

Introduction: The Sons of Isaiah 7-9

I have a Lutheran friend who refuses to sing Christmas carols until December 25.

He will sing *Advent songs* during Advent –
but nothing celebrating the birth of Jesus until Christmas –
and the two weeks following Christmas!

Due to what might be called a happy coincidence,
we will be spending the next couple weeks looking more particularly
at the importance of the birth of Christ,
as proclaimed by Isaiah the prophet.

Isaiah 6-12 is the second major section of Isaiah.

It begins and ends with the Holy One of Israel.

Chapter 6 is Isaiah’s vision of the Holy One of Israel –
with the call of the seraphim: “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of Hosts”

Chapter 12 will end with the line:

“great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel”

Chapter 6 ends with the image of a stump,

Chapter 11 begins with a branch growing out of that stump.

The focus is on the beginning of Isaiah's ministry,

during the reign of Ahaz,

when Syria and Ephraim (Damascus and Samaria) were the primary threats.

Ahaz himself thought that accepting Assyrian overlordship was the best hope for Judah.

In 732 (eight years after his grandfather, Uzziah, died)

Ahaz went to Damascus to swear homage to the Assyrian king,

Tiglath-Pileser.

While there, he wrote down the plans for an Assyrian-styled altar,

which he had made in the temple in Jerusalem –

next to the altar of Yahweh!

Probably our passage (chapters 6-12) comes a little bit earlier.

In other words, Ahaz hears this prophecy from Isaiah.

He takes the part that he *likes* – don’t join the anti-Assyrian league!

But he ignores the part that he doesn’t like – the part about trusting the LORD!

Isn’t that so much like us?

We take the parts of the Bible that we like –

and we ignore the parts that we don’t...

It's important to understand the unity of the passage in order to understand the message.

7:1-9:7 is all about four children:

In chapter 7, Isaiah takes his son, Shear-Jashub, to meet king Ahaz.

Shear-Jashub means "a remnant shall return."

Also in chapter 7 we hear the sign of the virgin who will bear a son
and call his name Immanuel – God with us.

Now in chapter 8 there is another son/sign:

Maher-shalal-hash-baz – quick to the plunder, hasten to the spoil.

And in chapter 9 is the coming son – the Prince of Peace.

And all of this points forward to the shoot that will come from Jesse's stump in ch 11.

The message of Christmas is that even in the darkest, coldest winter –
even when you are overrun by misery, suffering, and affliction –
there is hope – because Immanuel: God is with us.

1. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz and Immanuel – How Can Plunder and Exile Mean that God Is With Us? (8:1-10)

We saw last that that the name "Immanuel"–God with us–seems ironic.

Because God does not appear to be with us!

God seems to be against us.

At the end of chapter 7, there were four reasons why it looked like "Lo Immanuel"
(God is not with us).

Four times Isaiah says "in that day"–in the day of Immanuel's infancy
and all four times, it is *bad news!*

So how is the coming Assyrian invasion "good news"?

How is there any "gospel" in the message that the Assyrian army is going to invade!?

a. Quick-to-the-Plunder-Hasten-to-the Spoil – Assyria Will Plunder Israel and Syria (v1-4)

*Then the LORD said to me, "Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters,^[a]
'Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz.'^[b] ² And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and
Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me."*

Now a second time the LORD speaks to Isaiah

And just as the message to Ahaz had two parts (7:3-9 and 7:10-25),
so now the message to Isaiah has two parts (8:1-4 and 8:5-9:7)
each starting with "the LORD said to me" –
and each containing a promise of a son.

³ *And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me,*

“Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz;

First Isaiah goes to the prophetess.

Why doesn't he just say “my wife”?

Because in bearing a son she becomes a prophetess.

Her conceiving and bearing a son is a form of proclamation.

If you look back at 7:14,
the pattern is similar.

Just as the virgin will conceive and bear a son and call his name Immanuel,
so now the prophetess conceives and bears a son,
and the LORD said “Call his name, Maher-Shalal-Hashbaz,”
quick to the plunder, hasten to the spoil.

Why give him this strange name?

Listen to verse 4:

⁴for before the boy knows how to cry ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria. ”

Maher-Shalal-Hashbaz is a sign that Damascus and Samaria
will be carried away to Assyria quickly.

Indeed, it is when that happens that Ahaz goes to Damascus
to swear allegiance to the Assyrian king.

Ahaz hears from Isaiah that Damascus and Samaria will fall to Tiglath-Pileser,
so Ahaz decides that this means that Tiglath-Pileser is the one he should listen to!

And then again Yahweh speaks to Isaiah (v5)
(the exact same construction as 7:10 – the second speech to Ahaz).

