

ISAIAH — LESSON NINE

ISAIAH 8-9

CHAPTER EIGHT

Assyria, The Overwhelming Flood

Vv. 1-4 – The Sign – Maher-shalal-hash-baz

In chapter 7 King Ahaz refused to listen the Isaiah's message. In chapter 8 Isaiah speaks to the people to warn them. He also gives them a sign, but the people choose to follow their king instead of their God.

Isaiah is instructed to acquire a great tablet upon which he is to write "For Maher-shalal-hash-baz" (*the spoil speeds, the prey hastens*). Jehovah added that he would acquire witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, who would record the event. While this Zechariah is otherwise unknown¹, Uriah the priest may be the Uriah who, as recorded in 2 Kings 16:10-13, built the replica of the temple that Ahaz had seen on his visit to Tiglath-pileser. It is always good to have a witness from the other camp.

Having received Jehovah's instruction, Isaiah went in unto his wife, the prophetess², and she conceived, bore a son, and named him as God commanded. Verse 4 gives the

1. Although some speculate him to be the father of Abi (or Abijah), the father of Ahaz's queen (2 Kings 18:2; 2 Chron. 29:1).

2. No reason is given for her being called "the prophetess." There is no record that she actually prophesied. Thus it may be that the appellation was applied to her because she was married to Isaiah.

reason for the name. The life of the child is to be the measure of time before which “the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be carried away before the king of Assyria. It is to happen “before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and My mother.” This limits the interval to from two to three years. It came to pass when during the reign of Pekah the people of northern Israel were carried away into captivity (722 BC; 2 Kings 15:29). When Isaiah foretold that which was to come the spoil was speeding and the prey was hastening. Not only was that true, but for Northern Israel it was the beginning of the end³. Tigleth-pileser annexed Israel to his empire and received tribute through Pekah’s reign and into Hoshea’s, the last king of Israel. Hoshea rebelled against Shalmaneser V, Tigleth-Pileser’s successor (2 Kings 16:9; 17:3-4); the end had come.⁴

Vv. 5-8 – The Overwhelming Flood

Even if Ahaz is given the benefit of the doubt by assuming that all he wanted to do was to protect his people, there is a right way and a wrong way to go about it. Ahaz had had the prophet of God standing in his presence and telling him that if he truly wanted protection he should trust Jehovah. In spite of his message from God Ahaz sought safety through Assyria. In spite of their warning the people courted disaster for themselves. Having been rejected by both king and people, in these verses God tells Isaiah what is to happen. They had rejected the waters of Shiloh⁵ and rejoiced in Rezin and Remaliah’s son; they will receive the waters that they have chosen – the strong and mighty waters of the army of Assyria that will flow over its banks and sweep

3. It is true that Tiglath-pileser only conquered Damascus, and not Samaria; but he took from Pekah, the king of Samaria, the land beyond the Jordan, and a portion of the land on this side. The trophies, which he took thence to Assyria, were no less the spoil of Samaria than if he had conquered Samaria itself (which Shalmanassar did twenty years afterwards).

4. Tigleth-Pileser’s annals confirm the event. They state that this monarch “sent the population, the goods of the people of Beth-Omri, and their furniture to the land of Assyria;” after which he “appointed Husih (Hoshea) to the dominion over them,” and fixed their annual tribute at two talents of gold and a thousand talents of silver.

5. This may be either the place where Isaiah met Ahaz or a small stream that flowed from the temple area into the southeastern section of the city.

onward to Judah. It will overflow and pass through Judah reaching even to the neck (Jerusalem, the head, would not be reached), and the stretching out of its wings will fill the breadth of the land. In the last of the verses Isaiah changes from a river to a predator of the sky⁶. It has made a critical mistake – it has invaded Immanuel's land. Immanuel's land and the city would not be destroyed. God had promised the birth of Immanuel and the land and city in which he would be born and the Zion to which he would come would not be utterly destroyed.

