

Trusting God In a World of Fear (Isaiah 7:1–9:7)

Isaiah: Trusting the God Who Judges, Saves, and Renews
Zionsville Fellowship | October 18, 2026 | Drew Hunter

In the mid-1500s in England, many men and women showed faith-filled courage in a fearful time.

Here's what happened. England's leadership was favorable to the spread of the gospel and reformation of the church under Edward VI. But he died in 1553 and his sister, Mary, became queen. She is now known as Bloody Mary.

She was staunchly Catholic and wanted to restore Catholic authority over England. When she came to power, she imprisoned the leading reformers. And she also decided that they would either bend to her way or be put to death.

So, they were called one by one to be examined by special commissions. They must either recant of their reformed faith, or be burned alive. And this is exactly what happened. They were chained to a stake in the ground, surrounded with wood, and burned alive.

This happened to not just the primary pastors and leaders—it happened to almost 300 people—including women and younger people. They were some of the most godly and well-educated people in their time.

The first one to go was a London pastor named John Rogers. On the morning of his execution, he was led through the streets where his church members lived. He passed his wife and children. He walked calmly to the stake, reciting scripture.

The most well-known were the pastors Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer. Ridley was around in his mid-50s, and Latimer was somewhere between 70–85 years old.

They were bound to the stake to be burned together. And as they were bound, Latimer said to Ridley: “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day, by God's grace, light such a candle in England as I trust shall never be put out.”ⁱ Then the flames rose up and they were burned alive.

Where did they get this kind of faith and courage?

And what about us? We are not facing this kind of persecution, but many Christians and missionaries around the world are.

And apart from persecution—we all live in a world of fear. People fear crime and violence and shootings. Some fear China's expansion, Islam's spread, the potential nuclear warfare. Others fear the rise in secularism, or the rise of totalitarianism. Or climate change. An AI apocalypse. Or, more personally—an oppressive person in your life—a parent, a spouse, a coworker, another student. Potential financial insecurity. Declining health.

In this fear-filled world, we are inclined to anxiety and hopelessness.

So, how are we to live in world of fear? Where do we get faith-filled calm and courage?

We get it from trusting God and his promises.

This is what Isaiah 7–9 gives us. **This is here to cultivate faith in God in a world of fear.**

[Read Isaiah 7:1–17; 9:1–7]

Our text is here to cultivate faith in God in a world of fear.

There are four sections in this text—and each one teaches what it means to trust God.

In each of these sections, there is a son who is given a name. The names of these four sons carry a message. In 8:18 Isaiah says these sons are signs from God—they are signs like billboards, calling us to cultivate faith in a world of fear.

They tell us the truth about God and his promises to preserve us, be with us, and deliver us. And they ultimately lead us to trust in Jesus as the true Son.

So, we'll see how these four sons lead us to trust God in four ways: to trust God to preserve us, to trust him to be with us, to trust him when no one else does, and trust him to deliver.

1. Trusting God to Preserve Us: Shear-jashub (7:1–9)

The first son's name leads us to trust God to preserve us. This is Isaiah 7:1–9.

In this section we see king Ahaz—and he's filled with anxious fear in the midst of a crisis.

Here's the situation: When we think of Israel in the Old Testament, we often think of them as a unified nation of twelve tribes. But after king Solomon, the nation split in two. The northern tribes broke away and formed their own nation—and they are often called Israel. And the southern two tribes are often called Judah. So, Israel is in the North, and Judah is in the south.

And just above Israel—to the north of them—is the nation of Syria.

And here's the problem: Israel and Syria were joining together to attack Judah in the south.

Why were they joining together to do this? Because they were all scared of the rising superpower in the East, which was Assyria.

So, Syria and Israel joined forces to have more power together. And they wanted Judah in the south to join them. But Judah resisted this. So, they were going to attack Judah, probably kill king Ahaz, and set up a new king. Then they would be a coalition that might be able to resist Assyria's power.

That's what's going on in the opening verses. Let's read them again—and notice Ahaz's fear:

- “In the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah...” So this is Judah in the south, with Ahaz as the king.
- “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.” So this is Syria and Israel, about to attack Judah.
- Verse 2 shows us how Ahaz and the people respond: “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.” Their hearts are melting inside them. They're terrified and shaking like trees.

Have you felt like that about anything before? I remember a season when I was so anxious I lost my appetite and lost weight. A couple other times I was physically shaking.

What do we need in these times? We need God's word.

