

# *God's Plan of the Ages*

*Volume Four*

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# *God's Plan of the Ages*

## *Volume Four ~ King Ahaz to Messiah*

A historical fiction epic imagining what it may have been like  
to accompany the Creator of the universe  
from the beginning to the end of time.

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Note: This story begins in Volume Two and is continued in Volume Three. I recommend you read them first, to properly understand Volume Four, which concludes the Old Testament portion of the story. Volume Five tells the New Testament portion of the story and beyond, to the end of time.

Be sure to see the back pages for the timeline, maps, diagrams, and index for this volume.

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## ***Volume Four – King Ahaz to Messiah***

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# *God's Plan of the Ages – Volume Four – King Ahaz to Messiah*

**I**saiah had been prophesying only in Judah. But the Earthquake, followed by Tiglath-pileser III's sweep through the Levant with his huge army in 743 BC, had devastated Israel. Pekah's heavy taxes made it even worse. The poor farmers in the northern districts of Zebulun and Naphtali were hit pretty hard. It seemed such a short time ago that Jeroboam II had brought great prosperity to Israel, but now poverty and famine stalked the land. In their despair, some turned to witches and wizards for advice, but others cried out to YHWH. So Logos gave Isaiah-Alysa one more message for Israel (the northern kingdom).

“They say, ‘Consult the mediums and the wizards who whisper and mutter.’ Should not Israel consult YHWH her God instead? Must you consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law! To the testimony! If anyone does not speak in accord with this Word, it is because his mind is darkness and he has no dawn in his heart. So he will pass through the land hard pressed, famished, even enraged. He will look up and curse his king and his God. He will look down and see only distress, darkness, and gloom. That is why YHWH treats the land with contempt, yes, even the north-lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, who have plunged themselves into darkness and gloom when they turned away from the Light.

“But one day there will be no more gloom for her who was in darkness. YHWH will make Zebulun and Naphtali glorious, even Nazareth and Galilee of the Nations. Then the people who walk in darkness shall see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light shall shine upon them. The people shall multiply, for YHWH will increase their gladness. They will be glad in His presence more than the gladness of the harvest or the joy of dividing the spoil. For YHWH will break the yoke of their burden, the rod of their oppressor, as with Gideon against the host of Midian. For a Child will be born to us; a Son will be given us; and the government will rest upon His capable shoulders. Thus His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over His Kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with righteousness and justice from then on forevermore. The zeal of YHWH of Hosts will accomplish this.” It clearly spoke of Messiah!

But King **Pekah** was angry at the letter. “This is just the ramblings of a madman!” he screamed. “How could the Messiah be just a child? And He will certainly come from Samaria or Jerusalem, not despised Galilee!” He said that because he didn't really want Messiah to come at all. So he refused to heed Isaiah's warning. Satan had occasion. He filled him with hatred for Judah. Pekah went to Rezin and Zoba with plans to attack Elath, so he could cut off the southern trade flowing into Judah.

Outwardly, Judah still prospered abundantly. **Jotham** was a good king; a little naïve perhaps, but committed to YHWH's laws as well as loving and kind to his people. And his wife Jeko'ach was a pretty good queen. Her only flaw was that she didn't have much of a concept of how to be a mother, as she had grown up in a communal household. She didn't even know who her birth mother was. So she mostly left the mothering to the nanny. But Jeko'ach was faithful and true to her husband the king and thus a good example to the people. They all loved them dearly.

But alas. With peace, prosperity, open borders, and free trade comes the greatest challenge of all: to continue to seek YHWH even when you don't think you need Him. Don't get me wrong. Buzz, Jeko'ach's father, really did love YHWH. He was committed to doing what was right in His sight, for Jotham and Jeko'ach, for Judah, and for his rather large family. But don't forget, he had been a high priest of Baal. His family consisted of numerous wives, children, mistresses, and prostitutes from the priesthoods of Baal and Astarte. Along with Buzz, many of them had converted to become faithful servants of YHWH, due to the astute dealings of Jotham. But there are always a few for whom godliness is just a charade they play.

It was not the fault of Buzz – he was doing his best. But he should never have been put in charge of religion and morality in the kingdom. He didn't have the experience! Or rather, his experience was mostly negative. Judah's people were getting more wicked and idolatrous, but to Buzz, they all looked relatively good.

In Buzz's concept of family, the husband took as many wives and mistresses as he could afford (which for a high priest of Baal was quite a few); they shared all the work and he made the decisions. I know, it doesn't sound very fair, but that's the way it was. So with Jotham and Jeko'ach off being king and queen, Buzz just naturally took it upon himself to make the big decisions for his grandchildren, especially the oldest, Prince **Ahaz**. Jotham and Jeko'ach were delighted – as I said, they trusted him explicitly.

So when Buzz arranged the marriage of Ahaz to the daughter of one of the 'converted' priests of Astarte, they gladly gave their approval. Ahaz was 18; it was time to find him a wife. Jotham promised that when he turned twenty, he would be crowned co-regent. It's always best for a king to have a wife.

Her name was Abi, meaning 'daddy's favorite', and her father's name was Zackry, 'unforgettable'. He had been a good friend of Buzz back in the old days, so he had gotten him a good job as a buyer of supplies for the Levitical priesthood. But before he introduced them to the royal family, Buzz became concerned that his prior occupation might raise a stink in the 'YHWH conscious' court.

