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The Hearts of Ahaz and His People Were Shaken

7: 1-2

The hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken DIG: The events here occur in Ahaz's reign, some ten years after those of Chapter 6 (Second Kings 16:5-18). What two kingdoms were going to invade Y'hudah and why? What was their fatal mistake? Who was the king of Judah at that time? What did Isaiah prophecy to him? Why didn't he heed what the prophet said? What did he do instead? What were consequences for the two invaders, Ahaz and the House of David?

REFLECT: King Ahaz's first deadly decision was ignoring the Word of the LORD from the mouth of His prophet Isaiah. What is your belief about the Word? Is it God's letter to you? Is it something to base your life on? Or is it merely of human origin to be taken with a grain of salt? Secondly, Ahaz entered into a close relationship with Assyria that involved idol worship. Is there anyone who you are intimately involved with, socially, politically or economically, that is a friend with the world (Second Corinthians 6:14-17a; James 4:4)? How did it work out for Ahaz?



At the time **Isaiah** was written, **Ahaz, son of Jotham, the son Uzziah, was the king of Judah (7:1a)**. Of the four **Judean** kings under which **Isaiah** prophesied, **Ahaz** was easily the most wicked. The reason **he** was so uniquely wicked is that **he** tried to combine the idol worship of the high places and the golden calf, with the worship of Baal and Molech. It is important to understand that what **Isaiah** is about to prophecy was rooted in, and grows out of, real historical events. Prophecy and history have a symbiotic relationship here. The

prophecy is meaningless apart from an adequate understanding of its historical context, and the historical context is necessary to understand the prophecy.

Since **Isra'el** lay at the intersection of three great empires, Egypt, **Assyria**, and Babylon, it experienced frequent wars. At this time **the Assyrian Empire** was beginning to assert **itself** in the area of **Judah** and **Isra'el**. When **Assyrian** king Tiglath-pileser turned westward, the smaller nations in **his** path tended to group themselves into coalitions to defend themselves. **King Rezin** of **Syria**, known in the Hebrew as **Aram**, formed one such coalition with **Pekah, son of King Remaliah** of **the northern kingdom of Isra'el**. But **they** soon realized that **their** confederacy was not strong enough and **they** pressured **the southern kingdom of Judah** to join with **them**. But **Judah**, under **King Ahaz**, refused.

When diplomacy failed to entice **Judah, Syria** and **Isra'el** decided on a strategy to invade **Judah** and do away with **Ahaz**. Therefore, **King Rezin of Syria and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Isra'el, marched up to fight against Judah (7:1b)**. They inflicted heavy casualties (**Second Chronicles 28:5-8**), **but they could not overpower her (7:1c)**. A second invasion followed (**Second Chronicles 28:17-18**), and the northern powers threatened to replace **King Ahaz** with a puppet king, **the son of Tabeel (Isaiah 7:6)**.

If **Syria** and **Isra'el** had stopped with only wanting to kill **Ahaz** **they** may have been able to succeed. However, **they** were also determined to do away with the **house of David** once and for all. For that reason, **Ahaz** is described as **the house of David**, for **the Davidic Covenant** was being threatened (**Second Samuel 7:5-16**). **They** wanted to set up a new dynasty, with the House of **Tabeel** upon the throne in **Jerusalem** that would have been more favorable to an alliance against **the Assyrian** menace. Therefore, what happens in **Chapters 7** through **12** needs to be viewed in light of that threat to **Ahaz**, but more importantly to **the House of David**. **Ahaz's** next move would determine the future of **David's** line.

Although it is not mentioned here, something else lies in the background: When **Ahaz** was told that **Syria** had **allied itself with the northern kingdom of Isra'el**, with its capital in **Ephraim**, **the hearts of Ahaz and his people** were terrified (**7:2a**). This prompted **Ahaz's** decision to appeal to **Assyria** for help (**Second Kings 16:7-9**). We do not know whether the decision had yet been acted upon when **ADONAI** sent **Isaiah** to confront **Ahaz**, but surely it was at least under consideration. The situation abounded with ironies. It was probably the advance of **the Assyrian Empire** that prompted **Syria** and **Isra'el** to unite and try to force **Judah** into a defensive coalition with **them**; **Assyria** hardly needed to be urged

and paid a great sum to do what **she** had been planning to do all along. Furthermore, the real threat to **Y'hudah's** independence was not **Syria** or **Isra'el**, but **Assyria**, whom **Ahaz** was inviting to be an ally. Yet **Ahaz** could not see the long-term issues. **He** could only see the short-term view, and **he** was about to pay the full price for **his** shortsightedness.²⁵

The decision of **Ahaz** to appeal to **Assyria** had spiritual implications as well as political ones. The only way **Assyria** would help **Judah** was to have a covenant with her. As a result of **Ahaz's** policy, **Judah** was compelled to undertake the obligations of a normal vassal, which involved the paying of tribute and the recognition of **Assyria's** gods **in the Jerusalem Temple**. **Ahaz** was also obligated to appear before Tiglath-pileser in Damascus and to pay homage to **the Assyrian gods** at a bronze altar that stood there. A copy of this altar was then made and set up **in the Jerusalem Temple (Second Kings 16:10-16 and Second Chronicles 28:22-24)**. It was a humiliating position and not likely to win the approval of the people of **Judah**; however, **Judah** was spared military occupation and loss of **her** territory by **Assyria**. When **Isaiah** challenged **Ahaz** to trust in **God**, it backed **Ahaz** into a corner. **He** needed to either commit **himself** to **Assyria**, and in effect deny **YHVH**, or **he** must commit **himself** to **God** and leave **Assyria** in **His** hands. We know which one **he** chose, and all because of an attack that was doomed before it began!

There is the initial attempt to do away with **Ahaz** and the attack against **Y'hudah** is by the army of **Israel** alone. But this initial attempt fails. **The Israelite** and **Syrian** armies split. **Isra'el** went against **Jerusalem** while the Syrians went south against the city of Elath. The Syrians were successful in taking Elath, and after the conquest the armies of **Syria** and **Isra'el** then combined for a joint attack against **the southern kingdom of Judah**.

The prospect of such formidable **enemies** caused the people of **Judah** to be **shaken**. **The House of David** refers to **the royal family or the court**. **The king's name is not mentioned**. "A wicked man," declares a rabbinic tradition, "does not deserve the honor of being named." At any rate, **the House of David** is an expression for the **king** and **his** courtiers, much like *the White House* is for the president of the United States and his staff. But ironically, it is **the House of David** that was **shaken**. This **shaking** was due to a lack of faith and trust in the Scriptures. **Second Samuel 7:11-17, First Chronicles 17:10-15, Psalms 89:1-4 and 19-37** all detail the content of **the Davidic Covenant**. Had **Ahaz** been able to trust in **the LORD** and **His** promised **Covenant** with **David**, **he** would not have been afraid, and **the nation** would have followed **his** lead. Because of **his** lack of faith, however, **the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind (7:2b)**.