Vv. 9-15 – Only Jehovah Shall Be Your Fear

With assurance from Jehovah that Immanuel will come and that he will be with the faithful few, Isaiah proceeds to taunt the heathen nations. They may roar, but they will be broken in pieces. All of the far countries are invited to gird themselves but they also will be broken into pieces. For emphasis Isaiah repeats it twice. They make take counsel together to defeat Judah, but the conspiracy will come to naught. They may speak their word, planning and plotting the destruction of God's people, but it will not stand. Why? "God is with us." Here the phrase is not a name, but it is an appropriate name with the emphasis on Immanuel in this context. Jehovah promised to be with his people, but many in Israel and Judah refused to believe that God would keep his promise.

V. 11 is an explanatory clause that at first seems to be a completely different subject. It really stands in close connection with the triumphant words of vv. 9-10. It is Immanuel to whom they should hold fast as their refuge in the approaching times of Assyrian judgment. God begins this explanation with a one-way conversation with Isaiah telling him in no uncertain terms ("with a strong hand") not to walk in the way of this people. This people (not "my people") distrusted Jehovah and sought Assyrian aid. Isaiah is not to pay attention to their ways. He is to separate himself from the mass of his countryman in thought and feeling and to cling only to Jehovah.

6. A quick change of metaphors is common with Isaiah. See 1:30-31; 5:24, 30; etc.

Isaiah is further instructed not to say “a conspiracy,” even though that is the charge made by “this people.” Who is the conspirator? Some see the conspirators as Rezin and Pekah as they collaborated to defeat Ahaz. There is no question but that they did join together for the battle. But the next language, “neither fear ye their fear, nor be in dread thereof” seems to point in a different direction. It seems that when the people cried “conspiracy” it was aimed at Isaiah. It was Isaiah who was trying to persuade the people not to seek foreign aid from Assyria. Isaiah’s action was contrary to what the King and the people wanted to do. Thus, they considered Isaiah as a conspirator with Rezin and Pekah seeking to remove Assyria from the picture so that Isaiah’s conspirators could defeat Judah. Isaiah was not only a conspirator; he was a traitor. Isaiah was not to fear either their charge against him or the opposing armies that they feared. He is to sanctify Jehovah and let him be his fear and dread.⁷ If Judah is to be come upon violently and suddenly, it will be by the hand of Jehovah. Jehovah will be a sanctuary (v. 14) to his own, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence (Isa. 8:14; 1 Pet. 2:8) to all others (v. 15).⁸

Vv. 16-18 – Bind Up the Testimony

Both King and people had refused to hear Isaiah’s preaching and prophesying. This led God to command that the testimony and the law be sealed. The concept here seems to be, “File this away for future use.” Isaiah does just that and will wait for Jehovah to fulfill his prophecy and confirm that which Isaiah had declared. God has given signs through Isaiah’s children: trouble is coming (“hasten the prey”) but all is not lost (“a

7. (*maʿārāṣâ*) **awful shock, crash** (Isa 10:33). *Brown Driver Briggs, A Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 1905. The verb מִרָעַע denotes fear or terror; transitively, “to cause terror,” or intransitively, “to be terrified.” The Hebrew root may be compared with a Syriac root, “to come upon suddenly, violently,” and the Arabic *ʿarāṣa* “to quiver, flicker.” Hebrew synonyms include אָרַע “to fear;” רָעַע “to tremble;” רָעַע “to be afraid;” רָעַע “to be afraid;” רָעַע “to bristle with horror; and תִּתַּח “to be shattered, filled with terror.” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*.

8. Jehovah will also be “for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.” “Gin” is a word with which we are not familiar as used here. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* defines it as “I, **bird trap** (e.g. Hos 5:1; Amos 3:5). Often used figuratively for calamities and plots.

remnant will return"). Notice that a sign need not be a miracle. Miracle or not, they had behind them the power of Jehovah who dwelt in Zion. God will ultimately fulfill his promise through Immanuel.

