

WHAT TO DO IN A CRISIS

7 When Ahaz, son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Syria and Pekah, son of Remaliah, the king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to wage war against it—but they could not conquer it. ²But then the house of David received the report, “Syria is in alliance with Ephraim!” [King Ahaz’s] heart trembled—as did the heart of his people—like the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. ³Then Jehovah said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool, on the road to the Washerman’s Field. ⁴Say to him, ‘Pay attention and keep calm. Do not be afraid. Do not become fainthearted because of these two smoking stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and that of the son of Remaliah. ⁵[Do not become fainthearted] because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have planned evil against you, saying, ⁶Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it. ⁷This is what the Lord Jehovah says, Their plan will not be established, neither will it be accomplished—⁸because the head of Syria is [only] Damascus, and the head of Damascus is [only] Rezin. Furthermore, within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to any longer be a people. ⁹The head of Ephraim is [only] Samaria, and the head of Samaria is [only] Remaliah’s son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand [at all].”

¹⁰Again Jehovah spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹“Ask for a sign from Jehovah your God. Ask for a sign to be given either in the depths below or in the heights above.” ¹²But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask for a sign; I will not test Jehovah.” ¹³Then [Isaiah] said, “Now listen, O house of David! Is it too trivial a thing for you to test the patience of men, so you test the patience of my God as well? ¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and she will name him ‘Immanuel.’ ¹⁵He will eat curds and honey when he knows enough to reject what is evil and choose what is good; ¹⁶because, before the boy knows enough to reject what is evil and choose what is good, the land of the two kings whom you dread will be made desolate.

¹⁷But Jehovah will bring upon you and upon your people, and upon your father’s house, a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—[he will bring upon you] the king of Assyria. ¹⁸On that day Jehovah will whistle for the flies from the most distant part of the rivers of Egypt and for the bees that are in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹They will come and settle in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks, and in all the thorny bushes, and at all the watering holes. ²⁰On that day the Lord will use a razor that he has hired from the region beyond the [Euphrates] River—the king of Assyria—to shave your head and the hair of your legs, and to cut off your beard also. ²¹On that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two goats; ²²but because of the abundance of milk they will produce, he will eat curds. Everyone who is left in the land will eat curds and honey. ²³On that day, in every place where there once were a thousand vines worth a thousand shekels of silver, there will only be briars and thorns. ²⁴Men will only venture there armed with bow and arrow, because the land will be covered with briars and thorns. ²⁵As for all the hills once cultivated with the hoe, you will no longer go there for fear of the briars and thorns—they will become places where cattle are turned loose and places for sheep to trample.” (Isa. 7:1-25)

Introduction

“In a moment of disappointment, fear, and anger, I forgot God,” so writes Woody Bailey.

Woody faced a crisis in his life:

I stood on the steps of the Chamber of Commerce of Holdrege, Nebraska, one overcast summer day in 1973. Maybe the sun was shining behind the gloomy clouds, but I didn't see it. Certainly there was no sunshine in my soul just then. I had been turned down for a position that was all but mine a few hours before. A former colleague whom I trusted to provide me a good reference, and to clinch the job I so desperately needed, had resorted to jealousy. He cheated me out of something I sorely needed at the time. I felt squeezed by a suffocating mixture of disappointment, despair, and anger. For weeks afterward I merely existed, feeling withered and spiritless. With no paycheck in view, desperation swelled to panic. As days went by, I learned firsthand what “going to pieces” meant. In a moment of disappointment, fear, and anger, I panicked and, even as a Christian, forgot God. But then God nudged me, God seemed to say, “Trust Me. That is all—simply trust.” (*POWER*, 7/14/91, pp.4-5)

When confronted with a trial or crisis, we do tend to panic, and are even tempted to resort to godless measures, instead of trusting in the LORD our God. In the passage of Scripture presently before us we find King Ahaz and the people of Judah faced with just such a situation; and we find them panicking, and even resorting to godless measures. But in order that we may enjoy God's provision and blessing, let us heed the counsel of Scripture found here in Isaiah chapter seven whenever we are confronted with a trial or find ourselves in the midst of a crisis.

I. Place Your Confidence in the LORD (Isa. 7:1-9)

In the days when Ahaz was king of Judah, the nation of Syria (under king Rezin) began to wage war against the land of Judah. In the course of time, the nation of Israel (under Pekah) also began to wage their own war against Judah. Thus the nation of Judah found herself under attack from two separate enemies: Syria, attacking from the northeast; and Israel, attacking from the north, note 2 Chronicles 28:1,5-6,8,

Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of Jehovah ...⁵Therefore Jehovah his God handed him over to the king of Syria. The Syrians defeated him and took many of his people as prisoners and brought them to Damascus. He was also given into the hands of the king of Israel, who inflicted heavy casualties on him. ⁶In one day, Pekah son of Remaliah killed a hundred and twenty thousand soldiers in Judah—because Judah had forsaken Jehovah, the God of their fathers ...⁸The Israelites took captive from their kinsmen two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters. They also took a

great deal of plunder, which they carried back to Samaria. (2 Chron. 28:1,5-6,8)

Despite their attacks, these two individual enemies could not prevail against Judah, they were unable to capture Jerusalem. But now (as Isaiah 7:2) reports, word comes that these two enemy nations, Syria and Israel, have joined forces against Judah—this now produces a real crisis in the life of the nation for the people and for King Ahaz.

