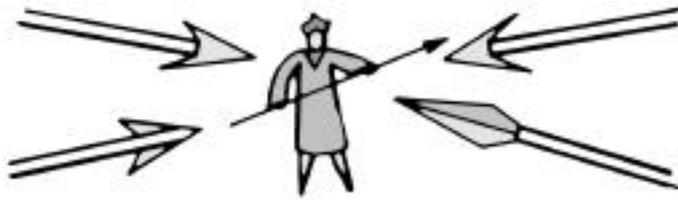


## LESSON 3 *\*April 10-16*

# When Your World Is Falling Apart



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### SABBATH AFTERNOON

One Sabbath, Connie and Roy drove into their driveway after church. A bantam hen flew frantically across the yard in front of them. Something was wrong. The pet birds were supposed to be safely in their pen but had gotten out. Quick investigation showed a tragedy in progress. Beethoven, the neighbor's small dog, also had escaped her yard and was down by the pond with Daisy in her mouth. Daisy was a beautiful laying hen with fluffy white tail feathers. Connie rescued Daisy, but it was too late. Her precious pet, now with a mangled neck, soon died in Connie's arms. She sat down in the yard, holding the dead bird, and wailed.

Another pet was deeply disturbed. A tall, white duck by the name of Waddlesworth saw Connie holding Daisy and seemed to have assumed she had killed her. So, for the next few weeks, whenever Waddlesworth saw Connie, he would viciously attack her, pinching her painfully with his strong bill. Sometimes it is hard to sort out who your friends and enemies are.

This week we'll look at a king of Judah who also had this problem as we seek to understand why he made the wrong choices he did.

**The Week at a Glance:** What threats was Judah facing, and why? How did King Ahaz respond to those threats, and why? What great thing did the Lord promise to do for him, if only he would show faith? What does it mean that "God is with us"?

**Memory Text:** "If you do not stand firm in faith, you shall not stand at all" (*Isaiah 7:9, NRSV*).

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 17.*

**SUNDAY** April 11

## **Danger From the North** (*Isa. 7:1-9*).

**What** terrifying crisis did King Ahaz face early in his reign? *2 Kings 15:37, 38; 16:5, 6; Isa. 7:1, 2.*

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The kingdoms of northern Israel (Ephraim) and Syria (Aram) ganged up on the smaller country of Judah, to the south. This happened when Judah was weakened by attacks from the Edomites and Philistines. In the past, Judah had fought with Israel, but an alliance between Israel and Syria was an overwhelming peril. It appears Israel and Syria wanted to force Judah to participate with them in a coalition against the mighty power of Tiglath-pileser III, of Assyria (*called "Pul" in 2 Kings 15:19*), who continued to threaten them with his expanding empire. Israel and Syria had put aside their longstanding struggle against each other in view of a greater danger. If they could conquer Judah and install a puppet ruler there (*Isa. 7:5, 6*), they could use its resources and manpower.

**What** was Ahaz's solution when his world was falling apart? *2 Kings 16:7-9, 2 Chron. 28:16.*

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Rather than recognize that God was the only Friend who could rescue him and his country, Ahaz tried to make a friend out of Tiglath-pileser III, the enemy of his enemies. The Assyrian king happily complied with his request for aid against Syria and Israel. Not only did Tiglath-pileser receive a rich bribe from Ahaz, he also gained a good excuse to take Syria, which he promptly did (*2 Kings 16:9*). The power of the Syrian-Israelite alliance was broken. In the short run, it appeared that Ahaz had saved Judah.

This action on Ahaz's part, however, should not come as a surprise. He had been one of the worst kings Judah had up to that point. (*See 2 Kings 16:3, 4; 2 Chron. 28:2-4.*)

**When we read about what Ahaz was like, it is understandable why he reacted to danger as he did. What lesson is here for us on a personal level? If we're not obeying the Lord now, what makes us think we'll have the faith to trust Him when real trials come?** (*See James 2:22, Jer. 12:5.*)

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

**Key Text:** *Isaiah 7.*

**Teachers Aim:**

1. To demonstrate God's willingness to reveal Himself.
2. To apply God's process for decision making to today.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. Common Sense Versus Kingdom Sense** (*Isa. 7:1-13*).

- A. Beware of consulting a human before God. Request for help from Assyria should have been addressed to God instead.
- B. Ahaz's false piety and humility in his refusal to accept God's invitation for a sign shows a lack of faith.

**II. What's in a Name?** (*Isa. 7:3, 14-25*).

- A. The name *Shear-jashub* means "a remnant shall return." Whether this means returning to God now or from captivity later is largely dependent on Ahaz's decision.
- B. *Immanuel* means "God is with us."
- C. Despite faithlessness and rejection, God is actively present in our lives.
- D. No matter what we go through, God promises always to be with us.