Vv. 19-22 – To the Law and to the Testimony

Over and over Isaiah has warned about turning to idols or other sources for knowledge (1:21; 2:6, 20; 3:2-3). In v. 19 that warning is repeated. In seeking safety the people will request consultation with dabblers in magic and spirits who can do nothing but chirp and mutter, when they ought to be seeking guidance from their God. How foolish they were to seek knowledge of the living from the dead (v. 19). The path of safety (salvation) lay in going to the law and to the testimony. Sad indeed is the language, "if they speak not according to this word, surely there is no morning for them. (v. 20). It gets no better as the chapter closes. When Assyria invades they will stumble along in hunger and darkness, fretting among themselves and cursing by their King and by their God.⁹ They will turn their faces upward, look unto the earth, and find nothing but distress, darkness, and anguish. In the end they will be driven away into thick darkness.

How often do we ask as we reap a harvest of foolish sowing, "Why is God doing this to me?" In our day of "feel good" religion we don't hear much about fearing God. We demand that God love us no matter what we do and that he never leave us or forsake us even if we forsake his way. We may say that we must always do our best, but since God is under obligation to love us no matter what, we never demand very much from ourselves. It was this type of thinking that led God to tell his people to stop worrying about what Assyria could do to them and start thinking about what Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, could do.

God will either be a sanctuary or a stumbling block over which we keep falling. God does not change and he certainly does not change in how he deals with rebellious

9. The ASV margin is preferable: they shall curse their King and their God. They will not blame themselves so they blame their King and their God.

children and unbelievers. It is true that even faithful children suffer, but faithful children know that beyond the suffering there is light, not darkness. There is beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isa. 61:3).

God is teaching us that we cannot exclude him from our world. We can exclude him from our lives and, like the rich fool, become practical atheists. All we accomplish, however, is a God-shaped vacuum that we try to fill with possessions, pleasure, diversions, work, and power. However, we can never fill that space with material things. No created thing can fill it. No personal relationship can fill it. All we accomplish is to keep stumbling over God.

Some may say that they have seen it work pretty well. After all, it is depicted every day on the television. But even if you believe the fiction portrayed there, and even if it in fact works “pretty well” some of the time, the one beckoning at the end of the way is life’s most inescapable reality – Death. In the end he mocks all of our attempts to make life without God (Psa. 73:13-20; Eccl. 9:3). The choice is ours. Will God be a sanctuary or a stumbling block?

CHAPTER NINE

The Dawning Light

Vv. 1-3 – Light Shines in Darkness

Chapter eight closed with darkness. Chapter nine begins by declaring that it would not always be that way. It will not always be dark to the land that is now in distress. There will be a restoration of light, but not for the present generation. In the latter time it will be glorious. Morning is coming, but it is not coming to Judah first. The darkness came first to Zebulun and Naphtali and they shall be the first to see the light – “there shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish.” Isaiah is seeing the future

from the present and he uses the prophetic perfect to “declar[e] the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done (46:10).

Instead of darkness there shall be light; instead of death there shall be life (v. 2). This prophecy was declared fulfilled in Jesus (Matt. 4:12-16) as he preached in Zebulun and Naphtali near the sea of Galilee.

The nation was multiplied by an influx of Gentiles flowing into it (2:2). This would bring joy as great as that from a good harvest or from victors dividing the spoil.

Vv. 4-7 – The Basis of This Joy

The basis for the joy is that there is no more burdensome yoke, no more beating by staff across back or shoulder, and no more oppressor wielding a rod. They are all broken as in the day of Midian, whom they had served seven years. Instead, they will walk in the glorious light of freedom, a freedom that came from God’s deliverance from Midian through Gideon (Judges 6-8). The armor of the armed man and his bloody garments will be nothing more than fuel for the fire. Once again God emphasizes that this new kingdom will be one of peace and will not seek to extend itself by power and war. Spiritual Israel will have armor, but it will be spiritual armor for its spiritual battle “against the principalities, against the powers, against the world-rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Isa. 2:2-4; Hos. 2:18; Zech. 9:10; Eph. 6:10-18).

