145 "It shall not stand ...."

In 742 BC there were chaotic times in and around Israel and Judah, akin to kids in the playground strutting round in "let's look tough"-type gangs. Jerusalem, the capital of Judah, was being threatened by Rezin King of Syria, and Pekah, King of Israel. We read that the heart of Ahaz, king of Judah, "was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind" (Isaiah 7.2) - what an evocative phrase describing that sense of stir and foreboding before a storm!

In response, the Lord sent His prophet Isaiah to King Ahaz, and the climax of the message (verse 7) is simply - "Thus says the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass". Despite the fears, the threats and the rumours, this imminent invasion was not going to take place - because the Lord God Himself would prevent it. He saw all, He knew all, and He controlled all.

King Ahaz was given this stark "wake-up call" concerning the reality of the God of the covenant, and of His continuing, loving concern for the well-being of His chosen people. But Ahaz knew better than to repent and change his ways, seeking out instead the help of Tiglath-pileser, King of Assyria, one of the local "big-boys" of the time, for protection (II Kings 16.5-18). So impressed was Ahaz with an altar he saw in Damascus (verse 10) that he had a copy installed in the temple in Jerusalem (vv 12-18) - here was blatant, wilful idolatry in the house of the Lord. When this wicked king died, his body was buried in Jerusalem, though "they brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel (II Chronicles 28.27): at least some people around Ahaz the king realised his wickedness and its dire consequences.

So, as always, we ask why the Lord God has included such passages in His Word for His people? What is He explaining to us here? For there are certainly parallels between the "then and now", despite differences of date and circumstance. Many are the problems, the threats, the forebodings today, globally and nationally, economically, socially and spiritually; many are the reasons for "the hearts of the people to be moved as the trees of the wood in the wind".

The Holy Spirit has given us the history of God's people Israel as a permanent visual-aid of how things should be done, and not be done, under Almighty God. These may be old, well-known lessons, but they are surely as vital today as they have ever been.

The Lord reminds us that leaders are crucial, their decisions setting the tone for whole societies, for better or for worse. King Ahaz, one example among many, was a complete rotter - wicked, weak and idolatrous, rushing for help to the nearest "big-boy", while spurning the God of the covenant.

The current "migrant crisis", affecting the peoples of Europe and so many people from parts of Africa and the Middle East, is a complex, heart-rending example of a world in as desperate need as ever of the one true God - the God who has brought into being the wonderful new covenant of grace and faith won at such fearful cost by His Son Jesus Christ the Lord.

Yet too many of our leaders behave like Ahaz and his ilk - ignoring the living God and even boasting in their secularism! Whatever else is done to solve this migrant crisis, how we need leaders, at the start of each day and of each meeting, unashamedly praying, humbly acknowledging their corporate failings and sinfulness, and seeking God's forgiveness through Christ and His gracious guidance for the path ahead. We see from Scripture what a huge difference such conduct among our leaders would make.

Is such a wish just a soppy pipe-dream? It needn't be! We are all still in the hands of Almighty God, even though those hands are widely ignored. He is the still the One who sees all, knows all, and controls all. He is still the One who decrees what shall stand, and shall not stand, what shall come to pass or not come to pass. And as leaders, peoples and individuals have found since the Garden of Eden, we ignore Him at our peril.