So God sends his prophet Isaiah to talk to Ahaz.

Verse 3 says Isaiah will find Ahaz just outside the city, by their water source. What is Ahaz doing there? He is probably fortifying Jerusalem's water-source, because if there's a siege, they will need it.

So, Ahaz is shaking in terror, and doing whatever he can to get ready for battle.

And Isaiah brings him a message. What is the message?

Verse 4 puts it negatively: “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.” So, “calm down. Quick shaking. Don't be afraid at all about this.” Then verse 9 puts it positively: “If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.”

In between these two verses Isaiah gives the reason—Israel and Syria won't succeed. God will make sure of it. In fact, *those* nations are the ones that will be destroyed.

I mentioned that there are four sons—and each son's name is a message and a call to faith.

Who is the first son? In verse 3, God told Isaiah to bring his son with him to visit Ahaz.

And what is the son's name? The son's name is *Shear-jashub*. That translates into English as "A remnant will return." Or "a remnant will repent."

There's hope in that name—God will preserve a remnant of people.

Ahaz is to trust God's promise to protect him. And no matter what happens—God will preserve a remnant. This is the promise that can give him faith-filled calm and courage.

How is Ahaz's situation similar to us today?

One of our staff members reminded me this week of a book by Ed Welch. The title is, *When People are Big and God is Small*. That's what's going on with Ahaz. These invading kings are understandably big to him—they are a real threat and this is a real crisis.

But the problem is that, to Ahaz, God is small. And what happens when our problems look bigger than God's promises? We tremble. We are anxious. We are fearful.

But when we see that God is bigger than our problems—then fear is replaced with faith.

Jesus helps us here. In the Sermon the Mount, he addressed our anxieties and fears in life. And he said our problem is that we have "little faith." In order to give us bigger faith, he reminds us that God is bigger than our problems. He says—look at how God takes care of the birds and fields; and are you not more valuable than they are?

So, what is leading you to become anxious in life right now? When do you find yourself trembling like Ahaz? What is it that you are afraid of?

And be honest with yourself about how you feel—and how big your problem is. You don't need to minimize it. But then also start to think about how big God is. And how big his promises are.

And what is the promise of this text?

The promise of this text is the name of the first son— it is that God will preserve a remnant. No matter how hard things get, God will preserve his people. Israel is going to be judged; but God is calling Ahaz to trust his promise of a remnant.

And if you are in Christ, you are part of this believing remnant, preserved by God.

This doesn't mean that we will never have problems. But it does mean that he will take care of us—and even if we die, we remain with him. Latimer and Ridley knew God would preserve them even through that painful death.

This is the message of the son's name: in your crisis of fear, trust God's promise to preserve you.

2. Trusting God to Be With Us: Immanuel (7:10–25)

But it's not just that he'll preserve you—he promises to be with you.

This is the second promise to receive in a fear-filled world. God promises to be with us, even in and through our suffering.

We see this in a new situation that develops.

Ahaz failed to trust God, so God graciously seeks to cultivate his faith again. He invites Ahaz to ask him for a sign. God will do anything that would strengthen his faith.

But listen to how Ahaz responds in verse 10 and ask yourself—Is this a good response, or a bad one? He says, “I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test.”

Now, at one level—that's good. Don't put the Lord to the test, right?

But this situation is different—God offered to give a sign to strengthen his faith. And Ahaz gives a pious-sounding response. But the subtext of his response is: “I've already made up my mind. I'm not going to trust you. I have my own plan. So, no thanks.”

Think about it like this: This is like if you have a son who is anxious about whether or not you'll provide food for him. He's convinced he's going to starve. You tell him to trust you, but he's shaking with fear. So you say, “Listen, let me prove myself to you. Ask for anything right now, and I'll do it.” And then the son says, “No, I could never ask that of you.” That's a pious sounding rejection.

So, God makes a new promise—and the promise comes with the name of another son.

This is one of the most well-known promises in the Old Testament. It's the promise of a son called “Immanuel.” But let's make sure we understand what this means in context here.

In verse 13, God says Ahaz and the people are wearying him with their refusal to trust him. So, in verse 14, he promises, “the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,” which means, “God with us.”

Now, can you see this is not a sheerly positive sign? Ahaz is rejecting God. God responds to that rejection with this promise. There is an ominous tone to this.

So, what's going on?

Well, this is a very hard verse to understand, actually. Lots of brilliant scholars have different takes on this. I won't get into the details. But let me give the main options, and then I'll show the main point either way.

