

After several weeks of introduction, this series actually gets going: a series in which we consider the greatness of God as explained by the prophet Isaiah, and as compared to the greatness of the greatest people of Isaiah's day. The "greats," the "great ones" of Isaiah's day, and ours.

We begin with a story: a true story from the history of God's people. A tragic story. An important story for us to know.

This story concerns our man Isaiah and the 3rd of the four kings he served under. **King Ahaz.** (735 B.C.)

"There was once a very wicked king named Ahaz. King of Judah.

He was 20 years old when he became king. He worshipped idols and false gods, even burning his children alive as sacrificial offerings to his gods.

WHAT TO DO WITH AHAZ We have three choices regarding how we will treat Ahaz.

1st **We can demonize him:** Call him "wicked," and simply look down on him as the villain of the story.

2nd **We can caricaturize him:** Think of him as "stupidly wicked," and mock him, and look for the moral of the story.

3rd **We can humanize him,** and see in him the human weaknesses that we may see in ourselves. And then do what we can to benefit from his bad example. I'm sure that the right choice is #3.

Now bad King Ahaz would have said he had TWO REAL PROBLEMS: the two kings to the immediate north of him.

King (Pekah) of "Israel" and King (Rezin) of Syria

Ahaz would have said he had ONE GREAT STRENGTH: Jerusalem, the capital city of Judah. A city with great walls.

In the story, there came a time when his city with its great walls no longer seemed enough.

Isaiah 7:1,2 ESV 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. 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.

Here was a perfect opportunity for Ahaz to turn to God. If only he had!

+ If only Ahaz had turned to his father Jotham's God.

2 Chronicles 27:6 ESV So Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God.

+ If only Ahaz had been directed by the details of the life of his grandfather, King Uzziah"

2 Chronicles 26:5 ESV He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.

And then **2 Chronicles 26:15,16 ESV** And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God ...

So there was King Ahaz in the 730's B.C. with his two great problems and his great city with its big walls.

Certainly, his two problems (Israel and Syria) WERE great challenges: (2 Chron 28:5-8)

"And the heart of Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind."

What a tragic thing! With God to depend on: **great in power** and **great in wisdom** and **great at gently shepherding his people...** *You know what King Ahaz was like?* He was like a married couple living in London, Ontario in the year 2013, burdened with, say, two great challenges... and thinking they had one great chance of fixing things.

This was basically bad King Ahaz's circumstance.

Isaiah 7:3-9 ESV And the LORD said to Isaiah, "Go out to meet Ahaz... 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 (That's the king of Israel). Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah (That is Israel), has devised evil against you, saying, "Let us go up against Judah and terrify it..." thus says the Lord GOD: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass... **If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.**"

King Ahaz would have said he had TWO REAL PROBLEMS but in fact, he really only had one. A spiritual problem.

This raises questions for you and me: Might it be that, like Ahaz, we really only have ONE serious problem?

HOW TO AVOID IMITATING AHAZ

a) Know that your greatest danger is **lacking real firm faith.**

Isaiah 7:9 If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.

The story continues. Bad faithless King Ahaz, with nothing to depend on but his city walls, and with his heart shaking like leaves in the wind, comes up with a solution to his two problems: In fact, he comes up with a really bad idea! But it IS a great example of what a lack of real firm faith in God can come up with.

For protection from the two nearby kingdoms, he turns to the superpower: **Assyria.** (Way up north and east. Iraq)

WEST LONDON ALLIANCE CHURCH, London, Ontario. www.wlchurch.org

All Scripture references: HOLY BIBLE, **English Standard Version**, © 2001, CROSSWAY PUBLICATIONS

2 Kings 16:7-9 ESV 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 what happens next seemed like great news! And the king of Assyria listened to him. The king of Assyria marched up against Damascus (Syria) and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin.

Ahaz must have been thrilled! Can you just hear him? *"My great idea worked!!! I'm down to just one problem."* (Ahaz meant was that the king of Syria was dead and that left just the king of Israel.) But Ahaz had ALWAYS been "down to one problem." From the very beginning. And he didn't see that. But he did see that his challenges just kept increasing.

In fact, life just kept getting more complicated, now that Assyria, the super-power, was added to the story...

2 Chronicles 28:20,21 ESV So Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him and **afflicted him instead of strengthening him**. For Ahaz took a portion from the house of the LORD and the house of the king and of the princes, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria, **but it did not help him**. **IMPORTANT TO NOTE! It did NOT help him.**

b) **Know that without firm faith in God, even your greatest efforts can make your problems worse.**
It is faith that connects us to God.

John 15:5 ESV I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. *"Nothing"* -- so to speak. Nothing that works really well!

Back to the story As might be expected, things just got worse and worse for Ahaz. When he died at the age of 36, he left everything worse than he had found it. And his family (and his nation) were left with Assyria to deal with (**Isaiah 10**; February 3).

The life of Ahaz: a great ancient tragedy, is often repeated to this very day. And it could have been so very different. For God had offered to prove himself to Ahaz...

The Lord gives Ahaz a sign (A promise: the word of God), but Ahaz doesn't receive it. Not interested: no real faith in God.

Isaiah 7:10-14 ESV Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." And he said, "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. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

On the other hand, Isaiah, firm in faith, was very interested! And we see the result in Chapter 8.

Isaiah 8:11-13 ESV For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.

And the signs (the promises of God) kept coming: but to Isaiah, a man of faith, and not to Ahaz, a man with no real faith.

Isaiah 9:1-7 ESV ... For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor (**The greatness of God's wisdom**), Mighty God (**The greatness of God's power**), Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (**And the great gentle shepherding of God**). Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. **The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**

c) **Decide to become and plan to stay firm in faith.** Trust and obey the one great God.
About all your problems. For all your solutions.

Like Ahaz's grandfather. **2 Chronicles 26:5** ESV ...as long as [Uzziah] sought the LORD, God made him prosper.

Like Ahaz's father. **2 Chronicles 27:6** ESV ...Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God.

Are there parts of your life: relationships, responsibilities, opportunities, perils that require you to humble yourself before God and be firm in faith in him?

Are you, right now, willing to turn to God with real firm faith?

(Maybe you could use some help from some person of faith with some experience.)

JANUARY 27:
FEBRUARY 3:

"Youth for Christ Sunday"
Next Isaiah sermon: Isaiah and Assyria

(James Coolidge)
(Mike Wilkins)

WEST LONDON ALLIANCE CHURCH, London, Ontario. www.wlchurch.org
All Scripture references: HOLY BIBLE, **English Standard Version**, © 2001, CROSSWAY PUBLICATIONS