

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #15

Isaiah 8:1-22

Just this past week I heard a reporter say something to this effect, “I just can’t figure out why there is such fighting in the Middle East between Israel and Arabs over what looks to me to be a small piece of dirt.”

The answer to this reporter’s question, in part, comes right out of the book of Isaiah. **The land Israel occupies was not supposed to be a land of dirt, but a land of blessing. The land Israel occupies was not supposed to be a land filled with fighting, but a land filled with peace.**

The reason why the land isn’t that way is because to this point, God has not caused it to become this kind of land and the reason why God has not caused it to become this kind of land is because of Israel’s refusal to turn to Him and Israel’s refusal to trust Him and obey His Word.

Never is that more obvious than when you journey through the prophecies of Isaiah. When we look at the opening word of **Isaiah 8:1**, it is an adverb “then.” In Hebrew, the letter waw is used to connect **chapter 8** with chapter 7.

In chapter 7, Isaiah brought a tremendous message of grace to King Ahaz and told him that God would not allow Judah and Jerusalem to be overthrown by those two northern powers, Syria and Israel. He challenged Ahaz to turn to God and trust in God, which Ahaz refused to do. He warned Ahaz that if he continued to trust in foreign powers, that God would whistle for them and they would come into this land and demolish it.

When we come to **chapter 8**, we come to further data surrounding all of this. God gets very specific about when and how those powers to the north would fall and He gets very specific about what will happen to those who are faithful and those who are not faithful. If we keep in our minds that Ahaz has not responded to Isaiah’s warnings, what we see in this chapter is this:

IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT MOST OF ISRAEL REFUSED TO RESPOND TO GOD’S WORD, HE WILL STILL GRACIOUSLY AND LITERALLY FULFILL HIS PROPHETIC PROMISES TO ISRAEL; BUT THOSE WHO REFUSE TO TRUST IN HIM AND HIS WORD WILL SUFFER TERRIBLE THINGS AND THOSE WHO DO TRUST HIM AND HIS WORD WILL FIND HIM A SANCTUARY.

One big difference between chapter 7 and **chapter 8** is that chapter 7 addresses King Ahaz and **chapter 8** addresses the people (**8:6, 9, 11, 16**). Just because King Ahaz didn’t have his focus on the Word of God did not get God’s people off the hook. God wants His people to know His Word. In fact, one thing this chapter clearly reveals is that during very threatening times, the specific thing that can remove some of the panic and fear among God’s people is a focus on the written Word of God (**8:1, 16, 20**). **No matter who the political leader, whether he is one who believes or doesn’t, no matter what the political climate, this text clearly shows us God wants His people focused on His Word.** What Israel needed to hear when faced with terrible threats was the Word of God and God sent His man, Isaiah, to communicate it to His people.

Now this chapter breaks down nicely into seven main parts:

PART #1 – God has His prophetic Word written for all to see and read. **8:1-2**

There are certain facts we want to see about this:

(Fact #1) - It was to be written on a large tablet. **8:1a**

It was King David who said that God magnifies His Word at the same level of His own name (Psalm 138:2). In fact, Isaiah will later say in this very book that God's Word is "great and glorious" (Isaiah 42:21). The reason why God wants this written on a large tablet is because He wants His people having a high and holy opinion of His Word, especially in times of trial and trouble. When facing intimidations and threats, God's people need to be focusing on the written Word of God. A church that truly honors God will be one that magnifies the written Word of God.

(Fact #2) - It was to be written in ordinary letters. **8:1b**

The reason for this is because God wanted His Word communicated to His people in a language they could understand. Any person, from the religious scholar to the ordinary man on the street, needs to clearly understand the written Word of God.

(Fact #3) - It was to be written with a specific prophetic message. **8:1c**

The message was straight to the point - "swift is the booty, speedy is the prey" or as it reads in Hebrew, "Maher-shalal-hash-baz."

(Fact #4) - It was to be written and testified that it was written by faithful witnesses. **8:2**

Isaiah was the prophet who was to write the Word and God selected two faithful witnesses to testify of the importance and accuracy of the written Word. The verb "take" and the noun "witness" both come from the same Hebrew root word. What God is actually saying here is that I have called to witness, two witnesses concerning the reliability and the accuracy of My written Word.

