

## Isaiah 7:10-14

### “Why would you name a son Immanuel?”

“Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz,  
11 ‘Ask the LORD your God for a sign,  
whether in the deepest depths or in the highest  
heights.’ 12 But Ahaz said, ‘I will not ask; I  
will not put the LORD to the test.’ 13 Then  
Isaiah said, ‘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? 14  
Therefore the Lord himself will give you a  
sign: “The virgin will conceive and give birth  
to a son, and will call him Immanuel.”

**Last week we talked about life’s tests and challenges.**

**Today we focus on our opportunities.**

All moments of life provide possibilities.

**Every second of consciousness gives us a chance to do something.**

**“What are these opportunities and how do I use them?” you ask.**

You’ll further want to know:

**“With my education, age, background, and limited experience, what options do I have?”**

**Our text from about 740 BC gives a powerful example of missed opportunity.**

Yet this exchange between the prophet Isaiah and King Ahaz makes little sense to most.  
**You stand a better chance of understanding a 3 AM conversation between two drunks.**



**On the other hand, if one of those drunks were privy to information that could save your life, you’d pay attention, right?**

One of the regulars of our business and professional peoples’ Bible study in L.A. invited a wealthy, agnostic friend to attend.

We used the Bible as our text in that study.

**This doubting man came with candid, vocal skepticism.**

He didn’t hesitate to speak his mind.

**After a few weeks, this scoffing agnostic bought his own Bible and started reading it.**

After a while, he said: **“This is good stuff.”**

Bear with me a few moments, and I think you’ll agree, “Our text contains good stuff.”

**Here’s a Christmas nutshell story about it. About 1850 BC, the Lord promised land to Abraham, the grandfather of Jacob (nicknamed, Israel).**

This man Israel-Jacob’s 12 sons and their families migrated to Egypt about 1750 BC.

**Those families greatly increased in population becoming 12 large tribes.**

Within four hundred years, (1350) three major occurrences affected the 12 tribes.

- Their total population grew to two million.
- The Egyptians enslaved all of them.
- Through God’s spokesman Moses, God and Israel’s 12 tribes formed a contract.

**God guaranteed the tribes possession of the land He pledged Jacob’s granddad.**

They had to obey His laws.

**God’s laws always benefit nations, families, and folks who follow them.**

His laws guide us toward good health and positive relations with one another.

**God’s laws preserve the environment.  
His laws apply equally to every person.**

**From king to commoners in Israel, God held all accountable to the same laws.**

**Keeping those laws would enable Israel to become advanced, at peace, and successful.**

Thus God gave Israel opportunity to become an enduring, prosperous, peaceful nation.

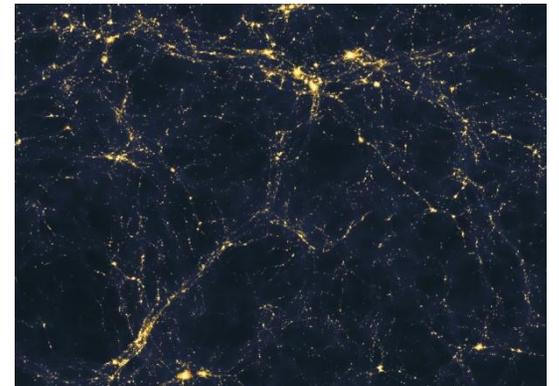
To attain those ends, each Israelite had to honor God above all other powers and beings.

**We tend to forget who God is.**

**He’s not just some kindly, white-haired old grandfather, who looks down from heaven now and then.**

- God created the entire Cosmos and knows its mysteries and boundaries.

**One view of God’s enormous, mysterious Creation.**



- God conceived and established the physical laws that some space scientist(s) misread or misinterpreted leading to the failure of that ISS space mission last week.
- He created the life that farmers depend on every spring when they plant corn, soy beans, wheat, etc.
- God perceives the backwaters of every human mind and always knows the truth about the excuses we make.

**Most of us know of the Ten Commandments that God gave Israel and his descendants.**

**Do you recall that the first four of the ten refer to honoring and worshiping God?**

Some Israelites became enticed by “more exciting and fleshly appealing” worship services that nearby countries practiced as they worshiped their gods.<sup>1</sup>

**Can you believe that some folks back then, preferred sports over God?**

One of the ten laws was: Honor your parents. Then as now, many tried to elude that duty.

**The last five applied to the Israelite’s treatment of their spouses and one another.**

**You understand everyday temptations.**

Some folks thought they were entitled to do what they wanted. **“It’s my life and body; I can do as I want.”**

**They forgot God who began life and gives us our bodies.**

Many got hooked on pornography, booze, and a lifestyle of pleasure.

**Many didn’t want to spend a whole day resting and honoring God.**

To increase income and profits, some cheated in their business transactions.

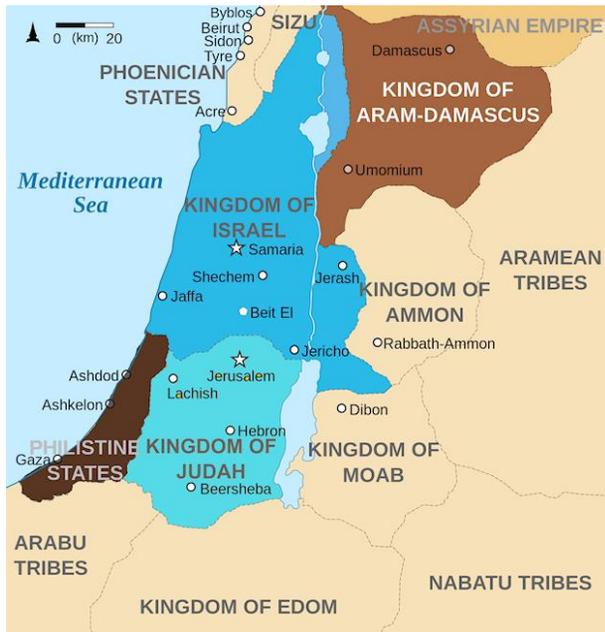
**Greed, envy, resentment, lust, and pride led to arguing, fighting and division.**

**About 920 BC, ten tribes rebelled against the king and the priesthood in Jerusalem.**

Those ten tribes appointed a new king and built their own capital north of Jerusalem. They began their own priesthood and set up idols for folks to worship so their tribe members wouldn’t have to go to Jerusalem.