So Buzz decided to make a minor compromise. His conscience smote him about it, but he didn't have the discernment to know that was a warning from the Spirit of YHWH. He justified himself. This was his job. He was in charge of the religious aspects of the kingdom, including oversight of the priesthood. He appointed Zackry to be an honorary priest of YHWH on condition that he officially change his name to Zechariah, 'YHWH remembers'. That sounded a lot better – Jotham and Jeko'ach would love it.

Zackry and his wife were delighted with the prospect of their daughter being chosen to marry the young Prince of Judah. Abi was pretty tickled, too. That is, she was until Buzz decided to change her name to Abijah, 'YHWH is my Father'. She did not like that at all, having been used to being called Abi all her young life. Buzz solved it by telling her that Abi was just her nickname – her real name had always been Abijah. She bought it. From then on, when introducing herself, she would let them know, "My name is Abijah, but all my friends call me Abi."

Abi and Ahaz hit it off just fine. They married near the end of 737 BC, and by the end of 736, they already had a son, whom they named **Hezekiah** ('YHWH is Mighty'). Abi had gotten quite good at the YHWH charades, and never mentioned her past as daughter of a priest of Astarte. Instead, she slowly instructed her husband in the modern way they worshiped YHWH. Each week she would take him to a different ancient sacred place, a hill, a grove, or under a sacred terebinth. There they would offer a sacrifice and burn some incense, 'to YHWH', of course. She made a picnic of it. Within a year or two they had visited every pagan cult center in the land, and Ahaz was thoroughly involved in the spread of idolatry in Judah. All this time, King Jotham and Jeko'ach thought they were enjoying a lot of picnics.

But Logos was not happy with Judah. They needed something to wake them up to the direction they were headed. He allowed Pekah, with his allies Rezin and Zoba, to flank Judah and attack their southern trading center of Elath. They easily captured it, for King Jotham thought they were at peace with all the surrounding nations and was not prepared for an attack, especially from the south! In early 736 BC Rezin invited the Edomites to help manage the trading post, depriving Judah of much income.

Jotham was not a warrior, but he understood their pain. Rather than try to fight against Pekah, Rezin, or Edom, he negotiated a peace compromise. He was willing to give up Elath, just to keep them happy.

Tiglath-pileser III went to Media to set up Assyrian provinces there. He took captives to deport to the Levant, which he planned to subdue again in another few years. He had not lost a battle. His plan to set up Assyrian control over conquered states, deporting their best and wisest to other conquered states, had proven very successful. *Israel should be preparing to face him rather than fighting Judah.*

Isaiah and Alysa had married just before the death of King Uzziah in 738 BC. Since then, Isaiah had basically set work aside to spend time with his new wife. Oh, he visited the palace a few times, such as to attend the coronation of Jotham, and to send that prophecy to Pekah of Israel. But mostly he spent his days just getting to know his wife and discovering what a treasure he had. In 737 BC, Alysa bore a healthy baby boy. By faith, they named him Shearjashub, 'A remnant shall return'.

Buzz was still in charge of guarding the religious health of Judah. King Jotham crowned his oldest son **Ahaz** co-regent in 735 BC, as he had promised. He appointed his second son, Maaseiah, to be captain of the palace guard, and promised that if he did well, he would take his turn as co-regent in a few years. That fall he also gave Ahaz control of the military, protecting the land from the surrounding nations. Jotham didn't even want to think about fighting. Now he would do what he had always wanted to do. He bought a pair of matching plain white tunics. Then he and Jeko'ach began touring the countryside, just like his father Uzziah used to love doing.

What a joy that was! This was what Jotham was made for, visiting with his people. Everyone in the kingdom knew and loved him and Jeko'ach, so their homes were always open. He heard their problems. He brought plenty of money to help any who were struggling. He understood them, encouraged them, and made sure they got justice from their elders and judges. With the palace in such good hands, he never wanted to return. He and his wife made the rounds from town to town throughout the land.

But the kingdom was not in good hands. Buzz was too tolerant. Flagrant idolatry was springing up everywhere. Abi and her father Zackry had gained more influence than Buzz ever thought possible. King Ahaz welcomed their reformed paganism. It was not long before he cast a pair of golden calves for Judah just like Jeroboam had made for Israel! By now all pretenses were off. Ahaz became openly accepting of all kinds of worship, pagan or not.

Near the end of 735 BC, when baby Hezekiah was only one year old, Abi bore Ahaz another son. But it was a rough delivery and the baby seemed deformed and sickly. Poor Abi ended up depressed and morose. She confided in her husband, "If I have another one like this you may lose me! Our problem is that we didn't sacrifice our firstborn to the gods. We ought to do that with this one right now while he's too young to feel any pain. Take it down to the Valley of Ben-Hinnom where King Solomon used to sacrifice to Molech. Then the gods will bless us again."

How Ahaz bought that I'll never know, but he did. He didn't want to deal with a squalling, sickly infant, who almost certainly would die anyway. He already had an heir. He certainly did not want to lose Abi! But Logos was furious. He allowed Pekah and Rezin to start planning another attack against Judah.

