

## *Session 9*

# Isaiah 7:1-25 | Session 9 | War and Sign of Immanuel in Ahaz's Time

*Isaiah Oracle by Oracle / Dr. Randy White*

### War against Jerusalem and counsel to Ahaz (vv.7:1-7:9)

- The historical setting of the war against Jerusalem (v. 1)
  - The Timing: The days of Ahaz
    - Ahaz was the son of Jotham and grandson of Uzziah, reigning as king of Judah in Jerusalem (2 Kings 15:32-38; 16:1-2; 2 Chron. 27:1-9; 28:1).
    - His reign places this event after Isaiah's throne-room vision in the year Uzziah died (Isa. 6:1), and during the rising pressure of Assyria under Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kings 16:7-9).
    - Ahaz was not a faithful Davidic king. Scripture says he "did not that which was right in the sight of the LORD his God" and even walked in the ways of the kings of Israel (2 Kings 16:2-4; 2 Chron. 28:1-4).
  - The Enemies: Rezin and Pekah
    - Rezin was king of Syria, or Aram, with Damascus as his royal city (2 Kings 16:5; Isa. 7:8).
    - Pekah the son of Remaliah was king of Israel, meaning the northern kingdom, sometimes called Ephraim in this chapter (2 Kings 15:27; Isa. 7:2, 5, 8-9).
- These two kings formed a coalition against Judah in what is commonly called the Syro-Ephraimite crisis.
  - Syria and Israel wanted to pressure Judah, and Isaiah 7:6 later states their intention to set "the son of Tabeal" as king in Jerusalem.
  - This was therefore not merely a border raid, but an attempted political overthrow of the Davidic throne.
- The Target: Jerusalem
  - "Jerusalem" was the royal city of Judah and the city of David's throne.
  - The attack against Jerusalem is especially important because the Davidic covenant promised an enduring royal house through David's line (2 Sam. 7:12-16). The threat in Isaiah 7 is therefore both military and covenantal.
- The Outcome: They could not prevail
  - Though they "could not prevail against it," this does not mean Judah suffered no damage in the broader conflict. Second Chronicles 28 describes severe losses for Judah during Ahaz's reign (2 Chron.

- 28:5-8).
- The point in Isaiah 7:1 is narrower: the coalition did not succeed in taking Jerusalem or replacing the Davidic king.
  - Verse 1 therefore sets up the central issue of the chapter: Ahaz faces a real historical crisis, but the Lord's word through Isaiah will call him to trust divine promise rather than political calculation.
  - The fear of the house of David (v. 2)
    - The Report: Syria is confederate with Ephraim
      - The message was brought to "the house of David," which refers to Ahaz and the royal household of Judah.
      - This wording keeps the Davidic issue in view. The crisis is not only about Ahaz as an individual king, but about the threatened royal line through which the Lord had promised an enduring throne (2 Sam. 7:12-16).
      - The report was that "Syria is confederate with Ephraim," meaning that Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel had joined forces against Judah.
    - The Name: Ephraim as Israel
      - "Ephraim" is used here for the northern kingdom of Israel.
        - Ephraim was one of Joseph's sons and became one of the dominant tribes in the northern kingdom (Gen. 48:13-20; Josh. 16:1-10).
        - This is not the first time the name is used for the northern kingdom. Hosea, for example, repeatedly uses "Ephraim" as a representative name for Israel (Hos. 4:17; 5:3, 5; 6:4).
        - In Isaiah 7 itself, the identification is made clear because "Ephraim" is associated with Samaria and Pekah the son of Remaliah (Isa. 7:8-9).
    - The Response: Their hearts were moved
      - The fear is understandable historically, because Judah was facing a coordinated attack from two neighboring powers.
      - Yet theologically, this fear exposes the central problem of the chapter: the Davidic king is moved by political danger before he is moved by confidence in the Lord's promise.
    - The Simile: Trees of the wood moved with the wind, used to display the "shivering timbers" of the hearts of Judah.
    - The Lord sends Isaiah to Ahaz with a word of steadiness (vv. 3-4)
      - The Messenger: Isaiah and Shear-jashub
        - The Lord commands Isaiah to go out to meet Ahaz, showing that the word of the Lord enters the political crisis directly.
        - Isaiah is told to take "Shear-jashub thy son" with him.
          - We know very little else about Shear-jashub personally. He is named only here, though Isaiah later says, "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel" (Isa. 8:18).
          - His name means something like "a remnant shall return."
          - The name itself is probably part of the message to Ahaz: judgment is real, but the Lord will not let the house of David or the nation be utterly erased.
          - This makes Shear-jashub a living sign, just as Isaiah's later son Maher-shalal-hash-baz will also carry a prophetic message in his name (Isa. 8:1-4).
    - The Location: The conduit of the upper pool
      - Isaiah is to meet Ahaz "at the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field."
      - This location was connected with Jerusalem's water supply. In a siege