<sup>1</sup> The Baals and Asherahs e.g. See 1 Kings 18.

**They could do as they pleased.**  
**The ten northern tribes took the name Israel; two southern tribes became Judah.**



Map 1 showing Kingdoms of **Israel**, **Judah**, and **Aram**

Map 1 shows the location of the divided countries in Isaiah’s time as well as Aram, and its capital Damascus.

**God’s laws forbade Israel to form alliances with the nations around them**

Yet in Isaiah’s time, the Kingdom of Israel formed an alliance with Aram and planned a war against their southern cousins in Judah.

Ahaz was king of Judah (southern) at the time. So two small nations, Aram and Israel, aligned against the tiny kingdom, Judah. **Isaiah was God’s prophet and spokesman. Isaiah advised Ahaz of God’s will.**

**Isaiah instructed what God expects every one of us and all people:**

- **Put God first.**
- **Trust God.**
- **Keeps His laws.**

As the first chapters of Isaiah tell us, Ahaz and the people of Judah had not done any of the three very well.



Map 2 showing huge **Neo (new)-Assyrian Empire**

**Ahaz saw a more appealing option than doing God’s will.**

### He wanted a visible human solution.

He looked to Assyria, the most powerful nation in the region.

**Human answers appeal to us because they are physically observable.**

Every generation produces a plethora of “experts:” who love telling others what to do.

**You can see the size of Aram, Israel, and Judah compared to Neo (new)-Assyria.**

**In our text, Isaiah challenged Ahaz to trust the Creator God, not some temporary guy.**

He earlier counseled Ahaz:

“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 (King of Israel).

**Through Isaiah, God reminded Ahaz, King of Judah, “Listen to Me. The two guys you fear are mere fireplace ashes.”**

**In our text, Isaiah says:**

**“The Lord will give you a sign.”**

**Ahaz declined God’s sign: “I will not put the Lord to the test.”**

**Ahaz wasn’t afraid to ask God for a sign.**

**He didn’t want to obey God or trust his future or that of his kingdom’s to God.**

**Just prior to our text (verse 9), Isaiah warned King Ahaz about rejecting God: “If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”**

**Ahaz’s opportunity seems clear, doesn’t it? At this crucial time, will he trust and serve the Eternal God or will he fear fireplace embers that will soon be cold ashes?**

**Sometimes we get in jams and pickles because we haven’t kept God’s will.**

**Still, God gives us opportunities to escape. But God’s way requires: we shape up; do God’s will; trust Him; and keep doing right. Ahaz chose to trust the worldly power Assyria.**

**Look at map 2 once more.**

**See the Kingdom shown in brown (Babylon to Assyria’s southeast?)**



**In less than a hundred years, the Babylonian’s conquered the Assyrians, Aramites, Israelites, and the perennially strong Egyptians.**

**They broke Jerusalem’s walls and destroyed the cherished Temple in Jerusalem ending Judah’s kingdom.**

**Human built nations and institutions are all temporary.**

**Do you recall the sign Isaiah wanted Ahaz to heed? “The virgin will conceive, bear a son and will call him Immanuel.”**

**The only way to really live is to trust God and to do his will.**

**Experience tells us that more than once this week you will face some significant choices.**

**Will you choose to trust God and do his will or will you make Ahaz’s mistake?**

**Your opportunity may simple be just telling someone, “You are doing a good job.”**

**Or thanking someone for doing a good deed.**

An elderly mother lay bedridden with her final illness. Medical workers called her two sons and one daughter to her bedside. She lay in bed very weak, but conscious. She smiled as they entered the room. One of the sons bent over and said, **“You’ve been a good mother.”** The mother sighed and whispered, **“Do you mean that?”**

**“Of course, you have,”** all three chorused.

Faintly and frankly the mother voiced: **“I didn’t know; you never said it before. I didn’t know.”**

**Every day gives us opportunities to thank, praise, encourage, and boost others.**

**You know what God’s angel (messenger) told Joseph concerning his fiancée, Mary, 700 years after Isaiah and Ahaz: “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. <sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet:**

<sup>23</sup> **‘The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ (which means “God with us”).**

<sup>24</sup> **When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. <sup>25</sup> But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.”**

**God tested Joseph with an awkward choice, but he did what the Lord commanded him.**

He passed his test using his opportunity well.

**“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (13) No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”<sup>2</sup>**

**We often excuse ourselves saying:**

**“I just couldn't help myself!” or**

**“It was too great to resist.”**

**There was a way out for us, of course.**

**We just didn't want to take it.**

**God is faithful.**

As surely as you never see God's law of gravity fail, or any of his physical laws, God keeps all his promises to provide ways of escape in our tests.

**No one who chooses to serve God and rely on his faithfulness in a test will ever regret that decision.**

**In Jesus, God came in the flesh to show us how to live and to prove how powerfully and dependably God loves us.**

**Jesus faithfully endured all his tests because he chose God's way every step.**

**Jesus was and is “God with us.”**

**“If we do not stand firm in our faith (in Christ), we will not stand at all.”**

**The Lord willing, we shall tie all of this together next week.**



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<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 10:12, 13 NIV