As the armies of Syria, Hamath, and Israel assembled in Ephraim, the news came to Ahaz of their plans to attack Jerusalem. Ahaz had been in charge of Judah's military for less than a year. He was terrified! He sent for his father, but Jotham was still on tour and couldn't be located.

As he feared, they came and besieged Jerusalem. Judah was doomed! Ahaz mustered his own army, but it was less than half the size of the forces camped around the city. Ahaz panicked. He ordered pagan priests to offer sacrifices on every high place and under every green tree. Idolatrous worship swept the land.

"I just knew we should have sacrificed our firstborn!" Abi swore, "Now it is the only way to save the country. Hezekiah is only a year old – still too young to feel the pain of the fires. Take him to the Valley of Hinnom. Offer him to Molech, the god of battle. Then we will be victorious."

But this time Ahaz wasn't buying. He'd come to love the little shaver, and was unwilling to give up his only heir. "Wait a minute," he said. Some things about his wife were finally becoming clear. "You're lying to me! Hezekiah is certainly not too young to feel pain. Just look at the pain in his eyes when I have to leave, and his joy when I return! There is no way in Sheol I'm going to send him through the fires of Molech. And I'll bet you lied about our second son, too. I'll bet all your worship of the Baals has offended YHWH. Maybe that's why we're in trouble."

The angelic host cheered! Ahaz had finally awakened to the truth. Logos took the form of a man and knocked on the door of the country home where Isaiah and Alysa were enjoying some playtime with baby Shearjashub.

They came to the door together, their baby in Alysa's arms. The stranger immediately began to prophesy to them the Word of YHWH, telling them to go out to meet Ahaz and give the Word to him. Then, without awaiting a response, He vanished.

It was obviously urgent. Pausing only a moment to grab some food and stuff some extra diapers in the diaper bag, they began the hike to Jerusalem.

They found Ahaz where the angel had told them he would be. "Take care, O King. Be calm. Have no fear. Do not be fainthearted because of these stubs of smoldering firebrands who have teamed up against you. I know, Rezin and Pekah in their fierce anger have come up against Judah to terrorize you, determined to breach Jerusalem's walls and to make Zichri son of Tabeel, mighty man of Ephraim, king in your place. Thus says YHWH, the King of Israel, 'Because you have rejected Ashtoreth and all the Baals, and have not sacrificed My son Hezekiah to the fires of Molech, their plans shall not stand, nor shall they come to pass. Rezin will never be more than king of Syria at Damascus, and Pekah – well, in another 25 years all of Ephraim will be shattered and dispersed to the nations. However, if you will not believe My Word, you shall not last.'"

Ahaz wrestled with this. It's tough to simply believe and be at peace when you have been so terrified.

A new thought from Logos hit Isaiah-Alysa. This time, Alysa voiced it. "O King, YHWH loves you. He knows your struggle. He would comfort you. He Himself has declared that any prophecy of good must come with proof. So He wants you to test Him in this. Ask of Him a sign. Ask it as deep as Sheol or as high as the heavens."

"No!" Ahaz backed away. "I will not ask a sign. Who am I to test YHWH? I fear Him! I won't do it."

"That is wrong, O house of David!" Alysa spoke so boldly that it startled her. "Listen to me! Is it too small a thing for you to try the patience of men, that now you try the patience of my God as well? He told you to ask a sign; do you refuse Him? Therefore, YHWH Himself grants you a sign. This!" She held up her little baby. Filled with the Spirit, she prophesied, "Shearjashub will be here, eating curds and honey, when he learns to refuse the evil and choose the good. But before that time, those two kings you dread will be slain and their lands will be devastated and forsaken. For my son is a type of the Messiah, who will be born of a virgin. His name will be called Immanuel, 'God with us'. But you, O King, because you have not believed YHWH, will instead place your trust in the king of Assyria and in the Pharaohs of Egypt. I swear neither will help you. They will shave both Israel and Judah like a razor, cutting off everything of value from your people and your land, plundering your harvest, and destroying your vineyards and croplands. So you'll subsist on curds and wild honey, because you did not trust in the Word of YHWH." She hugged her son close to her breast, adding, "Shearjashub also prophesies to you, O King. Whether you believe YHWH or not, 'A remnant shall return' to believe in Him."

The word laid out before Ahaz was clear. All he had to do was believe YHWH, reject his fears, and resist the urge to call for help from Assyria. Still struggling with it, he told Abi, "YHWH forgave us. He's going to protect us. Isaiah said Rezin and Pekah will not be able to take Jerusalem."

But Abi got angry. "You fool! YHWH is just one God. We need the protection of all the gods! Don't you know that Israel and Syria have only grown so strong because they sacrifice to the Baals and Asherim? If you can't handle this, I will!" She stomped out, heading for the nursery.

In a sudden burst of determination, Ahaz ran after her and grabbed Hezekiah out of her arms. He hugged his son, praying, "O YHWH, Abi is right. I am weak and foolish. But You called Hezekiah Your own son. Take care of him, I pray. Don't let Abi kill him. I choose to believe Isaiah's prophecy as Your word, and I accept Alysa's sign..."

