

## ***Isaiah Part 6: “I will wait for the Lord...”***

### **Isaiah 8**

#### ***The coming Assyrian invasion (Isaiah 8 v 1 to 10)***

This prophecy continues from Isaiah 7, where through the prophet Isaiah God assured Ahaz, king of Judah, that he would not be overthrown by the combined forces of Syria and Israel. God announced judgment against Syria and Israel, saying (with respect to their attack against Judah): “It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass” (Isaiah 7 v 7). Within 65 years ‘Ephraim’ (symbolic of the northern kingdom of Israel) would be “shattered”, so that it would no longer be a people. In this chapter, God gives Isaiah a sign to explain more clearly how soon the defeat of Syria and Israel will come...

“Take a large tablet” (v 1) – it isn’t often that the prophets are commanded to write, but here is one instance. Isaiah will write concerning his son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, which means ‘quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil’. “I will get reliable witnesses” (v 2) – God appointed two witnesses, so the validity of this word would be established (Deuteronomy 19 v 15). “And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son” (v 3) – this refers to Isaiah’s wife. She is called ‘a prophetess’, though this could be in the sense of being the wife of the prophet. However, she clearly brought forth prophecy on this occasion: the birth and naming of their son. “For before the boy knows how to cry ‘My father’ or ‘My mother’” (v 4) – through the birth and naming of Isaiah’s son God gives a time-frame for the invasion of Assyria that will punish Syria and Israel. This is essentially the same as the ‘near’ fulfilment of the Immanuel sign in Isaiah 7 v 10 to 16, but this sign was more plain and more public.

- Why do you think the LORD (through Isaiah) described the imminent Assyrian invasion in terms of a mighty river in flood and bursting its banks (v 5 to 8)?

“Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently” (v 6) – the people of the northern kingdom of Israel did not appreciate their humble streams. Instead, they rejoiced in wicked leaders (Rezin and Pekah). So God will give them “the waters of the River, mighty and many”. The capital of the Assyrian Empire was the city of Nineveh, which was founded on the River Tigris. The Assyrian Empire also contained the River Euphrates. God uses the difference between the small, yet adequate waters of Israel and the mighty, yet uncontrolled rivers of Assyria to make a point: ‘You don’t like what I have given you? Then I will give you something different, but you won’t like it either...’

“It will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks” (v 7) – like a river in flood, the Assyrian army will not stay confined to its ‘banks’: instead, the soldiers will ‘flow over’ Israel and Syria, and ‘flood’ Judah with violence. “Reaching even to the neck” (v 8) – Assyria would conquer the northern nation of Israel, but would not overcome the southern nation of Judah. The flood would come up to their necks, but not over their heads: Judah would suffer destruction (2 Kings 18 v 13), but would nevertheless survive the Assyrian invasion. “Your land, O Immanuel” (v 8) – this refers back to the ‘Immanuel’ prophecy of Isaiah 7 v 14. The land the Assyrians will invade does not belong to Judah: it belongs to God, to the coming Messiah, to Immanuel...

“Strap on your armour and be shattered” (v 9) – the victims of the Assyrian invasion (Syria, Israel, and Judah) could prepare for that invasion, but their preparation would not protect them. They could “take counsel together” (v 10), but it would come to nothing. Their words would not stand, for “God is with us” (v 10). Who is the ‘us’? In one sense this refers to the Assyrians, because they were the instruments of God’s judgment. Nothing could stop the Assyrian army, because – even if they did not know it – God was using them. But the ‘us’ also refers to Isaiah himself. As a messenger of God, his word would come to pass no matter what the three nations did to prepare against it. “God is with us” also alludes to the Immanuel prophecy, because Immanuel means ‘God with us’.

***[MORE OVER...]***

## ***Fear God, wait for the Lord (Isaiah 8 v 11 to 22)***

“Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear...” (v 12) – Isaiah and the people of Judah were tempted to give into fear and panic, knowing the dangerous place they were in. At the time of this prophecy, the combined armies of Israel and Syria had destroyed much of Judah, and were about to encircle Jerusalem. They planned to depose King Ahaz of Judah and set their own man on the throne (Isaiah 7 v 6). Now, Isaiah’s prophecy declared the armies of Syria and Israel would not succeed in conquering Judah, but would themselves be overcome by the Assyrians. In the midst of all this, it would be easy to let their hearts or minds dwell on conspiracies and threats. But God tells them not to.

“The Lord of hosts, him you shall honour as holy. Let him be your fear...” (v 13) – instead of fearing conspiracies and threats, fear God! Don’t see yourself at the mercy of opposing armies: you are in God’s hands. Instead of worrying about your enemies, worry about your relationship with God.

- How can God be both a “sanctuary” and “a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling” (v 14)?

“He will become a sanctuary” (v 14) – the LORD will be our sacred place of protection: he will keep us safe from our enemies. For those who trust in him, the LORD will be a sanctuary, but for those who do not, he will be “a stone of offence and a rock of stumbling”. Instead of finding protection from the LORD, they will ‘stumble’; indeed, “many shall stumble... they shall fall and be broken” (v 15). This is the same idea behind Simeon’s words in Luke 2 v 34. This is also an argument for the deity of Jesus, because in these verses the LORD of hosts is the stone, but in 1 Peter 2 v 6 to 8, Jesus Christ is the “stone of stumbling”. “I will wait for the LORD” (v 17) – waiting for the LORD is not passive inactivity: it means being totally attentive to the LORD, focused on his every move and responsive to his every desire.

“Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs...” (v 18) – Isaiah had been called to prophesy, and to use his children in his prophetic messages (Isaiah 7 v 3, Isaiah 8 v 3). It is as if he is saying, ‘Look at us! We *are* the message’, bearing in mind that Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz means ‘quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil’, referring to the imminent Assyrian invasion, and the name Shear-Jashub means ‘a remnant shall return’, referring to the restoration God would eventually bring. The name Isaiah means ‘salvation is of the LORD’, referring to the hopeful attitude Judah needed to adopt. We are also the children of God, and we are *his* message. Hebrews 2 v 11 to 13 quotes this passage to communicate this truth: just as much as Isaiah’s children were living witnesses of the truth of God’s word, so are we as God’s children.

- When disaster comes, and God seems to have hidden his face, where are people tempted to turn (v 19)? What should believers do in such circumstances? What test does Isaiah propose for ‘occult’ or ‘spiritualist’ teachings?

“Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers...” (v 19) – in the present danger from Syria and Israel, and in the coming danger from Assyria, Judah will be tempted to seek guidance and comfort from mediums and necromancers. Isaiah exposes the foolishness of this when he says, “Should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony!” (v 19, 20) – forget about mediums, wizards and the dead: instead, go to God’s Word (i.e. the ‘teaching’ and the ‘testimony’). “If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn” (v 20) – if there is a disagreement between God’s Word and the words of a messenger, then the messenger is wrong. “They will be thrust into thick darkness” (v 22) – when people forsake God’s word and trust in mediums and wizards, they are courting darkness, not light. This passage gives us a solemn warning against any dealings with the occult. See also Leviticus 19 v 31.

*Prayer – Lord, as we study these ancient prophecies and accounts of the imminent Assyrian invasion, help us to learn the important lessons given to the people of Judah. Help us not to be afraid of our enemies; help us instead to honour you as holy, to fear you in all circumstances, to wait for you, and to hope in you always. We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.*