**Summary:** As people of faith, we are called to make decisions in line with God's will. In His goodness, He reveals His will to us. We need to open our hearts and listen with discernment, rather than rely on what seems more readily apparent in the world surrounding us.

## COMMENTARY

### Introduction: When Your World Is Falling Apart.

Despite our stubborn pride, God sends forth rays of gospel light, attended with prophetic revelations designed to pierce the thick armor of unbelief and ignorance. He reveals the path of life that scatters indifference and despair.

### I. Weak King, Ambitious Enemies.

Ahaz paved the road to national ruin with his morally bankrupt administration (*see 2 Chronicles 28, 1 Pet. 3:12*). Hoping to prevent an invasion from the allied forces of Syria and Israel, he enlisted help from Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria. Assyria's ambition for conquest soon led them to turn their sights toward Judah. It is a mistake for God's people to seek friendship with the world for the preservation or advancement of His purposes (*see 2 Cor. 6:14-18, Gal. 4:6-9, James 4:4, 1 John 2:14-16*).

**MONDAY** April 12

## **Attempted Interception** (*Isa. 7:3-9*).

While Ahaz was weighing his political options to meet the threat from Israel and Syria, God knew some things he did not. For one thing, it was God who had allowed trouble to come upon him in order to discipline him and bring him to his senses (*2 Chron. 28:5, 19*). Moreover, although appealing to Tiglath-pileser for help seemed logical and attractive from a human standpoint, God knew it would bring the Davidic kingdom of Judah under foreign control from which she could never recover.

The stakes were staggeringly high. So the Lord sent Isaiah to intercept the king (apparently as he was inspecting Jerusalem's water supply in preparation for a siege) in order to dissuade him from contacting the Assyrian leader.

**Why** did the Lord tell Isaiah to take his son, Shear-jashub, with him (*Isa. 7:3*)?

Ahaz would be startled when Isaiah greeted him and introduced his son, named "A Remnant Shall Return." Remnant of whom? Shall return from what? Because the boy's father was a prophet, the name sounded like an ominous message from God about people going into captivity. Or was it about returning to God in the sense of repenting (the verb "return" also carries the meaning of repentance)? The message from God to Ahaz was: It means what you make it mean! Turn from your sins or go into captivity, and from captivity a remnant will return. The decision is yours!

**How** did God's message address the king's situation? *Vss. 4-9*.

The threat from Syria and Israel would pass and Judah would be spared. Powers that looked to Ahaz like huge, fiery volcanoes were in God's sight only "two smoldering stumps of firebrands" (*vs. 4, NRSV*). There was no need for Ahaz to appeal to Assyria for help.

But in order to make the right decision, Ahaz needed to trust the Lord and His promises. He needed to believe in order to be established (*vs. 9*). The words for "believe" and "be established" are from the same Hebrew root, from which come also the word for "truth" (that which is reliable) and the word "Amen" (affirming that which is true/reliable). Ahaz needed to be sure in order to be made sure; he needed to rely in order to be reliable.

**Look at that last section of Isaiah 7:9. Why are faith and belief so important in order to be "established"? Established in what?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

### II. Approaching Conquerors, Promised Deliverer.

God sent Isaiah to Ahaz to reassure him that, if he only returned to faithfulness, he would not need to fear the Syrian-Israelite alliance—that in 65 years, Israel would cease to be a nation (*see Isa. 7:4-7, 9; compare 2 Chron. 20:20*). Meanwhile, God was willing to be Judah's defense. But having defiled his conscience, the king dreaded God's involvement. Nevertheless, God offered to give Ahaz a sign of His intervention. Ahaz's refusal of the sign was a rejection of the divine authority of Isaiah's message. It also revealed the king's hypocritical unwillingness to meet the conditions required to receive divine protection.

God, however, was not so easily dismissed from the court. The throne was *His* footstool. Looking beyond the record of human failure, He promised the Messiah who would redeem the fallen race and establish His peace and righteousness. It is an exquisite prophecy revealed in a spiritually hostile setting. Contrast it with the reception Christ got from Judea's religious rulers during His life on earth. The history of Israel's resistance to God's mercy is illustrated in Nehemiah 9, Psalm 78, and Acts 7. Well might we profit from this record of failure (*see 1 Cor. 10:11, 12*).