As if in answer to his prayer, a servant ran up to Ahaz. "O King! The Israelites and Syrians seem to be packing to leave. And Pekah is calling for you from just outside the city gates. I think you should go talk to him."

Ahaz hurried to the tower above the city gates. Indeed, they seemed to be packing to leave. Pekah was waiting down below, so he called down to him. "I am Ahaz, king of Judah. Do you give up so soon?"

"Don't think you are so lucky!" Pekah shouted back. "An urgent matter has required our attention. But I swear that we will be back stronger than ever! So don't get cocky. By this time next year Rezin and I shall be feasting at your table in your palace!"

By the end of the day, they were gone. Ahaz breathed a sigh of relief, hugging baby Hezekiah. He praised YHWH that the crisis was over and that the word spoken through Isaiah-Alysa had proven true. He sent out an invitation to Isaiah and Alysa for a big victory celebration party in the palace. Abi was still angry with him, but with the attackers gone, what could she say? She invited her father Zackry (now known in the palace as Zechariah) to the party, too.

Before dinner was ready, a group of the king's advisors and elders came to petition Ahaz. They were led by Buzz, Jotham's father-in-law and chief advisor. Abi and Zackry were among them. "We lucked out this time," Buzz began. "But Pekah said he'd be back, stronger than ever! So we earnestly recommend, O King, that you send a gift to the king of Assyria. His armies are invincible. If we ally with him, then Pekah can ally with all the other nations he wants and he still won't be able to defeat us. But we need to do it now! For if Pekah is smart and allies with Assyria first we are burnt toast!" The others were all nodding.

At only 20 years old, Ahaz was easily swayed by all these older and wiser advisors, especially Buzz, the most trusted counselor in the kingdom. He gave his permission to get the gift ready, and sat down to compose the letter. It read, "King Ahaz of Judah, to Tiglath-pileser, great Emperor of Assyria. I am your servant and your son. Please come and deliver me from the hands of the kings of Israel and Syria who are rising up against me." But as he wrote, he kept Hezekiah on his lap, for he no longer trusted Abi.

That evening, Isaiah and Alysa pulled Ahaz aside just before the dinner began. "You are young, O King. YHWH understands. He will forgive you. He is Judah's Protector. So you must not give in to the wicked counsel to put your trust in the king of Assyria. You must make the choice to put your whole trust in YHWH God of Abraham. Your own destiny and the destiny of Judah hang in the balance."

The dinner was delicious. When all were satisfied (and possibly just a tad tipsy) they called on Isaiah to prophesy for them against Israel and Syria. He started to refuse, for prophecies don't come by the will of men. To his surprise, Logos said to take Alysa and Shearjashub to the speaker's platform. He obeyed, with not a clue what he would say.

When he opened his mouth, the Spirit of YHWH took over and began to prophesy through him. "YHWH sends a Word against Jacob, which falls upon Israel!" he began.

Everyone in the banquet hall cheered and then quieted to hear the message. "It falls on Israel," he repeated, "And the people there know it. The sons of Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria assert in their pride and arrogance, 'The mud bricks have crumbled, but we will rebuild with stones. The sycamores have been cut down, but we will plant cedars.' Therefore YHWH raises adversaries against them, and spurs their enemies on. Rezin and the Syrians turn against them on the east, and the Philistines on the west. They devour Israel with gaping jaws. In spite of this, YHWH's anger does not turn away and His hand of wrath is still stretched out. Yet they do not repent to Him who struck them, nor do they seek YHWH of Hosts."

Isaiah finished. But before his mouth shut Alysa took over. "So YHWH cuts off the head and the tail from Israel. both the palm branch and the bullrush in a single day. The head is the gullible noble, the foolish elder, or the ignorant guide; the tail is the prophet who teaches lies. For those who guide are leading them astray. Those who are led are filled with confusion. YHWH does not take pleasure in their young men, nor does He pity their orphans or their widows. Every one of them is godless, wicked, immoral, and idolatrous, and every mouth speaks foolishness."

Alysa finished. Before her mouth closed, Isaiah began anew. "For wickedness burns like a fire. It consumes the briars and thorns, and even sets the forests ablaze. By the fury of YHWH the land is burned up. The people are like fuel feeding the flames. No man spares his own brother. Ephraim devours Manasseh, and Manasseh, Ephraim. *And both together come against against Judah.*"

Now Alysa joined in, prophesying together with Isaiah in perfect concert, as if they had memorized this together. "Woe to those who enact evil statutes, who record unjust decisions, so as to deprive the needy of justice and rob the poor of My people of their rights, to spoil the widow and to plunder the orphan. Now, Judah, what will you do in the day of judgment, in the devastation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? Where will you hide your wealth? Nothing remains but to crouch in fear among the captives or fall on your face among the slain. In spite of all this, YHWH's anger does not turn away. His hand of wrath is still stretched out."

Isaiah and Alysa turned toward each other and bowed to acknowledge each other's contribution. Then without another word, they returned to their seats, hand in hand.

Some applauded, but many were angry that Judah had been included in the stern prophecy. Isaiah and Alysa kept out of it, not willing to give their own opinion on anything. Then somebody shouted, "Hey, Isaiah, prophesy about Assyria. They're going to come and help us defeat Pekah and Rezin, you know." The room suddenly became quiet. Isaiah looked at Ahaz, whose face turned red. It seemed like everyone in the room had heard the gossip about the letter and gift Ahaz was preparing for the king of Assyria.