- crisis, water access would be a major military concern.
- Ahaz may have been inspecting or securing the city's water system because of the threat from Syria and Ephraim.
  - The same general location appears later when the Rabshakeh confronts Jerusalem during the Assyrian crisis in Hezekiah's day (Isa. 36:2; 2 Kings 18:17).
  - The Command: Take heed, be quiet, fear not
    - The Lord gives Ahaz three closely related commands: "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted."
    - "Take heed" calls Ahaz to careful attention, not panic.
    - "Be quiet" does not mean passivity in every sense, but settled confidence rather than frantic political maneuvering.
    - "Fear not" directly answers the trembling hearts of verse 2.
    - The command presses **the central question of the chapter: will Ahaz trust the Lord's word, or will he seek security through Assyria?**
  - The Description: Two tails of smoking firebrands
    - Rezin and Pekah are described as "the two tails of these smoking firebrands."
    - This is intentionally dismissive language.
      - A firebrand is a burning stick, but these are not portrayed as strong blazing torches.
      - They are "smoking" firebrands, already mostly spent, irritating and threatening in appearance but near the end of their force.
      - Calling them "tails" emphasizes their weakness and remainder-status; they are the last smoking ends, not the full fire.
    - Their "fierce anger" is real, but it is not ultimate. The anger of Rezin and the son of Remaliah cannot overthrow what the Lord has promised to preserve.
  - The evil counsel of Syria and Ephraim (vv. 5-6)
    - The Conspiracy: Evil counsel against Judah
      - The Lord identifies the plan of Syria, Ephraim, and "the son of Remaliah" as evil counsel.
      - Ephraim and "the son of Remaliah" are not two separate northern powers. "Ephraim" names the northern kingdom corporately, while "the son of Remaliah" identifies its king, Pekah.
    - Isaiah may avoid the royal name "Pekah" here in order to diminish him rhetorically: he is not treated with full royal dignity, but reduced to his patronymic, "the son of Remaliah" (Isa. 7:4-5, 9; 8:6).
      - This fits the tone of verse 4, where Rezin and Pekah are dismissed as "two tails of these smoking firebrands."
      - Remaliah himself is otherwise known only as Pekah's father; Scripture records no independent role for him in the crisis (2 Kings 15:25, 27, 30).
    - This should not be connected with the modern West Bank city of Ramallah. Ramallah is usually explained from "ram" and "Allah," meaning "hill of God" or a similar Arabic/Aramaic construction, not from the biblical name Remaliah.
    - Verse 5 shifts the issue from international politics to rebellion against the Lord's covenant purposes.
    - Rezin and Pekah are not only attacking Ahaz; they are attempting to overturn the Davidic throne in Jerusalem.
  - The Historical Accounts: Kings and Chronicles