1. First, some think this is a direct prophecy of Jesus.

This says a woman will miraculously conceive as a virgin, and the son will be called “God with us,” because he is divine.ⁱⁱ

2. Second, some think this refers to a young woman of Isaiah’s time, who will have a son.

The word “virgin” doesn’t necessarily mean this will be a virgin birth. The word often just refers to a young woman. And even if it refers to a virgin at the time Isaiah says this, it’s reasonable to think this virgin will get married and have a kid the normal way.

This child is named “Immanuel,” and it was a sign that God was with his people in that time. And this still points forward to Jesus—because he is the ultimate, true, faithful Son.ⁱⁱⁱ And when he comes, it is a miraculous virgin-conception and God with us.

3. Third, it’s possible that the young woman is a metaphor for Israel.

Isaiah elsewhere refers to God’s people as a daughter, or virgin daughter. And the son, then, would be a remnant of true believers whom God is with. The image is of the nation giving birth to a son—a remnant of true believers—through the agony of judgment. And this will be proof that God is still with his people.^{iv}

It’s hard to know which is right.

I lean toward the second one—that this refers to a young woman in Isaiah’s time, who will give birth to a son and name him Immanuel.

It seems like what Isaiah says next fits this best—I think verses 15–17 indicate that before this child grows up, Israel and Syria are going to be destroyed, and Judah is also going to suffer.

And no matter how you take this verse—the promise is still the same. The name “Immanuel” gives the hope that God is with us. He is with those who trust him; and he will judge those who don’t.

The rest of the chapter unfolds the judgment.

It essentially says, in different ways, the land is going to be desolate. It’s going to be overrun by an invading army. It will be depopulated. It will return to its undeveloped state. The only people who live there, will live in poverty.

And this is what happened when the superpower of Assyria came through and defeated Syria and Israel. But even through this, God preserved a remnant; and he was with them.

So, for the people of Isaiah's time, this was a promise to cling to.

In the midst of a world of fear, they could trust God's promise to be with them. And God was with the small remnant of true believers in Israel's history. And when Jesus came, it was the greatest fulfillment of this promise.

And we have this promise now as well. No matter what you face... No matter what fears we have in our lives, or in our society, or in the world... *God is with us*. Jesus has come. He has given his Spirit to dwell within us. And he will come again to be with us forever.

This is what Jesus said to his disciples—and thus to us—when he was about to leave the first time. He said in John 14: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me... I go and prepare a place for you... I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” He said, “stop shaking. Calm down. Don't be afraid. I will be with you forever. Nothing can take this away.

But one thing makes this particularly hard to do—when we feel like we're the only ones.

3. Trusting God When No One Else Does: Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1–22)

This leads to the next challenge to our faith, and the promise of the third son's name.

So, third, trusting God when no one else does. This is chapter 8.

Ahaz and the people are refusing to trust God to this point, and so judgment will come.^y

And now God tells Isaiah to have another son, and give him another name. This son's name is—you can see in verses 1 and 3, “Maher-shalal-hash-baz.”

And the meaning of his name is ominous—it into English something like, “quick to the spoil.” Meaning, the enemies are coming fast. They're going to plunder you quickly.

Verse 4 explains it more clearly: “for before the boy knows how to cry ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.” So now the invasion is just a couple years away. Before this little kid learns to talk, Syria and Israel are going to be destroyed by Assyria.

And then verses 5–10 show us what this destruction will be like. And here we learn that Assyria won't just take Syria and Israel, but Judah, too. The Assyrians are pictured like a river that overflows and floods the whole land.

But a remnant will still be preserved. Notice the image of verse 8: the floodwaters will “will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.”

Now, what does faith look like in this situation?

The rest of the chapter shows us what it looks like to trust God when no one else does. Almost all the people are rejecting God. But there are a few who trust his promises—Isaiah and those who listen to him. Just a small remnant. A small minority. They trust God and don't fear in the face of this judgment.

So, God encourages Isaiah and his followers to live as a contrast community. In the midst of an unbelieving culture, filled with injustice, and headed for judgment—here's how you live with faith.

What does it look like? Two insights...

First, you do not fear what other people fear, but you trust the Lord instead.

This is verses 11–12, “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: 12 “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. 13 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” While the news headlines keep reporting threat after threat—you don't fear. You fear God. You regard him as holy. You trust that he is in charge. And verse 14 says he will be a sanctuary to you. He will be a refuge.

