 and then with a recurrence of a malignant tumor in 2018. She was brought through both of these battles. Then, when she was diagnosed with COVID, given the fact that she was a 71-year-old quadriplegic two-time cancer survivor, she thought for sure it was a death sentence. She had a very long and very difficult battle, but the Lord brought her through. It is hard for me to even begin to imagine how difficult Joni's life is. Her average day is far worse than just about any day I've ever had to live through. Her husband Ken has been a tremendous support for her, but she still deals with debilitating pain and with bouts of depression and frustration that would overwhelm most of us.

And yet, if you've ever heard Joni speak, you know that she speaks with a radiant joy of the greatness of God and of her satisfaction in him.

There are many reasons why life sometimes feels impossible: cancer, family conflict, struggles with children, financial difficulty, changing cultural realities, etc. Life as sinful and mortal people in a fallen and cursed world has always been extremely difficult, and all of our advances in technology and medicine have not changed this fundamental reality.

## **I. A Seemingly Hopeless Situation: Background**

At the beginning of Isaiah 7, we find King Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, in an impossible seemingly hopeless situation. In the transition from chapter 6 to Chapter 7, Isaiah skips over the reign of Jotham. We go directly from the year

that king Uzziah died to the middle of the reign of Uzziah's wicked grandson, Ahaz. He has was one of the worst kings in the history of Judah.

We read about the reign of King Ahaz in 2 Kings 16-17 and in 2 Chronicles 28. In 2 Kings 16:2-4, we read:

*Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree. – 2 Kings 16:2-4, ESV*

King Ahaz had suffered great defeats before his enemies, in judgment from God for his sins. 2 Chronicles 28:19 tells us “the Lord humbled Judah because of Ahaz . . . for he had made Judah act sinfully and had been very unfaithful to the LORD.” What did this humbling involve? Well, 2 Chronicles 28:5-8 tells us:

*The LORD his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with great force. <sup>6</sup> For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed 120,000 from Judah in one day, all of them men of valor, because they had forsaken the LORD, the God of their fathers. <sup>7</sup> And Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the king's son and Azrikam the commander of the palace and Elkanah the next in authority to the king.*

*<sup>8</sup> The men of Israel took captive 200,000 of their relatives, women, sons, and daughters. They also took much spoil from them and brought the spoil to Samaria. (ESV)*

Can you even imagine such a massive military defeat, such an unspeakable national tragedy? 120,000 men from Judah killed in battle in a single day. The bloodiest single day in American history was the Battle of Antietam, on September 17, 1862, when over 22,000 men were killed, wounded, or missing. This battle saw five times that number killed in battle, and then another 200,000 people taken captive. On top of these massive numbers, the king's son, the commander of the palace, and the prime minister of the country were all killed.

It appears that, at the opening of Isaiah 7, this same alliance of the King of Syria and the King of Israel, the northern kingdom, was coming together back to Judah to wage more war against them.

Just a moment for a little bit of clarification: We're dealing with three different countries here: After the death of King Solomon, the people of God split into two kingdoms. Judah was the Southern Kingdom of God's people, with its capital in Jerusalem. It's the nation that continued to have the House of David on the throne. Ahaz was the grandson of Uzziah and they were both direct descendants of David. The northern kingdom, which split away from Judah after Solomon, was called Israel. Its capital was in Samaria, and its most notorious rulers were King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.

Pekah the Son of Remeliah was the 18<sup>th</sup> and next-to-last King of Israel. Normally, Israel would be constantly fighting with Syria, whose capital was and is still today Damascus. But in a bold move, Northern Israel under King Pekah and Syria under King Rezin entered into a powerful alliance. They were trying to strengthen themselves against a rising superpower in the far north, in the area that is today Iraq, the Assyrian Empire. So, it's important to know that Syria and Assyria are two different kingdoms.

Syria and Israel wanted Judah to join their alliance against Assyria. Judah wanted to stay out of it. So, Syria and Israel united and attacked Judah to force them to submit to and support their alliance. After suffering a huge, devastating blow at the hands of this combined force, Judah was looking for options.

## **II. A Seemingly Reasonable Solution: Practical Help**

What Ahaz had decided to do, which is not stated clearly here in Isaiah 7 but is stated in 2 Kings 16 and 2 Chronicles 28, is to send envoys with money to Assyria to get their help against this powerful alliance. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" was the very normal, pragmatic, political thinking.

Here's what we read in 2 Kings 16:5-9:

*Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remeliah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him. At that time Rezin the king of Syria recovered Elath for Syria and drove the men of Judah from Elath, and the Edomites came to Elath, where they dwell to this day. So Ahaz sent messengers*

*to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, "I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house and sent a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria marched up against Damascus and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin. (ESV)*

It's so important that we understand this: King Ahaz faced an impossible situation where he thought for sure he was going to be crushed, and so he reached out for a worldly political solution that seemed practical and effective. And it definitely appeared to work!

In Isaiah 7, we're in the middle of this unfolding political drama. The kings of Israel and Syria have invaded. They've won the initial battle and then come back for more. King Ahaz is already planning to send his envoys to Assyria with the silver and gold from the house of the Lord and the treasures from his own house to present to King Tiglath-pileser, saying to this pagan world ruler: *"I am your servant and your son. Come up and rescue me."*

All of this is the background behind verses 1-2 in Isaiah 7.

