

# Isaiah 7:10-17

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Date: 21 December 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's pray together. God with us, I pray through your word, you would come and you would save us.

! You have spoken through the prophets, may you speak through them to our hearts this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You can be seated. Well, here we are.

Four days from Christmas. How are we doing? How is your stress level? I get the sense this side of the church is the more anxious side.

Because half of you aren't here. This side, no stress. This side, half of you very, very stressed. If you are stressed, a lot of us are stressed this time of year.

Or if you are scared. Or if you are anxious. If you enter the day today feeling like it's you versus the world. And you feel like you just have no idea how you'll get through the next week, the next month, the next year.

[ 1 : 24 ] God's word this morning is for you. This is what Isaiah 7 is all about. It's for people who are afraid.

And it brings good news of great joy. God speaks and brings us tidings of great comfort and joy. It would really help if you grabbed the black or blue Bible in front of you and flip to page 571.

This is probably a very unfamiliar text until it's the most familiar of texts. And I want you to listen again to how the passage starts.

This is Isaiah chapter 7 beginning at verse 1. It says, In the days of Ahaz, who is the king of Judah, both Rezan, the king of Syria, and Pekah, the king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it.

And when the house of David was told, Syria is in league with Israel, the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

[ 2 : 34 ] It doesn't sound very Christmassy, does it? I don't think any of us have a little figurine of King Ahaz we put around the tree when we decorate. But he is a character in Advent.

King Ahaz is stressed. He is terrified. He's shaking like a leaf as the enemy armies close in all around him.

King Ahaz, I don't expect you to have ever heard of him, was eight generations after David, in the direct family line. He's a young man, and he's the king of a really small kingdom called Judah.

The kingdom of Israel that David led with his son Solomon endured a civil war right after Solomon, and it split in two. There was a larger kingdom called Israel, or Ephraim, and then a much smaller kingdom called Judah that had Jerusalem as its capital.

And we read in Isaiah chapter 7 that the king of Israel, Ramalia, invades Judah, allied with his neighbor, Syria. And they march upon Jerusalem, but we're told they can't mount an attack on it, so there's a temporary pause in the fighting.

[ 3 : 49 ] Now we have a historical account of this invasion in two places, actually, 2 Kings chapter 16 and 2 Chronicles 28. And both record that during this invasion, Israel's army killed 120,000 soldiers of Judah in a single day.

The most fatal battle in Canadian military history you may know is Vimy Ridge. At Vimy Ridge, we lost 3,500 Canadians. In a single day, Judah lost 120,000 soldiers, and 200,000 civilians were taken captive.

And the enemy armies marched right through them and kept marching towards Jerusalem. And that's where Ahaz is, shaking like a leaf. So the shadow of death drapes over Jerusalem.

Destruction is at their doorstep. It's a land of deep darkness, you could say. Now, before we feel too much sympathy for poor old King Ahaz, you need to know he was not a good king.

He was not a good person. He is not a hero of the Bible. I know a lot of people named David. My dad's named David.

[ 5 : 02 ] My father-in-law's David. I have an uncle-in-law, a cousin-in-law. My son's middle name is David. I bet half of you are named David. But I've never met a baby named Ahaz.

He's not a hero of the Bible. 2 Chronicles 28, which is on page 379, tells us that Ahaz was only 20 when he became king.

And it says, I'm quoting now, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He made metal images for the Baals, these are the local pagan gods, and he made offerings to them in the valley of the son of Hinnom.

And he burned his own sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed, and he made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.

Do you get it? He was evil. He led his people away from God, and he committed atrocities. We're told in 2 Chronicles that because of this, God gave him into the hand of the kings of Syria and Israel.

[ 6 : 15 ] God actually is the one who unleashed these nations against Ahaz as judgment against his wickedness. So don't shed too many tears for Ahaz.

He's not the hero of our story. But look at what God does next. This is back in Isaiah chapter 7, verse 3.

And the Lord said to Isaiah, his prophet, go out to meet Ahaz, and bring your son with you. And at the end of the aqueduct, on the upper pool, on the highway to the washer's field, you'll find him.

Ahaz is evil, and he's in mortal danger. He's shaking like a leaf, but he is not seeking God. He is far from God.

He is staring death in the face, but he doesn't think to pursue God at this moment. He has more important things to do. He's actually inspecting the city's water supply.

[ 7 : 18 ] He's preparing for the siege of his capital. You know, he doesn't have time for religion right now. He's too busy doing important things that will actually make a difference, like securing Jerusalem's water source.

We learn at least two things about God from this unremarkable verse 3. The first thing we learn, God seeks sinners.

God seeks people who do not care about him. God seeks people who do not believe in him. Ahaz is not seeking God.

And so God seeks Ahaz. God does not wait for sinners to come to him. He goes to them. He goes out to the lands of deepest darkness, and it's there that he shines his light.

He's a missional God. We're told he does not live in temples built by human hands. He lives out there in the world seeking sinners.

[ 8 : 26 ] So God says to Isaiah, go out and meet Ahaz. Our God seeks sinners, and the way he seeks them, notice, is he sends his people to bring his word.