- Second Kings 16:5-9 gives the basic account: Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel came up against Jerusalem, besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him.
- Second Chronicles 28:5-15 gives the broader devastation of the war, including Judah's defeat, many captives, and the prophetic rebuke through Oded that led Israel to return the captives.
- Second Chronicles 28:16-21 also records Ahaz's appeal to Assyria, showing the very political solution that Isaiah's message is designed to confront.
- These accounts should be read together: Kings emphasizes that Jerusalem itself was not taken, while Chronicles emphasizes that Judah still suffered severely because of Ahaz's unfaithfulness.
- The Goal: Let us make a breach therein
  - The phrase "let us make a breach therein" means they intended to break into Judah, and more specifically to force open Jerusalem's defenses.
  - Making a breach into Jerusalem would not have been easy.
    - Jerusalem was a fortified hill city with walls, elevation, and defensive advantages.
    - The meeting place at the conduit of the upper pool already hints that water supply was a major strategic issue in such a siege.
    - Later history shows the difficulty of taking Jerusalem: Assyria threatened it under Hezekiah but did not take it (Isa. 36-37), while Babylon eventually took it only after a prolonged siege (2 Kings 25:1-4).
  - Thus the plan was ambitious. Rezin and Pekah wanted more than intimidation; they wanted to break the city open and impose a new political order.
- The Puppet King: The son of Tabeal
  - Their stated plan was to "set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal."
  - We do not know with certainty who this man was. He is not otherwise clearly identified in Scripture.
  - He was likely a proposed puppet ruler acceptable to Syria and Israel, perhaps someone with court connections or regional legitimacy sufficient to replace Ahaz.
  - The point is clear even if his identity is not: Rezin and Pekah intended to remove the reigning Davidic king and install their own man in Jerusalem.
- The Lord's answer to the conspiracy (vv. 7-9)
  - The Divine Decree: It shall not stand
    - The Lord directly contradicts the plan of Rezin and Pekah: "It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass."
    - This is the controlling word over the whole crisis. The coalition has counsel, but the Lord has decree.
    - The point is not that Judah is morally strong or that Ahaz is faithful. The point is that the Lord will not allow this attack to overthrow His covenant purposes for the house of David.
  - The Political Limits: Damascus, Rezin, Samaria, and Pekah
    - The Lord reduces Syria and Israel to their actual political limits.
      - "The head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin" (v. 8).
      - "The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son" (v. 9).
    - In other words, Rezin belongs to Damascus, and Pekah belongs to Samaria. Neither has rightful authority over Jerusalem.

- This is another reason “Remaliah’s son” matters. Pekah is again denied the dignity of being named as a great king; he is only the son of Remaliah, ruling from Samaria, not from David’s city.
- The implied contrast is that Jerusalem belongs to the house of David under the Lord’s covenant promise.
- The Time Limit: Within threescore and five years (65 years).
  - This is difficult chronologically if applied only to the fall of Samaria, because Samaria fell to Assyria around 722 BC, less than sixty-five years after Ahaz’s crisis.
  - The fuller breaking of Ephraim as a distinct people likely includes the later Assyrian resettlement policy, when foreign populations were brought into the cities of Samaria (2 Kings 17:24; Ezra 4:2).
  - On that reading, the prophecy is not only about the military fall of the northern
- kingdom, but about the longer process by which Ephraim ceased to exist as a coherent national people.
- The point for Ahaz is clear: the northern kingdom that now frightens him is itself under a ticking judgment.
- The Warning: If ye will not believe (v. 9).
  - The Hebrew wording makes a play on the same root for believing and being established: if you are not firm in faith, you will not be made firm.
  - This is the spiritual heart of the passage.
    - Ahaz does not need a better military calculation; he needs faith in the word of the Lord.
    - Judah’s outward stability depends on whether the king and nation will stand upon God’s promise.
  - This also prepares for the next section, where Ahaz refuses the offered sign and exposes his unbelief behind a show of piety (Isa. 7:10-12).