The two witnesses are Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. Now we don't know much about this Zechariah named here, but we do know something about this priest, Uriah, because he would actually listen to Ahaz and change temple worship after part of this prophecy was fulfilled (II Kings 16:10-16). He would, as John Calvin said, turn out to be "an ungodly and worthless apostate" (*Isaiah*, Vol. 7, p. 263).

What you have in Uriah is one who continually told people the importance of the Word of God and the reliability of the Word of God, and he turned out to be one who didn't obey the Word of God.

PART #2 – God had his prophet have a son who He told to give a specific name . **8:3-4**

The name Isaiah was told by God to give to his son, was the same name he wrote on the large tablet – ‘Maher-shalal-hash-baz,’ which means ‘swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.’ The reason why God wanted Isaiah to give his son this name was for a prophetic reason - before the son was old enough to say ‘My Father’ (abi) or ‘My Mother’ (immi), Assyria would sweep in against Judah’s two threatening enemies - Damascus which was the capital of Syria (Aram) and Samaria which was the capital of Israel and would sweep them away.

Now typically a baby is able to say ‘momma’ and ‘dada’ at about 1½ to 2 years. So what God did is He revealed to Judah and Jerusalem His written Word which specifically predicted that He would destroy their threatening enemies quickly, and then He specifically had Isaiah’s wife give birth to a son that the people could see and before he was old enough to say abi or immi, God would eliminate the enemies, which is exactly what He did. What this would prove is that another child would literally be born of a virgin who would fulfill all promises of God to Israel (7:14).

Isaiah made these prophecies in 734 B.C. and in less than two years, 732 B.C., Assyria swept into this land and took charge of both Aram and Israel.

Now you would think that after seeing the Word of God and watching this happen with Isaiah’s son that Judah would have said, we need to get serious about God’s Word and worship. You would think that all the people would have said, we need to turn to God right now for His help and guidance and forgiveness. But that is not what happened.

PART #3 – God informs Isaiah that He will permit Assyria to invade Judah because she refuses to turn to Him. **8:5-8**

What is described here is totally pathetic. In **verse 6** “the gently flowing waters of Shiloah” was, as Jerome said, a small fountain from which flowed a little river or stream that ran right through the middle of Jerusalem. This was a key stream that had been provided by God which supplied water to the temple, which was needed to wash away the blood of the sacrificed animals. The river was not big and impressive; it was a gentle, steady flowing stream. This stream was clearly connected to King David (Nehemiah 3:15; 12:37) and to the promise of God. As Dr. Young said, “To despise these waters is to despise Yahweh” (Vol. 1, p. 305).

So the point of this image is that instead of Judah trusting in God and His Word that a Davidic King would sit on the throne, these people trusted in Assyria and rejoiced when Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, the king of Israel (**8:6**), was broken.

Judah was so distorted in faith that her hope was not in God or in His provisions, but was in a foreign power. Her trust was in Assyria and her joy was in the fact that Assyria had taken out Rezin and Pekah. As **verse 6** says, she rejected the wonderful provisions of God. She was not content with the gentle river of blessings, she wanted a big river. So God says, “Alright, you shall have it.”

In **verses 7-8**, God says you don't want Me or My care. You don't want to trust in Me so I'll bring a foreign flood of disaster on you from the Euphrates, the King of Assyria and what I will let him do is sweep into Judah and flood it with his forces.

God says, as a direct judgment I will permit him to fill the land of Immanuel right up to your necks. The nation would be on the verge of drowning, but she would not drown for one simple reason, this is Immanuel's land (**8:8**). In 701 B.C., Sennacherib led the Assyrian army into Judah and only Jerusalem escaped. She was attacked right up to her neck.

Notice carefully what is said in **verse 8**. **Immanuel, that is God with us, has a specific land.** That specific land is in the Middle East. That land is presently dominated by Arabs and others. In fact, right now it is almost as if Israel is dominated by foreigners right up to her neck. She even shares Jerusalem right now with foreigners like the devils of Islam. **The reason she finds herself in this mess right now is because of what is right here; she refuses to turn to the only true God and Son of David who brought her to this land in the first place.**

But you can know with absolute certainty that even though, comparatively speaking, Israel may be outnumbered right now, she will always survive because even though she has been so unfaithful to God, He has still cared for her. One day He will give her Immanuel's land.