Alysa put her arms on the table, bowed her head into them, and began to weep quietly. Isaiah, with Shearjashub on his arm, made his way back onto the platform. “Woe to Assyria!” he thundered. “For it is but the rod of My anger, the staff of My indignation! I send it against a godless nation; I commission it against people with whom I am furious, to take their booty and seize their plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. For Assyria is My tool of judgment, though they do not intend to be so. They only want to destroy all nations around them until they are supreme over all. But I shall use them to punish Samaria and her idols; *then in the same way I shall use them to punish Jerusalem and her idols.* After I have completed all My work, I will then punish the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness! I will send a wasting disease among his stout warriors and a flame of fire under his glory. For the Light of Israel will become a fire, and Israel’s Holy One a flame, which shall burn and devour his thorns and briars in a single day. In that day the remnant of Israel and those who have escaped from Judah will never again rely on the one that struck them, but instead will truly rely on YHWH, the Holy One of Israel. For only a remnant, the remnant of Jacob, will return to the mighty God. Therefore O My people who dwell in Zion, do not fear the Assyrian who strikes you with the rod. For in a little while, My indignation against you will be spent, and after that My anger will be re-directed to Assyria’s destruction.”

This was really getting interesting. Two scribes were writing furiously, determined to not miss a word. For everyone knew this was neither Isaiah nor Alysa; it was YHWH Himself! Even the tone of Isaiah’s voice rang with a heavenly authority, quite unlike his normally rather mild and friendly voice.

So far, the prophecies had been pretty good for Judah, although those who wanted to get Assyria’s help against Pekah and Rezin were miffed when he said they would punish Judah, too. But many in the banquet hall had never heard the Word of God spoken so boldly and plainly. They wanted more. Jerusha, Uzziah’s widow, sensed the mood of the people. She brought up what has been on every true Israelite’s mind since Adam’s Fall. “Isaiah and Alysa, will you please prophesy to us about the promised Redeemer, the Holy One coming to restore the throne of David?”

Isaiah looked at Jerusha, seeing the longing in her blind eyes. He looked at Alysa, who smiled back and nodded. He looked down at his baby, who gave him a big grin. He still didn’t know how to answer, but often prophecies start that way, until God’s Spirit takes over. So he breathed a prayer, “YHWH my God, speak through me now,” and began to talk to his baby. “In the fullness of time, in the town of Ephrathah of Judah, a baby will be born – born to a virgin! His name will be called Immanuel, ‘God with us’, and also **Yashua**, ‘YHWH is Salvation.’” Isaiah paused, as he saw Alysa walking back up toward the platform.

Then the Spirit of God within him overflowed. “He will be a shoot from the stem of Jesse, for a branch from his root will bear fruit. And the Spirit of YHWH will rest upon Him in fullness, the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Might, the Spirit of Knowledge and the Holy Awe of YHWH: all the seven Spirits of God.

“For He will take delight in the nature and character of YHWH Himself, rather than judging by what His own eyes see or deciding by what His own ears hear. Thus He shall judge the poor in righteousness, and decide in favor of the afflicted of the earth in justice. He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.”

Alysa now stood beside him, looking intently over the heads of the people. As Isaiah paused for breath she raised her arm to point above their heads. “I see it!” she cried, wide-eyed and voice high-pitched with emotion. “I see the Kingdom of Jacob’s Messiah! He rules in righteousness and faithfulness, with truth as a belt around His loins. The wolf dwells peacefully with young lambs, and the leopard lies down with the kids. The young lion with the fatling calf and the cow with the bear graze together, for the lion and the bear eat straw like an ox. Look! A little child leads them to find good pasture. A barely weaned infant plays beside a viper’s den. They shall neither hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the whole earth is full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters fill the sea!”

Tears filled her eyes and her voice choked up, so Isaiah took over. “It will come about on that day that all nations will depend on the root of Jesse. He will stand as a banner for all peoples, and His throne will be incredibly glorious. On that day He will recover for a second time the remnant of His people who remain. He will bring them back from afar, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Nubia, Elam, Shinar, Hatti, Hamath, and from the coastlands of far-off nations. He will assemble the banished families of Israel and gather the dispersed people of Judah, bringing them back from the four corners of the earth.” He paused for breath.

So now the clear, sweet voice of Alysa rang out like a silver trumpet, bringing tingles to every spine. “Then the jealousy of Ephraim will be gone! Those who harass Judah will be cut off! But together as brothers they will swoop down upon the Philistines on the west and plunder the sons of the east. They will possess Edom and Moab, and even the sons of Ammon will be subject to them. Then YHWH will split the Euphrates into seven tiny streams to make a highway from Assyria, and our God will dry up the tongue of the Red Sea to make a broad road up from Egypt, so the remnants of My people can return in safety.”

Isaiah joined her in a chorus, “Then you will say, ‘I give thanks to You, O YHWH! Though You were angry with me, Your anger has turned away. You comfort me, O God my savior!’ I will trust, and never be afraid, for YHWH is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation!”