The apostle Peter quotes this when he encourages Christians like us who live in a hostile culture. He wrote, “But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (1 Peter 3:14–16).

Second, you devote yourself to God's word, rather than fickle and false source of truth.

Isaiah says in verse 16, “Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. 17 I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.” This is God's word—likely the scriptures they have up to that point, as well as Isaiah's teaching. And he is saying that during this time of judgment—this time of God hiding his face from them—bind the teaching up. Preserve it. Cling to it. Let his promises keep cultivating hope.

It's hard to live as a Christian when it's not popular.

But we're not the first ones to do it. Isaiah gives us the pattern that God's people have always followed. You trust the Lord rather than fear your circumstances. And you devote yourself to his word, because that's where he makes his promises to you. And in doing this, you trust him and you hope in him.

And there is a final promised Son that strengthens our faith.

4. Trusting God to Deliver Us: The Promised King (9:1–7)

The fourth son's names lead us to trust the God who delivers us.

As we approach chapter 9, Israel has been left in the darkness of judgment and exile. Assyria swept in to judge Israel in the north, and then Judah in the south. And then Babylon would come in and finish the job by carrying Judah off into exile. It's all darkness and gloom.

But chapter 9 opens with the hope of light after darkness. Joy after anguish.

Verse 1 describes this light dawning in one place in particular—in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali—and the land of Galilee. Why? Why is this the first place to receive light? Because this was the first place that went into exile. These cities were the first ones destroyed and taken captive by Assyria—right at the northernmost part of Israel.

But notice what verse 1 says will happen there: “But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”

Now, why is it worth knowing that this was the first place carried off into exile?

Because God will begin his restoration where he began the judgment.

And how does God actually accomplish this in history? Did you know that this is where Jesus started his ministry? He started there on purpose. Listen to Matthew 4

Matt. 4:13 “And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled...” And then he quotes this text. Light will come—and Jesus is that light. And then adds, “From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).

Jesus started his ministry there because he is the answer to the problem of judgment. He is—in the deepest sense—restoring people from exile. He is gathering a remnant from Israel—beginning in the place where the judgment began. And the gospel has now come to us as well. He is gathering humanity out of their exile; bringing us back to God.

And Isaiah gives Israel another promise to trust in anticipation of this.

And it's another son. But this is the Son of sons. This is now another familiar text if you've been a Christian for a number of years, or been around churches at Christmas. This is the fourth son. And this Son doesn't have one name—he has four names.

Verses 6–7: 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, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 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.”

This Son will be born from the Davidic line, but he will be the divine son of God.

- He is wonderful counselor, which means he accomplishes all his purposes.
- He is the mighty God; the one who rules the nations.
- He is the everlasting father—not in the sense of the first person of the Trinity, God the Father, but in the sense of being a father to his people.
- And he is the prince of peace—the one who brings peace to earth.

He is already doing this—spreading the gospel of peace, reconciling people together, creating churches, which are to be places of peace in a chaotic world at war. And he will one day establish his kingdom forever on a new earth. And peace will reign forever.

These are the promises that God gives us to strengthen our faith. And these are the promises that create courage in a world of fear. This is what we can trust.

This is what gave courage to Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, and the many other men and women.

Their strength was not their faith; but the God they trusted in.

They knew the God who would preserve them even through flames and death.

They knew the God who promised to be with them through it all and forever.

They knew the God who judges his enemies, and they clung to his promises.

And they knew the God who came to us in the flesh, the Lord Jesus.

They knew he was the true Son—who died while bound to a stake of wood.

And they knew he will preserve them, be with them, and deliver them in the resurrection.

So they could believe when no one else did. And so can we.

So, whatever you fear in life right now... Whatever is causing you anxiety... Whatever is melting your heart or making you shake like a tree in the wind...

Look to the God who is bigger than what you fear. He will preserve you, he is with you, and he will deliver you. And so you can trust him in a world of fear.

ⁱ J. C. Ryle, *Five English Reformers* (Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 19.

ⁱⁱ For example, J. Gresham Machen and Alex Motyer.

ⁱⁱⁱ For example, Jim Hamilton.

^{iv} For example, Barry Webb and David Peterson.

^v This is an outworking of what we saw last week in Isaiah 6. God commissioned Isaiah to preach to Israel—knowing that the people would be hardened in response, and then God would judge them. That’s what’s happening. Even as Isaiah calls Ahaz and the people to faith, they are hardened. And they will be judged.