### III. Deliverance Through a Child.

Isaiah's prophecy, given in the presence of the unreceptive king, magnified the root of all humanity's hope and the cornerstone of all prophecy. A Child would be born. This is what God had revealed to Adam and Eve on the day of their rebellion (*see Gen. 3:15*). A Child would be born who would crush the serpent's head. A Child would be born as Israel's eternal King (*Ps. 89:25-29*). A Child would be born, higher than the kings of the earth but meek and lowly in heart. A Son would be given to bless all who put their trust in Him (*see Ps. 2:7, 8, 12*). This Son will stand with His people in their fiery trials and turn flames of persecution into floodlights for His glory (*see Dan. 3:24, 25*).

### IV. God in the Garments of Humanity.

Read Isaiah 7:14. This verse presents eternity in miniature and is a seal that authenticates all Messianic prophecy. Some scholars have disputed translating the Hebrew word *alma* as "virgin." They contend that *alma* simply means a young woman. But their objection is overturned by the divine authority of Scripture, which quotes the text in New Testament times with unmistakable clarity: "Behold, a virgin [*parthenos*, in Greek, exclusively meaning "virgin"] shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (*Matt. 1:23*).

Christ's birth was as unique as His mission. As the only begotten (*monogenes*, in Greek) of the Father (*John 1:14, 18*), He was con-

**TUESDAY** April 13

## **Another Chance** (*Isa. 7:10-13*).

Ahaz did not respond to Isaiah's call for faith. So, God mercifully gave the king another chance, telling him to ask for a sign that was "deep as Sheol or high as heaven" (*vs. 11, NRSV*). Here is one of the greatest invitations to faith ever given to a human being. Unlike lotteries or sweepstakes, this invitation did not carry restrictions in fine print. God did not even limit His offer to the half of His kingdom as human rulers did when their subjects reached the upper limit of their generosity (*compare Esther 5:6, 7:2, Mark 6:23*). He stood ready to empty all heaven and earth for a wicked king if only he would believe! Ahaz could have asked for a mountain of gold, as a sign, or soldiers as numerous as grains of sand by the Mediterranean.

**Why** did Ahaz respond in the way he did (*vs. 12*)?

At first glance, Ahaz's answer seems pious and respectful. He would not put God to the test, as the Israelites had centuries before, during their wilderness wanderings (*Exod. 17:2, Deut. 6:16*). But the difference was that God invited the king to put Him to the test (*compare Mal. 3:10*). To take Him up on His overwhelmingly generous gift would please Him, not test His patience. But Ahaz was not even willing to allow God to help him to believe. He barred and bolted the door of his heart to shut out faith.

**Read** **Isaiah 7:13.** What is Isaiah saying here?

Isaiah pointed out that by refusing to put God to the test, outwardly to avoid wearying God, he, in fact, wearied God. But the most troubling aspect of this verse is the fact that here Isaiah refers to "my God," by clear contrast to verse 11, where earlier the prophet asked the king to ask a sign of the Lord "your God." When Ahaz refused the divine offer, he rejected the Lord from being his God. The Lord was the God of Isaiah, but not of Ahaz.

**What does this day's study teach us about God's forbearance and willingness to bring all of us to salvation? What also does it tell us about the blindness and hardness of the human heart when not surrendered completely to the Lord? In the end, even if God had given Ahaz any sign that he had wanted, do you think Ahaz still would have believed? Explain your answer.**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

ceived by the Holy Spirit's implantation of the seed of life in a young Israelite virgin who was deeply devoted to God. Thus, Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, partaking of our nature (*1 Tim. 3:16*). "Jesus left the royal courts of heaven, and laid aside His own glory, and clothed His divinity with humanity, that He might come into close connection with humanity, and by precept and example uplift and ennoble humanity, and restore in the human soul the lost image of God."—Ellen G. White, *Temperance*, p. 40. In Hebrews

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis 29:15-30; 37:23-41:46; Deuteronomy 4:31; Psalm 27:14; Acts 16:19-40; 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; Hebrews 13:5, 6.*

① Often people cry out for a change of circumstances—for their troubles to go away. Even as Christians, we sometimes pray, "Lord, remove this thing from me" or "Please don't let me go through this." It is in going through, however, that our faith can be strengthened. God has promised to stay with us when trouble will not leave us and when the pain of our suffering (physically, financially, spiritually, or emotionally) is great. Explore God's commitment to this promise in the following verses: Deuteronomy 4:31; Psalm 27:14; 2 Corinthians 4:8-10; Hebrews 13:5, 6. Ask the class to cite examples of God's nearness during troubled times in their lives.

