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Ask the LORD Your God for a Sign

7: 10-12

Ask the LORD your God for a sign DIG: Why did Ahaz have to be spoken to again? Who was speaking to him the second time? What was the purpose of the sign? What were the limitations the LORD put on this sign? Ahaz was known as an evil king, so what do you make of his response here? Is this unbelief or humility? What was his alternative plan (Second Kings 16:7-9)?

REFLECT: How does God communicate best with you? A still small voice? Art? Worship? Through Scripture? Nature? Or something else? When God the Holy Spirit comes to convict you of your sin, does He have to come back again and again, or do you repent quickly? How do you recognize His voice when He comes to you? Ahaz masked his lack of trust in God with false humility. What examples have you seen of people covering up their sin with a veneer of virtue? How does Ahaz' refusal serve as a warning to you? Read Isaiah 7:12 and Exodus 17:1-7. How could one use Scripture to attempt to justify their own sinful nature?

Ahaz is now challenged to give **God** a chance to prove **His** trustworthiness. **He** was willing to strengthen **the king's** faith through **a sign** of deliverance. As happens often in the TaNaKh, one time **the prophet** speaks as if **he** were **the LORD**, and another time, as is the case here, **the LORD** speaks as if **He** were **the prophet**. Hezekiah had asked for **a sign** when **Isaiah** prophesied of **his** recovery and fifteen additional years of life. **The prophet** gave him the **sign** he asked for by causing the shadow cast by the sun to go backwards ten steps instead of forwards (**38:1-8**).

The last time **Isaiah** met **King Ahaz**, **the prophet** brought along **his** son Shear-Jashub, whose name meant *a remnant will return*. By bringing **his** son as an object lesson, it gave **Ahaz** a chance to believe in **God**, and not in **his** political savvy. But if **Ahaz** ever got the message, **he** ignored it completely. Here **Ahaz** is spoken to **again**, this time by **ADONAI**. The stakes were being raised; **the LORD** was going to make **Ahaz** an offer **he** couldn't refuse.

Therefore, as a means of strengthening **his** faith, **ADONAI** spoke to **Ahaz**, saying: **Ask the LORD your God for a sign (7:10a)**. When **ADONAI** or **the LORD** is used in a compound word with **Elohim** or **God**, it points us to **His** relationship to mankind or to **the Nation**. In this case, **ADONAI** spoke to **Ahaz**, so this compound name emphasizes **His** relationship to **the king of Judah**. If **Ahaz** would ask for **a sign**, its fulfillment would be a demonstrable miracle that would confirm **God's** spoken word. **The king** could choose any miracle **his** heart desired, **whether in the deepest depths of in the highest heights (7:10b-11)**. This is a figure of speech called a merism, where two extremes are mentioned with the intention to include everything in between. Other examples of merism would be: *hook, line and sinker*, or *lock, stock and barrel*. Previously, **Isaiah** had told **Ahaz** that the northern invasion that **he** feared so much would **not happen (7:7-9)**. Here, with any **sign** of **his** choosing, **he** would have visible confirmation that **Isaiah's** words were truly from **ADONAI**.

The word **sign** is used a total of 79 times in the Bible; **Isaiah** uses it 11 of those times. When we look at all 79 passages we see that it is used three different ways. First, it is used in the sense of heavenly bodies; the stars are used for navigation (**Genesis 1:14**). Secondly, it is used in the sense of positive proof. Not the miraculous, but merely positive proof (**Exodus 3:13**). Here **YHVH** speaking to Moshe says: **I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain**. Now that in and of itself is no miracle, but it did serve as a sense of positive proof. Thirdly, it is also used in the sense of the miraculous (**Exodus 4:6-9**).

Every **you** in **7:10** through **12** is singular and only applies to **Ahaz**. **Isaiah** is emphatic: **ask the LORD your God. The prophet** puts **Ahaz** to the **test**. Although **he** invites **Ahaz** to **test God**, it is really **the king himself** who is being tested. **ADONAI** said: **If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all (7:9B)**. Will **he** respond to the words by believing in **God** and standing **firm**, or will he reject them? Undoubtedly, as **the king of Judah**, **he** had given lip service to the idea of faith, but now **he** must act upon it or deny it.