God sent Isaiah to Ahaz. God sends his angels to the shepherds on Christmas night. After Jesus is risen from the dead, what does he do?

Well, he sends his followers out to spread his gospel. Jesus sends you out today. Now, before we go deeper, just think in your own life, who is the Lord putting on your heart this morning who is far from him?

Who does not know God but does know you? Perhaps God is inviting you to go to them and to bring them good news that has the power to bring great joy.

It's Christmas time. Wednesday is Christmas Eve. It's probably our biggest single ministry day of the year. And everything we're doing on Christmas Eve has been planned with guests and visitors in mind.

[ 9 : 41 ] So we're going to have crafts and goodies at 2.30, a family service at 4, a Christmas feast to follow at 5, carols and a cantata at 7, Holy Communion at 10. Should we do something else? Or do you think that's enough?

We're planning something for everyone. It's intended for anyone. So be bold. Invite the neighbors you run into between now and Wednesday.

Invite your family members and the friend who always says no. Let's go and invite our city to come and see and celebrate the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Maybe all they're waiting for is a personal invitation. So the first thing we learn, God seeks sinners through sending his people out to them with his word.

The first thing we learn about God. The second thing we learn about God is this. God is sovereign.

[ 10 : 47 ] Chronicles 28 tells us that Israel and Syria have been unleashed on Judah by God himself. God controls these countries and their kings and their armies.

Isaiah 7 verse 3 also tells us that God knows exactly where Ahaz is and what he's doing. He gives Isaiah Ahaz's exact GPS location.

Even gives him walking directions. He's sovereign. He's in control. His people are in crisis. There's death and there's danger everywhere.

They're terrified. And yet God is in control. Take a deep breath. He's got this. God seeks sinners and God is sovereign.

So what's the message that Isaiah has been sent to deliver to the petrified, wicked, unbelieving king? It's given in verse 4. Be careful.

[ 11 : 49 ] Be quiet. Do not fear. Do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering firebrands. Because of the anger of King Rezan of Syria and the king of Israel.

Because Syria and Israel have devised evil against you saying let's go up against Judah and terrify it. And let's conquer it for ourselves and set the son of Tabeal as king in the midst of it. And then verse 7.

Thus says the Lord God. It shall not stand. It shall not come to pass. God knows the future.

And despite everything in the present suggesting the opposite, he tells Ahaz, this invasion will fail. These kings will fall. We have seen that God seeks sinners.

We have heard that God is sovereign. And now, more than that, we learn one more thing about God. God doesn't just seek sinners. He saves them.

[ 12 : 55 ] God tells Ahaz, these two armies are at your doorstep, but don't worry about it. They won't succeed. In fact, in verse 16, God says to Ahaz, in about 10 years, the lands of these two seemingly mighty kings will be deserted.

And we know from history they were. It's good news of salvation, even for a wicked king like Ahaz. The Lord God, God Almighty, the sovereign Lord will save you from your enemies.

He has sought you, he is sovereign, and he is mighty to save. And all Ahaz is told to do in verse 4 is be careful and be quiet.

Do not let your heart be faint. Do not be afraid. It's as if God is saying, Ahaz, don't worry about these enemies and their armies. Don't even prepare to defend yourself.

Stop checking the water supply. In fact, be quiet. Don't even speak. Don't do anything. Don't say anything. I am God.

[ 14 : 02 ] I am the Lord. And I will do everything that's required to save you. Just trust me. Be careful. God seeks sinners.

God is sovereign. And God saves sinners. God warns Ahaz at the end of verse 7, if you're not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.

The single foundation upon which your life is to be built is faith in God. Faith that God seeks sinners, that God is sovereign, and that God will save.

All other ground is sinking sand. It's wonderful, isn't it? What a great message. What hope. Now, God is sovereign, so he knows Ahaz.

And he knows that Ahaz has no faith. And so God now does something incredible. He invites Ahaz to ask for a sign. To ask God to prove himself, to prove that he's trustworthy, and he's sovereign, and he saves.

[ 15 : 14 ] God here accommodates himself to Ahaz and his unbelief. Verse 10, Again, the Lord spoke to Ahaz. Ask a sign of the Lord, your God.

It could be as deep as Sheol, hell, or as high as heaven. Ask me to do absolutely anything. Notice, in verse 11, God calls himself the Lord, your God.

Ahaz, you don't worship me, you don't trust me, you don't seek me, but I am still the Lord, your God. I am still God, whether you have faith in me or not.

I am still for you. I am still your God. God is still God no matter what you believe about him this morning.

God is still your God, even if you claim to have no God. He is still your creator, your sustainer, your provider, and offers to be your savior.

[ 16 : 21 ] Your belief in him does nothing to change who he is. See, our self-conceived notions of truth don't cancel the actual truth.

God is your God. God recognizes that trusting him is really hard for Ahaz with all these enemy armies on Jerusalem's door.

And so he offers to give them a sign, a proof, that he's sovereign and he's worthy of trust and he's mighty to save. Verse 12, but Ahaz said, I will not ask.