② Whenever we feel our world crumbling around us, it is a great temptation to become discouraged or to feel sorry for ourselves. We bargain with God and make promises we cannot always keep. "If You will just help me out, I will . . ." Many times we get ourselves into more trouble when we rely on ourselves or another person, rather than wait on God. What advice do we find in Psalm 27:14? How can we still have joy while waiting for the Lord to bring us through our trials? Recall the stories of Sarah and Hagar (*Genesis 16, 21*); Jacob (*Gen. 29:15-30*); Joseph (*Gen. 37:23-41:46*); Paul and Silas (*Acts 16:19-40*). What other examples can your class think of?

③ What New Testament texts reveal Christ's encouragement for those who are enduring trials and temptations? What good comes from trials and temptations? *James 1:2, 3*. What does all of James chapter 1 reveal about the source of our trials, the way of escape, and the rewards for our faithfulness?

**WEDNESDAY** April 14

## Sign of a Son *(Isa. 7:14)*.

An offer of a sign as “deep as Sheol or high as heaven” (*vs. 11, NRSV*) did not move Ahaz. So, when God says He Himself will come up with a sign (*vs. 14*), we expect it to have breathtaking dimensions that only the divine imagination could devise (*compare Isa. 55:9, 1 Cor. 2:9*).

Surprise! The sign is a son. But how could a young woman bearing a child and calling him “Immanuel” be a sign of biblical proportions?

### **Who** is the woman, and who is her Child?

Nowhere does the Old Testament point out a fulfillment of this important sign, as it had done for the signs given to other people, such as Gideon (*Judg. 6:36-40*). So, here are some of the possible fulfillments, based on the Old Testament alone:

1. Because the word for “young woman” refers to a young woman of marriageable age, many assume she is a married woman living in Jerusalem, perhaps the wife of Isaiah. Isaiah 8:3 does record the birth of a son to Isaiah by “the prophetess” (referring to his wife, whose prophetic messages consisted, at least, of her children; *compare Isa. 7:3, 8:18*). However, her son was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz (*Isa. 8:1-4*), not Immanuel. Nevertheless, the signs of the two boys are similar in that before they reach the stage at which they can choose good or evil, Syria and northern Israel would be devastated (*Isa. 7:16, 8:4*).

2. Some suggest that Immanuel is Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, the next king. But nowhere is the name Immanuel applied to him.

3. Because Immanuel is somewhat mysterious and his name, commonly translated “God with us” refers to God’s presence, He could be the same as the special Son prophesied in Isaiah 9 and 11. If so, His exalted description as divine (*Isa. 9:6*) and “the root of Jesse” (*11:10, NRSV*) surpasses anything ascribed to good King Hezekiah.

4. A natural birth for an unmarried woman of marriageable age would result in an illegitimate child through promiscuity (*see Deut. 22:20, 21*). Why would such a child be a sign to inspire faith?

In contrast, the New Testament identifies Jesus as Immanuel (*Matt. 1:21-23*), born miraculously and with purity to an unmarried but betrothed virgin. “When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman” (*Gal. 4:4, NRSV*), to give us the presence of God with us.

**Dwell on the reality of Christ’s coming into humanity. What kind of comfort can that reality give us amid what seems like a cold, fearsome, and uncaring world?**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

10:5-10, we learn that God prepared a body for Jesus, that He might be the all-sufficient sacrifice to redeem us from our sins.

Such texts as Romans 1:3, 4; 8:1-4; Hebrews 2:9-18; 4:14-16; 5:5-9; 7:24-28; 9:24-28 reflect the completeness of Christ's identification with our human nature for the sake of our redemption. These passages call for close and reverent study but are not fuel for theological dispute. Truly, Jesus is God with us and the perfect human model while partaking of our nature.

## Witnessing

Do you remember the first time you stood on the edge of the swimming pool and your dad or mom held out his or her arms and said, "Jump! I'll catch you!"? Or do you remember the first time you sat in the driver's seat with one of your parents beside you as you attempted to parallel park? Whatever the situation, you believed you could trust your parents.

Because God is our heavenly Parent, we would be wise to place our trust in Him. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord" (*Ps. 27:14*).

God's timetable for addressing our concerns and needs is not always easy to understand. Sometimes it is extremely hard to exercise patience while listening for the still, small voice of God. Human nature being what it is, we often believe that we know better than God how to *fix* a situation. However, as our lesson taught us this week, to rush ahead without Him can lead only to disaster.

King Ahaz, upon learning that his kingdom was threatened, turned to human intervention rather than placing his trust in God for deliverance. Time and time again, Isaiah admonished Ahaz to place his trust in Him who never fails. Sadly, Ahaz chose not to listen. Although he was free to make that choice, the penalty of his action cost him his salvation.