In other words, the sign of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz
is deliberately put in parallel with the sign of Immanuel.

b. The Rising Tide Will Overflow Judah as Well – but Immanuel! (v5-10)

⁵The LORD spoke to me again: ⁶“Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, ⁷therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, ^[c]mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks,

The waters of Shiloah probably refers to the water supply that Ahaz was inspecting in chapter 7.

It probably refers to what was later called the “pool of Siloam” –
which was admittedly a rather tiny water supply.

Ahaz is concerned that he doesn't have enough water.

You want water?

I'll give you water!

I will bring the River (when you say ‘the River’ in Hebrew,
you are usually referring to the Euphrates – the great River of the Middle East).

Here the “waters of the River” refers to the armies of Assyria
that will rise over all its channels and overflow its banks –
sweeping through Syria and Israel, all the way to Jerusalem!

Just as the Euphrates floods and brings a torrent of rushing water
that destroys everything in its path
so also the king of Assyria will come in like a flood,
washing away the entire land.

Except Jerusalem.

It will “overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck.”

But while it will drown Damascus and Samaria,

Jerusalem will be rescued.

A remnant shall return (Shear-Jashub).

And in the midst of the torrent of the Assyrian flood,

Yahweh reminds them he is with them.

“Its outstretched wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.”

Ahaz hears this and says – “I know how to deal with this –

I will ally myself with Assyria!

That will protect my people from this massive threat!”

Having preached through all of the OT prophets,

I have come to have great sympathy with those who heard their message!

I totally get why the kings of Israel and Judah

generally refused to do what the prophets said!

Their advice runs contrary to all good political sense!

Because now Isaiah turns to all who will listen,

and he declares the *point* of Immanuel.

Notice that the verb “be shattered” is used three times in verse 9:

Read 9-10

⁹ *Be broken,*^[d] *you peoples, and be shattered.*^[e]

*give ear, all you far countries;
strap on your armor and be shattered;
strap on your armor and be shattered.
¹⁰ Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing;
speak a word, but it will not stand,
for God is with us.^[1]*

If you try to overthrow God's purposes,
you will be shattered.

The last word of verse 10 is the same as the last word of verse 8:
Immanuel.
God with us.

All of the plans and alliances of the nations will come to naught.
The words of the wise and powerful will not stand.
Because Immanuel.

The children of Isaiah 7-11 stand firmly against the counsel of the nations.

2. Conspiracy Theories vs. the Children of Isaiah (8:11-22)

In the second half of chapter 8, we hear an antidote to the fears of our age as well!

a. What Do You Fear? (v11-15)

¹¹ For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying: ¹² "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. ¹³ But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. ¹⁴ And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken."

Again we see the centrality of the *holiness* of God.

"Him you shall honor as holy."

What does it mean to honor God as holy? (v13)

Keep reading:

"Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread."

I see a lot of people on Facebook who have forgotten this.

They are convinced of all sorts of conspiracies.

Notice that God does not say that conspiracies aren't happening!

He doesn't say that it's "fake news."

He says that *you* shouldn't fall into the trap of fearing conspiracies.

So what if Donald Trump becomes a dictator?

So what if the left takes over the country and we become a socialist nation?

Do you believe that Jesus came in the flesh or not?

Is Jesus Lord? or is Caesar?

The current political landscape is not what it appears.

Being an astute politician is not going to save you.

God is going to take all of your political savvy and use it against you,
because you do not fear him.

"And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling
to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

And many shall stumble on it.

They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken up."

Remember, the promise of Immanuel is an upside down promise.

It promises God's presence, but in all the wrong ways.

It promises the destruction of Israel and the near-destruction of Judah.

It calls foreigners into the land as agents of God's purposes.

No wonder this is a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling!

Peter says in 1 Peter 2:8 that we are living stones being built into a spiritual house through Jesus Christ, who himself is the chief cornerstone –

and (citing Isaiah) "a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense."

Jesus is the ultimate Immanuel—the true "God with us",
and therefore also the ultimate rock of stumbling.

But Peter goes on in the next chapter to say of us,

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy,

always being prepared to make a defense

to anyone who asks for a reason for the hope that is in you." (3:14-15)

In other words, Peter is borrowing language from Isaiah 8

in order to identify the Lord of hosts with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Peter says that Isaiah's admonition to Jerusalem applies just as much to us.

What if the destruction of American democracy is actually what God is doing
in order to advance the kingdom of Jesus?

I have no idea!

I'm not saying that I know what God is doing right now.
But I *do know* that God tells us not to fear what the people around us fear.

Fear God.

Honor Christ the Lord as holy.
And don't worry!

Humanity was created in the image of God.

Therefore, when you live the way that God says to live,
it's good!

Sure – you will face hostility, suffering, affliction, misery!

But when you live the way that Jesus calls you to live,
you find a joy and a peace that fits the way we were created to live!

But it may take a while...

