

My daughter Jordan reads the national news on ABC Radio National in Melbourne. Her 5am broadcast today began with a story about the need for peace in Palestine. Syria. Iraq. Palestine. A world in crisis. These were the same headlines in the Middle East in the 8<sup>th</sup>C BC. God's Christmas promise has a historical context of world crisis. In 735BC the revived Assyrian Empire was the new global superpower. In Israel ten northern tribes (called Ephraim) made a pact with Syria (called Aram) to counter Assyria's aggressive expansion west and south into Palestine. King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel formed an alliance against the Assyrians. However in the south, Ahaz King of Judah refused to join their alliance and was attacked by the two kings.

**Now the house of David was told, "Aram has allied itself with Ephraim"; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind." (Isaiah 7:1-2)**

Bad news can shake us - a letter of termination – a late night knock on the door - a bad diagnosis? A friend has recently received news that his cancer has spread. He wrote: *'I didn't get the result I was hoping for...the choices are not great either way.. it's going to be a tough call. One thing I ask is for the kids.I'd really value your prayer for them. They've had to face a lot of tough news in their lives...my hope and prayer is that it doesn't dampen their love of God or their faith in his goodness.'* That's how my friend is facing his cancer. How did Ahaz king of Judah face the crisis of invasion? Did he trust in the word of the Lord? Did he rely on God's promise of deliverance?

**<sup>3</sup> Then the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer's Field. <sup>4</sup> Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. <sup>5</sup> Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, <sup>6</sup> "Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it." (Isaiah 7:3- 6)**

They were scared, but God spoke peace. Don't be afraid of these two trouble makers. They are threatening you but will be stubbed out like a cigarette butt. Trust in me.

**Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "It will not take place, it will not happen. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.'" (Isaiah 7:7-9)**

Ahaz received another word from the Lord, as well as a warning about not believing.

*'How great is Your goodness which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You prepared for those **who trust in You in the presence of the sons of men!**' Ps 31:19*

**Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test."** It sounded pious. The king quoted Scripture. (Deut 6:16)

In reality this was pretense. He refused to trust in the Lord. Like the Christmas gift you do not want but pretend to like, he wrapped unbelief in religion. Why wouldn't the king ask for a sign? Ahaz didn't pray for it required faith that he had abandoned.

**Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, "I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me." And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift**

**gift to the king of Assyria...**Then King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria. He saw an altar in Damascus and sent to Uriah the priest a sketch of the altar, with detailed plans for its construction. ***So Uriah the priest built an altar in accordance with all the plans that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus and finished it before King Ahaz returned. When the king came back from Damascus and saw the altar, he approached it and presented offerings on it.*** (2 Kings 16:1-12)

In a secret treaty he had submitted to Assyria's lordship and acknowledged Assyria's gods; even redesigning the Jerusalem temple to encourage worship of their idols. He trusted his enemy not God. Are we trusting the Lord? *Is your faith vulnerable?* God had already helped Ahaz. The planned invasion did not overpower Jerusalem. Isaiah had taken his son '**Shear-Jashub to speak with King Ahaz.**' *The boy's name means 'a remnant will return.'* The message of the boy's name was: God's people will not be destroyed. Don't fear. Have faith. But Ahaz wouldn't believe God's Word nor pray to God. Not reading God's Word and not praying are signs of drift. '*Let him pray now that never prayed before. And him that prayed before, but pray the more.*'

(P. T. Forsyth) "**Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?**" (7:13) God will give you a sign Ahaz, whether you ask him or not. '*the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel...*before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste. The Lord will bring on you and on your people and on the house of your father a time unlike any since Ephraim broke away from Judah—**he will bring the king of Assyria.**" (7:14-17) **Who is the son?** The immediate fulfilment is Isaiah's son. The Lord said to me, "**Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.** For before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria." (8:1-4) The boy's name means, '*Speed up the plunder; hurry up with the loot*'. It spoke of deportation of the tribes of Israel. God had hired Assyria *for judgment*. For the next 100 years the kingdom of Judah was subject to Assyrian power and paganism. Isaiah's son signified defeat. Will there be another Son? Not a son of judgment but of salvation? Isaiah says another child will be born. **To us a child is born, to us a son is given.** (9:6)

'Joseph son of David, **do not be afraid** to take Mary home as your wife...what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins...to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son **and they will call him Immanuel.**' 1:22-23

In the same words God spoke to Ahaz the angels said to Joseph: **Don't be afraid.** The fulfilment of Immanuel is Jesus - God with us – the bringer of God's salvation. From beginning to the end in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is with his people. (Matt 28:20) By God's Spirit we experience the beautiful blessing of having God always with us.

*'We are not alone in any sorrow, ambition, joy, defeat, success, or even in our sin—for the Spirit of the Father shares our every mood and need, comforting, helping, restraining and healing us.'*