I will not put the Lord to the test. Ahaz quotes Deuteronomy in the Bible, which forbids humanity from putting God to the test. Ahaz here turns on the politician mode and he displays piety.

He quotes God's word. The problem is the passage he quotes is about humans demanding God prove himself. And that's not what's happening in Isaiah 7.

[ 17 : 24 ] God is inviting Ahaz to ask for a sign. So in refusing, Ahaz is disobeying God. See, Ahaz hides his unbelief behind false piety.

He pretends to be very religious and very concerned about righteousness. He pretends to have faith. He even quotes scripture. He knows how to talk the talk.

It's exactly what the Pharisees did in Jesus' day. It's like when Satan quotes scripture to try and tempt Jesus, remember? Even the devil can use the Bible, twisting it and misusing it to deceive and to distort.

But what this false piety proves is that you have no faith and no interest in seeking God. It's focusing purely on your external appearances and it's hiding what's actually in your heart.

Ahaz does not trust God and so he refuses to play God's game. From the historical record in 2 Chronicles 28, we know that Ahaz put his trust not in God but in Assyria, asking the unpredictable global superpower that was hell-bent on world domination to come to his aid.

[ 18 : 44 ] If you live in Burnaby or Richmond, I apologize for this analogy. It's a bit like if Burnaby and Richmond decided to invade Vancouver tomorrow and our response as a city was to call Russia and to ask if they could come and destroy Burnaby and Richmond for us.

Ahaz refuses to trust God. He refuses God's offer to prove he's trustworthy and instead he decides to trust Assyria.

You can guess how the story ends. Verse 13, God speaks, Hear then, O house of David, is it too little for you to weary men that you weary my God also?

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. You refused God's offer showing you have no faith in him, but God is going to give you a sign regardless, a visible proof that he is worthy of trust.

Why would God do this? He does it because he wants us to know that he seeks sinners and he's sovereign and he wants to save us. And so the sign he gives famously is in verse 14, Behold, look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel.

[ 20 : 07 ] Ahaz, you refused a sign, but I give it to you anyway. And this sign is not just for you, Ahaz, but now it's for your entire family line. Oh, house of David, here is how you know you can trust me.

Here's how you can know with certainty that I seek sinners and am sovereign and am mighty to save. A virgin will have a baby. It's impossible, obviously.

It's a sign that could only be explained by supernatural intervention. but it's so much more than that. This supernatural child will be called Emmanuel, which means God with us.

This miracle child will be no normal child. This child is God. The promised sign is bigger than Ahaz.

It's indeed a sign that stretches up to the heights of heaven, heaven, and it descends to the deepest depths to invade and conquer hell. It's a sign that will change everything forever.

[ 21 : 16 ] It's why we're here today. God will come to earth. God is coming to be with us. God will come to prove that he seeks sinners and he is sovereign and he is mighty to save.

And now if we zoom out from Isaiah and Ahaz at the aqueduct and look forward 700 years, we have a new historical account, the Gospel of Matthew.

It's the very beginning of our New Testament and it starts with the genealogy which seems like kind of a boring place to begin if we're honest. We skipped it today in our second Bible reading.

The New Testament starts with the family tree of Jesus. It's on page 807 if you want to look at it. And it goes through all the centuries and it starts with the patriarchs, you know, the big names.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. And then it gets to the kings and it goes through David and Solomon. These are really good credentials. And then in Matthew chapter 1 verse 9 Jesus' ancestor Ahaz is listed.

- [ 22 : 21 ] The genealogy continues through the whole house of David. 700 more years to Joseph, a common man, a village carpenter who's engaged to a young woman who is a virgin named Mary.

And right after Jesus' family tree, the first thing we hear in Matthew's gospel was our second reading. It begins in verse 18 and we find out Mary is pregnant and Joseph, her soon-to-be husband, is not the father.

It's scandalous. An angel comes to Joseph in a dream and says, Joseph, son of David, and therefore son of Ahaz, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. And then in verse 22, the first Old Testament passage in the New Testament is quoted.

And can you guess which one it is? All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoke by the prophet. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

- [ 23 : 32 ] The entire New Testament is the fulfillment of this sign. The birth of Jesus is the promised sign for the house of David that proves to the whole world God is sovereign and that he seeks and saves sinners.

Jesus proves this. He is God's sign to us. He is Emmanuel. He is God with us.

So how will you respond? Well, don't respond to God with false piety like Ahaz, smiling and nodding, but dismissing God the second you leave this room.

Respond instead with faith. This week is busy, so you need to hear this word. Imagine if God came to you through a prophet and what he said to you is be careful and be quiet.

God has done everything that needs to be done. He wants to save you, he invites you to have faith in him, and he gives you a sign that he is trustworthy. Stop living scared.

- [ 24 : 45 ] If you are firm in faith, if you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm in anything. Trust in God, trust in his promises, trust in Emmanuel, trust that Jesus is the sign for you that God is mighty to save.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her king. thanks be to God. Amen.