PART #4 – God encourages Judah that He is always with her and will give her victory. **8:9-10**

God calls out to the nations, even the remote places of the earth, and He reveals what eventually He will do to them if they turn against Israel; He will shatter them. Nations can band together and form alliances and devise plans against Israel and make proposals to each other against Israel, but they will never succeed because "God is with Israel." Notice carefully here the assurance of Israel's survival is because "God is with us."

PART #5 – God encourages His people to trust in Him, not in political conspiracies. **8:11-15**

Isaiah stood before the people and with mighty power and instruction he communicated to the people - do not turn against Israel. Do not turn against Israel or you will be shattered.

Now the sense of **verses 12-13** is this - do not fear all the political conspiracies which are against you. Do not be afraid of the surrounding forces and their plans. Do not fear what other people fear. Live your life in a fear of God. Fear the Holy God of all power. If you want to spend your life fearing something, fear God and not man. When you start fearing men, you become weak, feeble, cowardly. You don't dare say or do anything that might offend someone else even if what they are doing offends a Holy God. When you fear God you face your sin, you embrace truth and you acquire a solid faith and strength from knowing you are in a right relationship with Him.

Not only should we fear God, but we should also flee to Him, because He is our sanctuary and He will become our haven and sanctuary if we fear Him and turn to Him (8:14a). As Isaiah revealed in 7:14, a Son would be born of a virgin in whom Israel could place her trust. But to this day she still will not do it.

Just like **verse 14** says, Israel stumbles over this message, Jerusalem is trapped in the same unbelief and as **verse 15** says, so are many all over the world.

They will not turn to God and will not turn to Jesus Christ who is Immanuel. God is a sanctuary for some and at the same time He is a rock of offense for others.

PART #6 – God tells His people what to do in times of trouble. **8:16-18**

(Action #1) - Have an intense focus on God's written Word. **8:16**

The only reliable absolute standard to turn to in times of trouble is the written Word of God. Everything Israel needs to know and everything we need to know is found in Scripture. The tragedy for most people is that in times of trouble they do not turn to the Word, they cannot speak the Word because they do not know the Word.

(Action #2) - Continue to trust God, wait on God and look eagerly for God to deliver Israel. **8:17**

Waiting for God to work is a wonderful way to live. It will sustain you in dark, threatening times. It will uplift you in low moments. It will strengthen you in weak moments. One of the best things we can do when surrounded by seeming insurmountable troubles is to wait on God and look eagerly to Him for help.

(Action #3) - Continue to look at the Biblical signs related to Israel. **8:18**

Isaiah and His children were signs that God was watching over Israel. There will always be a remnant left (Shear-Jashub) and God will always swiftly put down Israel's enemies (Maher-Shalal-hash-baz).

There is critical eschatology revealed right here. **Signs are for Israel, not the Church**. As the Church Age winds down, we may expect to see a lot of new movement related to Israel for this very reason, and the more we focus on God's Word, the more we will be able to make sense of what is happening.

PART #7 – God tells His people what not to do in times of trouble. **8:19-22**

Do not trust in those who are not focused on God's Word. What is so sad about these verses is that Israel is a land that has become so far removed from God and His precious Word that she would rather consult spiritists and mediums that supposedly can contact the dead, rather than consult the living Word of God.

God tells His people to keep their focus on His Word; and that faithful group who does will see those enemies of His driven away. I don't care what economists are saying about Israel or what politicians are saying about Israel; what Israel really needs to know is what God's Word says. Because almost all the people of the world have opinions about Israel and those opinions have "no light."

But I can say to Israel, if you as a nation right now will turn to your God who led you to the land you are presently in, a land that looks like a land of dirt, and if you will cry out to your deliverer, your Immanuel, Jesus Christ, He will chase your enemies into oblivion and turn you and your land into a people and place that overflows with His blessings. You may ask, where in the world do you get an idea like that? From your own prophet, Isaiah.