During the week ahead, look for an opportunity to guide someone in crisis. Explain to that person how only God can help and assist him or her in understanding that His way is the only way!

**THURSDAY** April 15

## “God Is with Us”! *(Isa. 7:14)*.

Like the name of Isaiah’s children (Shear-jashub, “a remnant shall return,” and Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which means “swift is booty, speedy is prey”), the name of Immanuel has a meaning. It is literally “with us God.” But the commonly accepted translation “God with us” misses something important. As with other Hebrew names of this kind that lack verbs, the verb “to be” must be supplied, because it is not expressed in Hebrew. So, Immanuel must be translated “God is with us” (*compare the same words in Isa. 8:10*) just as the name “Jesus” (Greek, and short for Hebrew Yehoshua, or Joshua) means “The Lord is salvation,” with the verb again being supplied (compare Isaiah, which means, “salvation of the Lord”).

But the name “Immanuel” is not just an abstract description; it is an assertion of a promise that is fulfilled now: “God is with us”!

### **What** is the significance of the promise that God is with us?

There is no stronger assurance and comfort. “God does not promise that His people will not endure hardship and pain, but He promises to be with them. The psalmist says: ‘Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me’ (*Ps. 23:4*).

“God says: ‘When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you’ (*Isa. 43:2*). Where was the Lord when the Babylonians threw Daniel’s three friends into the fire? With them (*Dan. 3:23-25*). And where was the Lord during the time of Jacob’s trouble when he wrestled until daybreak? In Jacob’s arms, as close as he could get (*Gen. 32:24-30*).

“Even when the Lord does not appear in physical form on earth, He goes through the experiences of His people with them. Where was the Lord when the mob condemned Stephen? ‘Standing at the right hand of God’ (*Acts 7:55*). But when Jesus ascended to heaven, He ‘sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high’ (*Heb. 1:3*). Why did He stand when Stephen was in trouble, about to be stoned to death? As Morris Venden has said, ‘Jesus wasn’t going to take that sitting down!’ ”—Roy Gane, *God’s Faulty Heroes* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assn., 1996), p. 66.

**Even though we have the promise that “God is with us,” what difference does that make if we still face terrible trials and suffering? What good does the knowledge of His presence, then, do for us? Explain your answer.**

## TEACHERS COMMENTS

### Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** One night, a man dreamed he was walking along the beach with God. Scenes from his life flashed across the sky. In most scenes, he noticed his footprints and God's footprints. However, in the scenes that depicted the bleakest times of his life, he noticed only one set of footprints. When he asked about it, God replied, "Those were the times I carried you!" In your times of need, how has God responded to you? Have you been willing to accept His leading, or have you all too often insisted on going off in your own direction? We will see in our lesson this week the ultimate tragedy of refusing God's help when it is most needed.

#### Thought Question:

The dictionary defines the word *leap* as "to spring free from . . . the distance covered." The dictionary describes the word *faith* as "a belief and trust in and loyalty to God . . . a firm belief in something for which there is no proof . . . complete confidence." If we connect these definitions, we see that trust in God, especially when there is no proof, allows us to spring free and cover a great distance. Perhaps one of the greatest acts of faith recorded in the Bible is in Exodus 14. Here, God instructs Moses to stretch his rod over the Red Sea to part the waters so the children of Israel can cross on dry land. With such miracles as part of their heritage, why did Ahaz and the people lose faith? How did their situation differ from earlier tests of faith?

#### Application Questions:

❶ Fear is a basic human response. However, why might fear not always be negative? How does Satan use fear to reduce God's influence in our lives? Reflect on individuals you know who have overcome fear. Share what you believe to be positive outcomes as a result of their experience.

❷ Review Hebrews 11:1-3. Ask members to share how these verses have helped them grow in their walk with God.

## FRIDAY April 16

**Further Study:** “ ‘His name shall be called Immanuel, . . . ‘God with us.’ ‘The light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ is seen ‘in the face of Jesus Christ.’ From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God’s love,—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’ ”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 19.

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 329.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 When you are in the process of making a decision, is it appropriate to ask God for a sign? What dangers are possibly inherent in doing something like that?
- 2 It is good to have human assistance, but how do you recognize its limits?
- 3 Russian author Leo Tolstoy once wrote to a friend that “Once a man has realized that death is the end of everything, then there is nothing worse than life either.” How does our knowledge that “God is with us” answer such a statement?

**Summary:** God brought faithless King Ahaz to circumstances in which he had to make a difficult decision: To believe or not to believe, this is the question. Even though the Lord offered him any sign that his imagination could devise, Ahaz even refused to allow God to demonstrate a reason why he should believe. As his “friend” he chose instead the king of Assyria.