Their chorus became a song, with Alysa taking the lead and Isaiah carrying the harmony. “Therefore with joy shall you draw water from the well of salvation. And in that day you shall say, ‘Praise YHWH! Give Him thanks. Magnify YHWH’s holy name! Make known His deeds among the peoples! Proclaim the name of YHWH, for He is worthy. Praise YHWH in song, for He has done great things. Let the chorus be heard across the earth. Cry aloud! Shout for joy, all you who dwell in Zion, who live in the city of the great King. Marvelous in your midst is the Holy One of Israel!’”

After the echo of that final chord, stillness. For a few moments, a holy hush reigned in the great hall. Then a muffled sob was heard, then another, and soon everyone was kneeling or flat on his face, weeping, repenting, and swearing a fervent commitment to the awesome vision. But when Isaiah looked for Ahaz and Abi, they were gone, along with Buzz and some others of the king’s counselors.

Ahaz had gone out to see if he could stop the messenger he had sent to Assyria with his letter and the big gift they had collected. Abi had followed him, suspecting as much. She argued, “Hey! Those are only words. Pretty words, but words, just the same. We still need Assyria on our side. You heard Buzz. If Pekah gets to them first, we’re dead!”

“I don’t trust you anymore, Abi. You wanted to kill Hezekiah! Why should I listen to you?”

“Oh, stop it. We don’t need to sacrifice the baby any more. Pekah’s gone. But I swear we will need to sacrifice him if Pekah comes back and we don’t have Assyria behind us. So,” she sneered at him, “if you really want to save your precious son, don’t try to stop the messengers.”

“My precious son? This is our son! And I will save him! ... Okay, Abi, I’ll do it. I’ll let them go. Even if I die, I’ll do whatever it takes to save Hezekiah.”

Thus again Ahaz yielded to his wife, even knowing now that it was wrong. Logos sadly told Satan. “You have won a victory over Ahaz. After all My warnings and examples, all the holy ones I’ve sent him, he has chosen foolishness. You have My permission to bring harm to him and to all Judah under him, yet you must spare his life, for I still see some good in him. Ahaz truly loves Hezekiah, My precious son. He is willing to give his life for him. Someday, he may be able to repent of his faithlessness and trust Me.”

Satan wasted no time. Rezin and Pekah returned to Jerusalem the next summer. Tiglath-pileser had gotten the letter and gift Ahaz had sent, but hadn’t had time to respond, so this time there was no stopping them. Zichri, son of Tabeel, slew Maaseiah (Jotham’s second son, now captain of the palace guard), Azrikam (a palace steward), and Elkanah (Ahaz’ military general). On that one day, they killed 120,000 and took 200,000 hostages, including King Ahaz himself. Rezin and Pekah took all the Judean captives, along with the spoils of war, back to Samaria. It was all over before Ahaz figured out what had happened.

This was a catastrophe of the first magnitude. It was the 9th of Av, 734 BC. Abi was slain. Her father Zackry was slain. Buzz was slain. Many other nobles and counselors of Jotham’s court were slain, as well as all of Ahaz’ own circle of advisors. King Ahaz was put in chains and dragged into the court of King Pekah in Samaria. There he became sport for Pekah and his nobles. They beat him, mocked him, and laughed him to scorn. They gloated over him with tall tales of all they had done to Judah. They told him that his queen and father-in-law were dead, together with all his officers. And they told him that Zichri son of Tabeel, the ‘strong man of Ephraim’, now ruled at Jerusalem in his palace. Finally, when they tired of their sport, they threw him into the dungeon and left him to rot.

They had, however, unintentionally given him one tiny glimmer of hope. In all their cruel taunts, they had never mentioned his son, the Crown Prince Hezekiah. *Perhaps he was yet alive. Perhaps someone had seen the child and had taken pity on him.* Oh how he prayed it was so.

In fact, someone had. It was Jerusha, Uzziah’s widow. She had seen clearly what was coming, and had stolen him away before Pekah even broke down the city gates. How could she do that, being blind, you ask? Her sight was of a different nature than yours or mine, and she had learned to use it well. As Isaiah had prophesied, she could see things that you or I only wish to see. She had managed to avoid the onslaught and secret Hezekiah down to the School of Prophetesses, where the ladies all cared for him as if he were their own son. But Ahaz didn’t know that.

He heard noises, loud arguing, outside the palace. He couldn’t see, because the sole window was too high, but he could hear the shouting. Evidently the army had brought the rest of the captives, mostly women and children, into Samaria. *Someone wasn’t happy with that. Oh! Rezin! He wanted to take his share of the captives up to Damascus.* Ahaz leaned the bench next to the window and climbed up so he could see through the bars. But what he saw made him cringe. Rezin was taking 100,000 captives to give his nobles as slaves! Ahaz fell to the floor with cries of agony.

Suddenly the commotion outside quieted down. Ahaz climbed back up the bench to see again. “I am Oded, prophet of YHWH, God of Abraham!” Oded’s voice rang out so Ahaz could hear clearly. “Because YHWH was angry with Judah He delivered them into your hand. But you have slain them in a rage which has reached the heavens. And now you are proposing to enslave your brothers? Do you not already have enough transgressions of your own against YHWH your God? Now therefore, you had better listen to me. Return the captives which you have taken from your brothers. For the burning anger of YHWH has turned away from them and come against you!”