This news causes the heart of king Ahaz and the hearts of the people to tremble *“like the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.”* Have you ever had such an experience? Everything seems to be going wrong at the same time. Everyone seems to be against you. You are confident that you can cope with one problem at a time; but multiple problems prove to be overwhelming. Sometimes they threaten to send you into despair, sometimes they can cause you to tremble in fear, and sometimes they can throw you into a panic.

Then, in the midst of this crisis, the LORD sent Isaiah to King Ahaz with the message contained in verses 4-9. The LORD instructs Ahaz to get hold of himself: *“Pay attention and keep calm.”* This is the same exhortation as is found in Psalm 46:10a, *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* Ahaz is further instructed, *“Do not be afraid. Do not become fainthearted.”* When we find ourselves in the midst of such circumstances, the LORD calls upon us to stop and to acknowledge the fact that He is God. He is in control; He will care for us and provide for us as our faithful covenant God. We must place our confidence in Him, and even ask Him for the grace to do so.

The LORD proceeds to inform Ahaz that Syria and Israel are enemies without strength; they are two pieces of charred wood (*“two smoking stubs of firewood.”*) That is to say, these two hostile nations, before whom Judah trembles in fear, are impotent before the God of Israel. Likewise, the Lord Jesus assures us today, *“All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth”* (Matt. 28:18.) Do we take seriously these words of our Lord Jesus Christ? Do we really believe that they apply to our lives and our situations today? They do! We are to trust the Lord Jesus, and as we do so we will experience His presence and power operating on our behalf.

The LORD assures Ahaz that Syria and Israel are enemies whose purpose shall fail: *“Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have planned evil against you, saying, ‘Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it. ‘7This is what the Lord Jehovah says, Their plan will not be established, neither will it be accomplished.”* Knowing that the Lord is the same today as He was in the days of Old Testament Judah, let us note and take to heart such passages as the following:

Jehovah is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? ... ²When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, even then will I be confident. (Psl. 27:1-2)

I know the plans I have for you, declares Jehovah, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jer. 29:11)

Then the LORD commands Ahaz to place his confidence in Him. He states it in negative terms because He knew Ahaz' heart: *"If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand [at all]."* In other words, if you trust in the LORD—but only if you trust in the LORD—He will uphold you in the midst of your trial and cause you to grow spiritually stronger by means of your trial.

In the hour of trial and when we face a crisis, let us place our confidence in the LORD.

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where does my help come? ²My help comes from Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth. ³He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber. (Psl. 121:1-3)

When I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. (Psl. 56:3)

II. Take Comfort from the “Sign” the LORD has Given You (Isa. 7:10-16)

The LORD not only calls upon Ahaz and Judah to place their confidence in Him, He graciously condescends to help them to believe. The LORD is willing to put Himself at their disposal; in order to strengthen their confidence in Him, the LORD offers to provide Ahaz with a sign. Ahaz is invited, *“Ask for a sign from Jehovah your God. Ask [for a sign to be given] either in the depths below or in the heights above”* (vs. 11.)

But Ahaz spurns the LORD's gracious offer, using the guise of humility (vs. 12) to conceal his determination to go his own way and seek his own “salvation” (see below under heading III.)

Do you ever do the same with God? Do you outwardly pay lip service to the counsel the LORD provides (from His Word, from a Christian friend, from your pastor,) while inwardly you plan your own course of action? Outwardly, by your words and manner, do you express a humble willingness to comply with the LORD's directive, but in your heart are you resolutely determined to do what seems to you to be the best or easiest or safest or most pleasing course of action? We must not pretend with God: He knows what is in our hearts and on our minds as well as what is expressed by our lips. We must be honest with the LORD: If you are not going to trust Him, be honest enough to tell Him so; that very honesty may serve to awaken you to the seriousness and the foolishness and the sinfulness of what you are contemplating, namely, spurning God's counsel in

order to pursue your own course of action. Note Proverbs 14:12, *“There is a way that seems right to a man; but in the end it leads to death.”*

Since Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, the LORD will Himself give the people a sign. As Isaiah stands before Ahaz, he receives a vision from God: *“Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and she will name him ‘Immanuel,’* (which means, “God with us.”) By virtue of a miraculous birth, God Himself will come to His people to be present with them for their salvation. Note the change from the present tense to the future: Ahaz was invited to ask for a sign in the height or the depth that would be performed in his immediate presence; but when he refuses to do so, the LORD gives a sign—but it is one that shall be fulfilled in the future. The LORD will deliver His people, but unbelieving Ahaz will not share in that deliverance. Before the child is old enough and mature enough to reject what is evil and choose what is good, the land of Judah’s two enemies will be conquered (vs. 16.) Isaiah has been given a look into the future and has been made to see the birth of the Messiah. Now he takes the period of the child’s infancy, from the time of his birth up to the time when he is old enough to distinguish between right and wrong (approximately 2-5 years,) and declares that within that measure of time Judah will be delivered from her two present enemies.