What will it take for **Ahaz** to believe the prophecy that has just been given? **God** was offering **Ahaz** anything **he** wanted. **He** could ask for **a sign** in heaven, **a sign** on the earth, or whatever it was going to take to convince **him** that this prophecy was really going to come true and **He** would make it happen. Unfortunately, there is never enough proof for unbelief.

Trying to appear religious, in whatever form it takes, is one of the great trappings of human existence. Quite naturally, human pride wants to look good to others, and some people think they know what will appear as being pious. During the Sermon on the Mount, **Jesus** said: **When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full (Matthew 6:5).** The Bible teaches us: **In every town in Judah Ahaz built high places to burn sacrifices to other gods, he set up altars at ever street corner in Jerusalem, even in the Temple itself (Second Chronicles 29:22-27).** Therefore, **King Ahaz** was one of those **hypocrites**, trying to act religious, while courting **the devil**.

Even though **ADONAI** offered **Ahaz a sign** to confirm the reliability of **His** spoken word, it was useless. **The king did not want to be convinced because his mind was already made up.** The way the word **sign** is used here, the context of **the sign** was to produce faith in **Ahaz** (and from what we know of **Ahaz** that would take a miracle). But **Ahaz** did not want such a **sign**. Why? **He** was going to trust both **his** personal future and **his nation's** fate to Assyria. Any **sign** provided by **Isaiah** would only be an embarrassment to **him**, so **he** attempted to avoid the dilemma with an appeal to piety.



He made a choice, which indicated **his** skill at diplomacy and quick thinking. **The king of Y'hudah** said: **I will not ask; I will not put the Lord to the test (7:12).** Now doesn't that sound spiritual! **He** was actually appealing to a passage in **Deuteronomy 6:16** that says: **Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah.** So to the casual onlooker **Ahaz** made it appear that **he** did not have a problem with too little faith, but rather **he** possessed such a deep faith that **he** did not want to ask for evidence. The real sin of putting **the LORD to the test** is refusing to trust **Him** and **His** past faithfulness unless **He** prove **Himself** trustworthy over and over again. Nevertheless, the whole dynamic of the

confrontation between **YHVH, His prophet** and **Ahaz** changed when the offer of a **sign** was made. From **ADONAI's** point of view, nothing is more important than that **His** promises are met with trust.

Ahaz alluded to Scripture, just as **the Adversary** did when tempting **Messiah** (see my commentary on **The Life of Christ, to see link click Bj - Jesus is Tempted in the Wilderness**). Similar to others before and after **him, the king of Judah** took **Deuteronomy 6:16** out of context when confronted by **Isaiah**. Because if the **sign God** was offering **Ahaz** really took place, it would require **him** to change **his** pro-Assyrian plans. **He** would have to stop trusting in Assyria and start trusting in **ADONAI**. For that reason alone **he** rejected the offer. It is always the same throughout all of history. Evidence cannot create faith; it can only confirm it. Where there is no faith, evidence is merely unwelcome, something to be explained away. There is never enough proof for unbelief.

The Judean king demonstrated the real danger of an outward religious appearance without faith. It is **having the form of godliness but denying its power (Second Timothy 3:5)**, or missing the substance of the relationship with **the LORD**. Piety is the by-product, not the end product. Is going to church or messianic synagogue good? Is having a daily devotion good? Is avoiding lust, greed and self-indulgence good? Is moderate, inoffensive speech good? Is regular, significant giving to the cause of **Messiah** good? Is integrity in all one's dealings good? The answer to all these are "of course." But do any of them really demonstrate faith in **ADONAI**? The answer is "no."

In fact, these things can be deadly substitutes for faith in **the One True God**. If I rely on any of these to get to heaven, I am building my house on the sand (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Dy - The Wise and Foolish Builders**). Faith in **the LORD** is surrendering to the love of **YHVH** demonstrated to us in **God with us**. The good works in our lives are merely an expression of the relationship with **Immanuel**, not substitutes for it, as was the case with **Ahaz**.²⁶

As pious as **his** words sounded, **King Ahaz** was doing the work of **the Ancient Serpent** by quoting Scripture for **his** own purposes; thus without realizing it, **he** revealed **his** unbelief. This was **his** moment of decision. For **him** and for **the nation** . . . there was no turning back.