Rezin angrily ordered his half of the captives on, saying, “Who cares what YHWH thinks? Do whatever you want with your share. I’m taking my share to Damascus!”

But some of the elders of Ephraim who had not gone to battle sided with Oded. “Wait, Rezin. Oded is right. We’ve been too harsh with Judah. We must return the captives. We can’t enslave them. The Law of YHWH prohibits us from enslaving our brothers. Our sins are already so...”

“Law of YHWH? Bah!” Pekah interrupted. “The law of war asserts, ‘To the victor belongs the spoils!’ I know you, Oded. You’re just a troublemaker from the School of Prophets in Gilgal. Of course you take Judah’s side here. So get back to Judah where you belong, and prophesy against them like all the other prophets. Rezin, go ahead. Take your share of...”

“No, my lord the king.” It was Azariah, son of Johanan. Behind him stood Jehizkiah son of Shallum, Amasa son of Hadlai, and Berechiah son of Meshillimoth, all respected elders. “You are proposing to add more guilt upon the land, but our guilt is already so great that YHWH’s wrath has fallen upon Israel.” He stood firm, arms akimbo.

Pekah suddenly saw that he had a crisis of confidence here. These were leaders supporting his administration. They could easily turn all the people against him, and he might then be assassinated. He quickly changed his mind. “King Rezin, take your share of the spoils. It will make you very rich. But you do not need the burden of all these rebels. For they are a stiff-necked and hard-headed people, who will cause you nothing but trouble. I will deal with them. In their place, I give you their king, Ahaz himself. March him in chains before you as you enter Damascus, to add to your great glory and honor before your people.”

Rezin bought it. Ahaz was hauled out of the dungeon and handed over to him. Now the taunts and abuse started anew. All the way up to Damascus Ahaz was humiliated and tormented. After they had tired of their sport, Rezin tossed him into his own dungeon and left him to rot. There he languished in despair for two years, utterly broken in spirit. Still he would not repent or turn back to YHWH.

Bowing to the will of the elders, Pekah assigned Azariah and his friends to dispose of the captives however they wished. Then he turned his back and walked away.

Azariah quickly reorganized the hostages into smaller groups and assigned each of his friends a group. They fed and clothed them. They bandaged their wounds, anointed them with oil, loaned them donkeys for their little ones, and brought them safely back to Judah.

Logos was pleased that they had shown mercy, and He vowed to show them mercy in return when Tiglath-pileser (king of Assyria) came to devastate the land. For yes, he had gotten the message from Ahaz and had already made plans to come to the Levant to help him. In 733 BC he left Media. He brought many captives to repopulate the lands he planned to conquer. First he had to re-establish control at Arpad and Calneh in northern Syria. Then he headed south through Sidon and Tyre and reconquered Philistia.

With that devastating loss to Pekah and Rezin, King Jotham finally woke up to his dereliction of duty. Some of the returning hostages told him that his son Ahaz had been taken in chains up to Damascus, and Pekah had installed an Ephraimite as king at Jerusalem. Jotham hurried back toward the palace with his bodyguard, to see for himself. But he was met on the road by Isaiah and Alysa. “No, O King. Do not go up to Jerusalem now. You’ll just be slain, accomplishing nothing for your people. Bring your wife to our country home. We need to talk.”

Jotham came with Jeko’ach. They were full of plans to muster the armies of Judah and storm Jerusalem. While listening to their plans, Isaiah and Alysa sat them down with some tea. Finally, “... so what do you think, Isaiah? Will you ask YHWH to bless our plans before we go?”

“You’ve been very tolerant...” Isaiah began.

“Yes, I have! I swore to Jeko’ach from the day I first met her father Buzz that I would always remain tolerant and kind, loving and non-judgmental, not only toward her family but toward everyone. For as Moses said, we are all made in the image of God. Who am I to criticize another person made in God’s image? As God is my witness I have kept that vow, and He has blessed us for it.”

“Oh. He has blessed you.”

“Yes, and all Judah with us. We spend all our time going around the countryside helping the poor, providing for their needs, understanding their pain, encouraging them that their sufferings are not their own fault, and helping them to feel good about themselves. Why, we even...”

“Jotham! Do you even realize what just happened to Judah? Have you been living in a vacuum?”

“Well, of course I know what happened. Pekah overran Jerusalem. I’m afraid I haven’t trained my son in the art of diplomacy – he probably said something to offend Pekah. I’ll apologize – negotiate for him. Once Pekah understands that we mean him no harm, I’m sure he will take...”

“Jotham!” Alysa interrupted. “You are a fool! A kind, loving, tolerant, non-judgmental fool, but a fool just the same. Some people really are evil! You can’t deal with the evil in the land by pretending it doesn’t exist – by loving everyone and sitting around a campfire singing Kum By Hyah. You are the king! It is your responsibility when evil floods your kingdom! Why do you think YHWH’s Law is so strict against evildoers? You have assumed that loving people means tolerating their wickedness!”

King Jotham had never gotten a tongue-lashing from a woman before. He shut up in bewilderment. Isaiah took over. “My friends, the trouble in Judah is more severe than you know. 120,000 of your brothers are slain, including nearly everyone from your palace. Jerusalem’s walls are broken down. The surrounding land is plundered and ruined, and is still occupied by the army of Israel.”

