

showing an even more aggressive policy than the Assyrian kings of former centuries. Ahaz decided to send a messenger across the desert to the king of Assyria to ask him to send an army to help Judah. He said he was ready to take the distant Assyrian king as his overlord and pay tribute to him, if only the Assyrian king would deliver him from the terrible danger of these neighboring enemies. How easy it is in time of stress to think that the distant power is good and friendly when it is so far off that we do not think it can hurt us, but we feel that it will only provide a new source of protection to us by attacking our enemy from the other side! This is the view that Ahaz had. So, as we learn from Kings and Chronicles, he sent his messengers with rich gifts across the desert to Nineveh. Meanwhile, he set about strengthening the defenses of Jerusalem in order to resist the attacks of Israel and Syria until the Assyrians would come to his help.

In this situation, the Lord sent Isaiah to speak to Ahaz. Isaiah could not approach the king directly, for Ahaz thought it a waste of time to talk with the prophet of the Lord. These were times of great emergency and he must be occupied with the protection of the city. In order to meet Ahaz, Isaiah would have to go to a place, outside the city, where Ahaz was engaged in a defense inspection. So the Lord told Isaiah, as we read in verse 3, to go out to the end of the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field, and there to tell Ahaz not to fear the king of Syria and the king of Israel, since God was going to protect him from them. The promise was expressed in very strong language. Isaiah said that the plan to put a puppet king in place of Ahaz would not succeed. He declared that within sixty-five years Ephraim would be broken so that it would no longer be a people, and he said, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." In these words he was calling upon Ahaz to trust in God alone. Since Isaiah did not refer specifically to the distant heathen power, it is reasonable to assume that Ahaz was still keeping his negotiations secret.

In view of this situation we can well imagine that when Isaiah said these words Ahaz had on his face a look of impatience. He did not quite dare to tell Isaiah to get out of the way and allow him to go on with his important defense labors, for he knew that many of the people regarded Isaiah