## Sign of Immanuel and consequences for the land (vv.7:10-7:25)

- The LORD speaks to Ahaz and offers a sign (vv.10-13)
  - The Lord gives a “blank check” of verification to Ahaz (vv. 10-12).
  - Ahaz feigns piety (“I will not ask, neither will I tempt the LORD” - v. 12)
    - Since the Lord Himself commanded Ahaz to ask for a sign (vv. 10-11), Ahaz’s refusal is not humble obedience to Deuteronomy 6:16 but disobedience wrapped in religious language.
    - In the end, God’s response (v. 13) is the most convincing reason to know that Ahaz was just “blowing smoke.”
- The sign of a virgin conceiving and bearing Immanuel (vv.14-16).
  - The voice switches from that of the Lord (v. 7, v. 10) to that of Isaiah, and from the singular (“ask thee a sign”) to the plural (“Hear ye now...”). Note that the Lord had been speaking to the nation collectively until verse 10.
  - Isaiah wants the nation to listen up: “will ye weary my God also?” (v. 13).
    - The “also” is key - Ahaz has wearied the Lord in not asking for a sign. Now will the nation weary the Lord in not receiving the sign?
    - This is a key shift: the nation is going to be given a national sign, while previously Ahaz was offered a regal sign.
  - The sign (v. 14) is given to “you” (plural - the nation).
    - The sign is clear and unmistakable, “a

virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”

- These have become some of the most familiar words in Scripture, virtually always taken as prophetic of the Messiah by Christian interpreters.
  - Jewish interpreters take this more contextually related, but is it the right interpretation? We shall see.
    - The standard Jewish interpretation usually takes the “virgin” as a woman in Isaiah’s own day, often connected either with Isaiah’s household or Ahaz’s royal household, and the child as a near-term sign that Syria and Ephraim would be gone before he reached moral awareness.
  - “Butter and honey. . .” (v. 15)
    - “Butter” is better understood as curds, the kind of dairy product available when ordinary agriculture has been disrupted and people are living more from surviving flocks than from cultivated fields.
    - Honey likewise suggests what can be gathered from the land rather than produced by stable farming. Verse 15 therefore anticipates the desolated conditions described more fully in verses 21-25.
    - The food does not cause the child to refuse evil and choose good; rather, he will be eating this simple diet during the period in which he grows to moral discernment. The phrase marks the child’s development: before he reaches the age of knowing to refuse evil and choose good, the two kings feared by Ahaz will be removed (v. 16).
  - The timing factor - v. 16
    - This should be distinguished from the 65-year horizon in verse 8. Verse 16 is
- not saying that Syria and Ephraim will remain dangerous for 65 years; it says that before the sign-child reaches moral awareness, “the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings.” The fuller 65-year horizon included the rise of the Assyrians and their conquest of Israel.
  - In other words, the compressed time of the child concerns the removal of the immediate threat: Rezin and Pekah will not be around long enough to fulfill their plan against Jerusalem.
  - Matthew’s interpretation of verse 14:
    - In Matthew 1:22-23, we are given explicit connection of verse 14 to Jesus, the Messiah.
    - Without that verse, we would have virtually no reason to see this passage as Messianic, which explains why Jewish interpreters generally do not see it as such.
    - We must admit that verse 14 appears to be a national sign for the fall of two geopolitical leaders in Ahaz’s day. We must also admit that Matthew, under the control of the Spirit, sees the ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.
    - The reconciliation comes through a Hebrew interpretive key expressed in Ecclesiastes 3:15: “that which is to be hath already been.” God’s future actions are often patterned in His past actions, so the historical Immanuel sign in Ahaz’s day can be both a real eighth-century sign and a prophetic pattern brought to its fullest meaning in Messiah.
      - As I explain in *Life Under The Sun* (Dispensational Publishing House, 2026): “In Jewish thought, this principle is sometimes referred to as prophetic history. It means that the events recorded in Scripture,