### **III. Unexpected Instructions: Isaiah & His Son**

Into the heart of this political crisis of enormous, threatening proportions, God sends His prophet with His Word:

*<sup>3</sup> And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field. <sup>4</sup> And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. <sup>5</sup> Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, <sup>6</sup> "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves, and set up the son of Tabeel as king in the midst of it," <sup>7</sup> thus says the Lord GOD:*

*"It shall not stand,  
and it shall not come to pass. – Isaiah 7:3-7, ESV*

God gives Isaiah some very specific and unusual instructions: “Go out to meet Ahaz, you and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field.” Why meet Ahaz at this place, and why take his son with him?

Well, this exact location has stunning significance in the coming history of Jerusalem. Ahaz is reaching out to Assyria for help against Syria and Israel, but it's always a risky thing to invite a tiger into your house to get rid of a wolf that's troubling you. In this case, it was a faithless act of rebellion against God masquerading as practical politics.

King Ahaz's son would be one of the best kings of Judah, Hezekiah. In the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah's reign, the King of Assyria sends his royal official, the Rabshekah, to stand and threaten Jerusalem with destruction. When he comes, Isaiah 36:2 tells us, “he stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Washer's Field.” God knows what Ahaz is plotting, and He knows what the long-term consequences are going to be, and He sends His prophet to the very spot where Assyria will threaten Jerusalem.

Isaiah takes his son, *Shear-jashub*, because his name means “*the remnant will return.*” Isaiah's son is a prophecy to the King of Judah, a message from God in human form. He is a message of both judgment – exile is coming – and of grace – God will preserve and return a remnant. So, God sends His prophet with a type of incarnate word in his son and with the spoken word.

The spoken word begins with a four-fold command: “*Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint.*” God is saying the same thing four times to King Ahaz, first positively in two different ways and then negatively in two different ways.

**Be careful:** Take heed. Pay attention to the Word of God.

**Be quiet:** Quit your plotting and planning, scheming for your own salvation. Be still, and know that I am God.

**Do not fear:** Fear of man is offensive to God, for it puts more faith in the actions of men than it does in the Word of God.

**Do not let your heart be faint:** No one can stand against the Word of God; no one can resist His power.

If you are afraid and overwhelmed, either by circumstances in your personal life or changing realities in our culture, you need to hear this fourfold command from the

Lord. First, be careful and take heed to the word of God. We must hear what God says. We must trust his promises. We must obey his commands. His word alone must be the sovereign voice of power and authority in our lives. Sometimes this means we need to shut down social media, turn off the cable news channel, stop listening to the fearful fretting of friends and family, and soak in the goodness and power of the precious and all powerful word of God.

Rooted in God's Word, we need to be quiet and trust in Him, not fearing and not being dismayed of whatever might be happening in our lives, in our families, or in our culture. We do not need to get angry. We do not need to cower in fear. We do not need to worry about what the future might hold. We need to trust God.

God refers to the kings of Israel and Syria as *“these two smoldering stumps of firebrands.”* He openly mocks them because He does not fear them. He then assures king ahaz in very clear and simple language that the plan these two kings have to conquer Jerusalem and Judah will not come to pass: *““It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass.”*

God has spoken similar clear and bold promises to us. He has told us that no one can snatch us out of His hand. He has told us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. He has told us that He is working all things for the good of those who love Him and who are called according to His good purpose. He has told us that Christ rules over the nations as king of kings and Lord of Lords, that His Kingdom will know no end. He has told us that all of the raging of the kings of the earth only provokes the Lord in heaven to laugh and to hold them in derision. God has set His king on His throne, and no political or cultural or military force in the world can dethrone King Jesus or shake His unshakable Kingdom.

#### **IV. A Bold Message with a Sober Warning**

God is Even so bold as to give King Ahaz an exact timetable for the future:

*<sup>8</sup> For the head of Syria is Damascus,  
and the head of Damascus is Rezin.*

*And within sixty-five years  
Ephraim will be shattered from being a people.*

*<sup>9</sup> And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,  
and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.*

Now God does not give us exact timetables. He does not tell us how long we will have to endure hardship. He does not tell us how long individual trials in our lives may last or how long it may be until Jesus returns again and makes a final end of all evil. He does not tell us how long a church may be persecuted in a certain part of the world or how long an evil political regime may triumph. But He does tell us that all the apparent triumphs of evil in this world are temporary, and furthermore that He is working them all together for His eternal glory and for our eternal good.

The final word in verse 9 is a sober warning to King Ahaz and a sober warning to us as well: "*If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.*" this final line is clear in its meaning but is difficult to translate accurately. Alec Motyer translates this line as, "*If you will not affirm, you will not be affirmed.*" the words which he is translating as affirm and be affirmed or two versions of the same verb "Amen," which means "to believe or trust or make firm or make sure." It is where we get our word Amen, which is also the same in the New Testament and in English.

We could say that what God is saying here is that if we will not Amen his word we will not be Amen-ed ourselves. In other words, the only way for us to be firmly established and confirmed in our security and salvation is by affirming and standing on the word of God alone. Jesus told us that those who hear his words and put them into practice are like a house built on a rock which stands through any storm. He also tells us that those who hear his words and refuse to put them into practice are like a house built on sand which falls in the storm.

Nothing can ever shake the word of God or the Kingdom of God. All the words of men and all the kingdoms of men are like Jell-o built on sand compared to the eternal word of God and his Kingdom in the king of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. If we allow the world or our flesh or the devil to shake our confidence in the word of God so that we are desperately searching for human solutions, for earthly salvation, we will not stand. We either stand on Christ the Solid Rock, on the word of God made flesh, on the promises of Scripture, under the sovereign lordship of King Jesus, or we will not stand at all.