In Vv. 6-7 we come to the real basis for the joy. The one of whom Isaiah spoke in 7:14 has come – unto us a child is born, a son is given. The “names” by which he shall be called are descriptions of his nature and character. He is Wonderful; he is Counsellor;¹⁰ he is Mighty God; he is Everlasting Father; he is Prince of Peace. Surely Paul did not overstate his nature when he asserted that “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9). He shall be king upon whose shoulders the

10. Some translations render these first two appellations as “Wonderful Counsellor.” Forests have been felled and oceans of ink have been used in the debate over which is correct. What a waste of time to worry about such details in such wonderful language!

government shall be. There shall be no end to the increase of his government and of peace as he sits upon the throne of David ruling over and establishing his kingdom, upholding it with justice and righteousness forever (Dan. 2:44). How shall all of this come to pass? What certainty do we have other than Isaiah's continued use of the Prophetic Perfect? "The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this."

Vv. 8-12 – The Arrogance of Ephraim

There is an abrupt change of subject in v. 8 as Isaiah turns 180 degrees to God's judgment. It reminds of the swift change between 2:2-4 and 2:5-7. Isaiah's mind may have been turned by the mention of justice and righteousness. Perhaps the word "zeal" in v. 7 brought to mind God's wrath against sin (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4). The refrain with which each of the following paragraphs concludes, "For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still," was first introduced in 5:25. In fact, using a modern phrase, the people's response to God was "Bring it on." Bricks may be made of clay and thus be fragile; destroy them and we will build of hewn stone. All of our sycamores may be cut down, but so what? We will replace them with the choicest of lumber, the cedars of Lebanon (v. 10). God's response is that he will set up on high against him the adversaries of Rezin and will stir up his enemies. The Syrians will attack from the front and the Philistines from the rear, and they will devour Israel with an open mouth as a wild beast devours its prey (vv. 11-12).

Vv. 13-17 – Israel to Be Cut Off, Head and Tail

In spite of it all the people have not learned their lesson; they have not turned unto the one who smote them, nor have they sought Jehovah of hosts (v. 13); there has been no repentance. God has no choice left and his hand of punishment is still outstretched (v. 12). Assyria will be unleashed; Israel will be cut off head (the elder and the honorable man, v. 15) and tail (the prophet that teacheth lies, v. 15), palm-branch (at the top of the tree; another description of the elder and honorable man) and rush (marsh grass, lowly and abased), in one day (v. 14). They deserve no more because they lead the

people astray and cause them to err (v. 16). God will not rejoice over their young men¹¹ because all, including the fatherless and widows,¹² are profane and evil-doers who speak folly (v. 17). Once again we hear the refrain: “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” It’s not over; there is more to come.

Vv. 18-21 – The Devouring Fire: Wickedness and Civil War

The northern kingdom is on fire, a fire fueled by wickedness. It begins with the briars and thorns, the easiest to ignite, and then moved to the thickets in the forest and turned them into a billow of smoke rolling up to the sky (18). The fire that burns is evidence of the wrath of God for their conduct. Not only the land, but the people are fuel for the fire. If they had known the law of God and walked in his way it could have been avoided. If they had known the law of God they would have known that their conduct would lead to their destruction. God had warned that the man who walked in stubbornness of heart would see God’s anger and jealousy smoke against him and all the curses written in this book would lie upon him (Deut. 29:20). The destruction led to divisions even in families as brother turned against brother (19).

There was not only the foreign invaders – Assyria, Syria, and Philistia – but the northern tribes were also being torn apart by civil war. Neighbor was stealing from neighbor and desperation led to self-cannibalism. Still their hunger is not satisfied. Ephraim fights with Manasseh and Manasseh with Ephraim. The only thing on which these two sons of Joseph could agree was to fight with Judah. For all these reasons God’s anger is not turned away; his hand is stretched out still.

To all of these things Judah may be saying “Amen.” However, Isaiah has been using some principles in discussing the northern tribes that he is fixing to apply to Judah. Judah’s “Amens” will be silenced.

11. It was the young men who were used to fight their wars. Instead of protecting them, God will permit their enemies to destroy them

12. Those whom God formerly protected and whose mistreatment he punished will no longer be the objects of his compassion and protection.