Alysa continued, “The Edomites have taken advantage of Judah’s weakness to enslave whole towns on the east. The Philistines have done the same on the west. Pekah and Rezin planned to enslave their captives, too – 200,000 of them! Rezin had begun to take his half up to Damascus. They were only released after we sent Oded up to Samaria to meet the army and put the fear of God into them!”

Jotham, finally faced with the magnitude of his defeat, turned white. “What... What should I... What does YHWH want me to do?”

“Stay here with us. You and Jeko’ach can have the guest room. Your bodyguards can sleep in the barracks with the field workers. Pray. Repent. With all your heart. Perhaps YHWH will hear you. Perhaps He will respond by bringing back your son and restoring your kingdom.”

“Repent? Me? Repent for what? I’ve done everything YHWH has told me to, all my life!”

Isaiah covered his eyes with his hand and shook his head. “Repent for what. Right.” He was trying not to be exasperated. “What was the first thing YHWH told you to do through me after my death?”

Jotham didn’t remember. So Isaiah told him. “He said to depose Buzz and give his job to another. So did you do it? Do you know where Buzz is now?”

“Ahh, well no, I guess not. But Buzz is a good man. A godly man. He repented. He is loyal and true – my most faithful advisor. So I didn’t think that was YHWH. You’d just come back from the dead, so I thought you were...”

“I had just come back from the throne of God in heaven, you mean. I had His Word as much as ever in my life. And Buzz is neither godly, nor loyal and true. He is dead. He took your own toleration of evil, and let it spread across the land. God judged him for it. He is now being buried in a shallow mass grave in the Valley of Hinnom, along with Abi your daughter-in-law, her father Zackry, General Elkanah, and hundreds of other palace nobles.”

“Oh my God! What have I done?” Finally good King Jotham was ready to repent. He remained at Isaiah’s house, crying out to YHWH for forgiveness and wisdom.

King Pul (Tiglath-pileser III) and the invincible armies of Assyria swept into Israel the next spring, 732 BC. King Pekah had planned to join up with the armies of Syria and Hamath but he was too late. He sent for help, but all his runners were intercepted and killed. He had no defense and no hope against such incredibly superior forces. He took the only option left to him; he opened the gates of Samaria and walked out alone to plead for mercy. But mercy was not a concept that was well-understood by the Assyrians. Pekah was bound in chains, marched back through the city gates in front of King Pul, and treated like he had treated Ahaz. After the taunting and beatings he was thrown into his own dungeon, where Ahaz had been.

King Pul saw a young nobleman in the palace named Hoshea, and took a shine to him. His was 24 years of age, handsome, and well-liked by his own people, but with just the right mixture of humility and respect for Assyrian power that Pul looked for in a vassal king. Pul established him on the throne of Israel and promised that he wouldn’t devastate Samaria as long as Hoshea remained faithful and sent the required annual tribute. Hoshea gratefully vowed his allegiance, and worked closely with Pul to establish a government of those willing to submit to Assyria. All who refused to swear fealty were slain.

Azariah, Amasa, Jehizkiah, Berechiah, and others who submitted were granted clemency and given the freedom to remain living in Samaria as a vassal state of Assyria. Assured that the tribute would keep flowing, King Pul did not deport anyone from Samaria. To everyone’s surprise, the Assyrian army actually behaved, treating the Israelites with respect and neither plundering nor harming the land very much. Thus the mercy which they had granted to the captives from Judah returned upon themselves.

But not so with northern Israel. Once Tiglath-pileser got past the Valley of Jezreel, he conquered Kedesh, Hazor, Galilee, Gilead, and all the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali, and deported all but the peasants back to Assyria. He repopulated the area with his captives from Media. He established three new Assyrian provinces: Dor on the west coast, Megiddo, and Gilead. Then, at the end of the year, he headed up toward Damascus, leaving northern Israel plundered and ‘shaved’ behind him.

King Rezin of Syria was terrified. He opened the gates of Damascus and came bowing and pleading for mercy, just like Pekah had a few months before. But King Pul had no mercy left. After a few days of making sport of Rezin, his family, and his entire court, he tortured them all to death one by one. The last thing wicked Rezin saw before his eyes were put out was the sight of his wife and children being misused and slain with unspeakable cruelty. Everything Rezin had done to others all his life returned upon him in full measure. He slowly succumbed, in ultimate pain.

As usual, the Syrian nobles, leaders, tradesmen, and teachers were rounded up and taken hostage. Captives from Media were released to live in their fine homes. Only the Syrian peasants and farmers were left on their farms to till the land. King Pul divided up the land of Syria into Assyrian provinces and installed his own governors to rule them – governors who swore to keep the tribute flowing..

But while rounding up the captives from Damascus, they found King Ahaz in the dungeon. At first they didn’t recognize him, for he was a sick and broken man. But after they treated his wounds, Ahaz was granted an audience with King Pul. He managed to convince him that it was indeed he who had sent the letter and the large gift to Assyria, pleading for deliverance from Rezin and Pekah. So Ahaz succeeded in making friends with King Pul.