- especially in what the Hebrew Bible calls the Former Prophets—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings—are not just historical archives, they are prophetic. Wars, kingships, exiles, deliverances, and restorations are not just events, they are messages, previews and blueprints of what God will do again in a future, greater way.” Further, citing *Kohelet Rabbah*: “Everything which God will do in the future, He has already done in the past.” This is not a cyclical view of time, but a teleological view in which God’s past acts foreshadow His future acts.”
- The LORD brings days of Assyrian invasion (vv.17-20)
    - Verse 17 marks the turn from deliverance to discipline. Ahaz fears Syria and Ephraim, but Isaiah speaks for the Lord in announcing that the greater calamity will come through “the king of Assyria.”
    - The comparison to the day “Ephraim departed from Judah” reaches back to the division of the kingdom after Solomon (1 Kings 12). Since that rupture, Judah had known instability and pressure, but Isaiah says the coming Assyrian trouble will be worse than anything since the kingdom split.
    - This is the irony of Ahaz’s unbelief: the empire he uses to escape the present danger becomes the instrument of a greater judgment.
  - The fly and the bee (v. 18)
    - The Lord will “hiss” for the fly from Egypt and the bee from Assyria. The image is not of uncontrolled chaos, but of summoned powers. These nations move because the Lord calls them.
    - Egypt and Assyria are the great powers on either side of Judah. Judah will not find safety by playing one empire against another; both can be summoned by God for judgment.
  - The fly suggests swarming nuisance and contamination, while the bee suggests painful, organized attack. Together they picture invasive forces filling the land.
  - The occupation of the land (v. 19)
    - These forces will settle in ravines, rocks, thorns, and pastures. The language pictures total penetration: places difficult, hidden, cultivated, and uncultivated are all occupied.
    - Judah’s problem will not merely be battlefield defeat, but the loss of ordinary control over its own land.
  - The hired razor (v. 20)
    - Assyria is called a “razor that is hired,” because Ahaz literally hired Assyrian help with silver and gold from the house of the Lord and the king’s house (2 Kings 16:7-8).
    - The razor will shave the head, feet, and beard, an image of humiliation, exposure, and shame. The helper Ahaz pays for will not merely trim Judah’s enemies; it will strip Judah itself.
    - “Beyond the river” points to Assyria across the Euphrates, reinforcing that the coming judgment is foreign, imperial, and much larger than the local Syrian-Ephraimite crisis.
  - Life during the days of desolation and scarcity (vv.21-22)
    - The picture is of a man keeping only “a young cow, and two sheep” (v. 21). This is not prosperity in the ordinary agricultural sense, but survival after the land has been emptied and disrupted.
    - Yet those few animals produce enough milk for “butter,” or curds (v. 22). The abundance of dairy is not because the nation is flourishing, but because there are

so few people left to consume it and so little normal farming left to compete with it.

- The diet of “butter and honey” returns to verse 15. It is simple survival food from animals and the uncultivated land, not the full produce of a settled agricultural society.
- Thus verses 21-22 are both mercy and judgment: the remnant will eat, but what they eat testifies that the land has been reduced from cultivated abundance to sparse provision.
- The land becomes briers and thorns with arrows and bows (vv.23-25)
  - Verse 23 begins with what had been valuable land: a vineyard with a thousand vines worth a thousand silverlings. This is not marginal ground, but productive and costly agricultural property.
  - That valuable vineyard will become “briers and thorns.” The point is economic reversal: cultivated abundance is overtaken by neglect, danger, and useless growth.
  - Men will come there “with arrows and with bows” (v. 24), not pruning hooks and harvesting tools. The land once managed by farmers is now approached
- like wilderness, suitable for hunting or self-defense.
- Even the hills once carefully worked with the mattock, a hoe-like digging tool used for breaking and working the soil, will no longer be cultivated (v. 25). Fear of briers and thorns keeps men away from normal labor.
- The final picture is grazing land for oxen and lesser cattle, likely sheep and goats rather than larger herd animals. Agriculture has collapsed into rough pasture, completing the movement from vineyard abundance to survival economy.
- This closes the Immanuel sign section with a warning: Judah will be spared from Rezin and Pekah, but unbelief will still leave the land scarred by the very imperial power Ahaz trusted.
- Historical note: This was fulfilled when Sennacherib of the Assyrians devastated Judah in approx. 701 BC (2 Kings 18:13, Isaiah 36:1, 2 Chronicles 32:1). This took place during the reign of King Hezekiah, when Sennacherib shut up Heekiah “like a bird in a cage.”