In the hour of trial and when we face a crisis, let us take comfort from the “sign” the LORD has given us. Look back in history to the time when God fulfilled that sign first prophesied by Isaiah: the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, His cross, His resurrection, His ascension, and His testimony: *“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation. But have courage; I have conquered the world”* (Jn. 16:33.) Look to your own past and recall the “signs” or acts of protection, deliverance, and provision the LORD has provided for you. Look to your ever-present Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and take comfort from His promise: *“he himself has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you’”* (Heb. 13:5b.)

III. Do Not Resort to Your Own Devices (Isa. 7:17-25)

As we have seen, Ahaz spurned God’s gracious invitation to request a sign. Ahaz employed the guise of humility to conceal his determination to go his own way and seek his own “salvation” by resorting to godless measures. As 2 Kings 16:7-8 indicates, Ahaz had resolved to put his trust in the mighty nation of Assyria, rather than in the LORD Almighty:

Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, “I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.”⁸ And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of Jehovah and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. (2 Kgs. 16:7-8)

Assyria did, indeed, come to his “rescue.” Within a period of 2-5 years the nation of Judah was delivered from her two present enemies (Syria and Israel)—they both were defeated by the mighty armies of Assyria. But there is more to the story.

The mighty Assyrian “redeemer” did not stop with the conquest of Syria and Israel; it was also determined to control Judah. As the Assyrians proceeded to subject Judah under their control, the empire of Egypt to the south of Judah felt threatened. Consequently, the Egyptians advanced north to protect their own sovereignty at the expense of Judah’s freedom and prosperity.

So it happened just as the LORD foretold through the prophet Isaiah (vs. 17-25.) The LORD brought upon the land of Judah days of trouble unlike any she had seen since the time of the civil war when the northern tribes of Israel broke away from the southern tribes of Judah (vs. 17.) Like “*flies*,” (representing the nation of Egypt with its fly-infested delta land,) and “*bees*,” (representing the land of Assyria with hills filled with honey bees,) these two great powers would “settle” in the land of Judah, controlling Judah for their own purposes (vs. 18-19.) The nation of Judah would suffer humiliation and shame at the hands of a foreign power: Assyria, viewed as a sharp razor, hired by the LORD, would shave the nation of Judah “bald,” the utmost form of humiliation (vs. 20.) The consequence of the foreign invaders is that the once prosperous land would become utterly unprofitable (vs. 23,) the once civilized land would be reduced to a dangerous wilderness (vs. 24,) and the once cultivated land would become inaccessible to man (vs. 25.) The reference to briars and thorns indicates that the nation and the land are subjected to the curse of God, compare Genesis 3:17-18, “*And to Adam he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, the one of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it; cursed is the ground on account of you; by toil shall you eat the produce of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸Both thorns and thistles shall it produce for you.’”*

All this trouble was brought upon the nation by the very “redeemer” Ahaz had confidently looked to for deliverance when he should have been looking to the LORD, note 2 Chronicles 28:20, “*Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came to him, but he gave him trouble instead of help.*” Can you look back upon such an occasion in your own life, when you forsook the LORD’s counsel and had to reap the bitter consequences? If so, may the LORD give us the grace and wisdom to avoid repeating the same pattern.

But, as verses 21-22 indicate, in the midst of the tribulation coming upon the nation of Judah, the LORD shall abundantly provide for those who do trust in Him. The nation is reduced from an agricultural land to a pastoral land, and even the pastoral activity will be minimal: one young cow and two sheep (vs. 21.) But those who are left in the land (i.e., the remnant, those who belong to the LORD and trust in Him as their Savior,) shall experience the abundant

provision and blessing of the LORD: even in adversity they shall experience His care and “feast” with Him on “*curds and honey*” (vs. 22.)

In the hour of trial and when we face a crisis, let us be careful not to resort to our own devices, but to look to the LORD our God.

This is what Jehovah says, Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from Jehovah. ⁶He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. ⁷But blessed is the man who trusts in Jehovah, whose confidence is in him. ⁸He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit. (Jer. 17:5-8)

Conclusion

When confronted with a trial or crisis, we do tend to panic and are even tempted to resort to godless measures. But instead of yielding to such temptations, let us pay heed to the counsel of the LORD: “*If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all*”—stated in positive terms: If you will believe, you surely shall be established. The LORD shall surely uphold us in the hour of trial and cause us to grow spiritually strong and fruitful unto His glory.