Isaiah then turns to his disciples and says (16-18)

b. Whose Word Do You Hear? (v16-22)

¹⁶ *Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching^[g] among my disciples.* ¹⁷ *I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.*

I will wait for the LORD.

I will hope in him.

In him who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob.

How long?

How long will God hide his face from his people?

There are two answers to that question.

The promise of Immanuel took 700 years before it was fulfilled.

So, if it is 700 years before we begin to understand
what God was doing in the 21st century –
that's pretty much normal for God's way of dealing with his people!

But there is a second answer.

Because God appeared to Isaiah in the temple.
And the children who were born to Isaiah were flesh-and-blood signs
that God was with them.

¹⁸ *Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from*

the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

Look at me and my children.

We are signs from Yahweh of hosts.

Can you not see what this is pointing to?

Jesus takes these words into his own mouth in Hebrews 2:13.

Jesus says this about us.

Yes, it may be hundreds of years before anyone really understands why we endure
the plagues and wars of our day –

but even in the midst of the chaos and confusion,

Look at Jesus and his children!

We are signs and portents from the Lord Jesus Christ who dwells at the heavenly Zion.

That person sitting next to you – that person across the aisle –

is a sign from Jesus – showing the coming of his kingdom!

So don't get distracted by other voices – don't listen to other words!

(look at verse 19:)

¹⁹And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

What is the attraction of other voices?

I'm sure that part of it is the esoteric – the mysterious –

perhaps I could learn something interesting and useful!

Curiosity has led many down that path!

But at the core, I suspect, is a fundamental dissatisfaction with the word of the Lord.

God calls us to humble ourselves.

To treat *him* as holy.

To fear him.

And we are proud.

Just like Adam and Eve in the garden,

we want to be king.

We want to govern our own destiny.

We know that we cannot overturn God's law –

so instead we ignore it and listen to other voices.

But the other voices have no dawn – they have no light –

they speak only from the darkness of the grave.

And of those who refuse to listen to God – but insist on listening to the voices of death –
Isaiah says:

²¹ They will pass through the land,^[h] greatly distressed and hungry. And when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will speak contemptuously against^[i] their king and their God, and turn their faces upward. ²² And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness.

Those who reject the teaching of the living God will be thrust into deep darkness.
“Those who continue to despise God’s word will wander in darkness and despair.” (Harman 107)

This is language reminiscent of Psalm 23 – the valley of the shadow of death –
the valley of thick darkness.

And in the midst of that valley – in the midst of that gloom –
there is a final promise of hope and light!

3. The Coming of the Final Son – the Prince of Peace (9:1-7)

9 ^[i] But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

At last Isaiah speaks clearly of what these sons are all pointing to:

*² ^[i] The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,
on them has light shone.
³ You have multiplied the nation;
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as they are glad when they divide the spoil.
⁴ For the yoke of his burden,
and the staff for his shoulder,
the rod of his oppressor,
you have broken as on the day of Midian.
⁵ For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult
and every garment rolled in blood
will be burned as fuel for the fire.*

Do you remember Gideon?

Just as Gideon delivered Israel from bondage to Midian,

even so the light will dawn in Galilee someday.
Why Galilee?
This was the region that fell first to the Assyrians.
This was a buffer zone that had changed hands continually
for more than 500 years.
A mixed race lived here—both Israelite and Gentile.
And it is here—the furthest place from Jerusalem in all Israel—
that God will reveal his light.

Yes, Jesus was *born* in Bethlehem –
but he was first revealed to Israel as he preached in Galilee –
as the light began to dawn!

One day there will be a deliverer—like Gideon—
who will arise and rescue his people from their enemies.
How do we know?
(v6-7)

⁶ *For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon^[m] his shoulder,
and his name shall be called^[n]
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ *Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.**

In chapter 8 Isaiah told us that Yahweh of Hosts would be the sanctuary and stone of stumbling,
now we are told that a son of David will deliver his people.
Already we are beginning to see that the redeemer must be both God and man.
The names of this king make it clear that he is more than just an ordinary man.
He is the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God (and no man is ever called “El”)
the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

Jesus is the one who came to make all things *right*.
He came to bring peace.

Peace is more than just absence of conflict.
Peace includes *well-being*.

Peace means that both sin and misery are dealt with.

In chapter 5 Yahweh looked for justice but found bloodshed,
he looked for righteousness, but heard an outcry.
Now we see where justice and righteousness are found:
they are found in our Lord Jesus Christ.

*⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.*

And as Jesus continues to extend his government –
so also he extends his peace.

Jesus is King!

So whether we have 2021 –
or whether it turns out to be 2020, part 2 –
remember that the LORD is God!

The promise of Immanuel comes to its final fulfillment in the child born in Bethlehem.
The language of Isaiah 9:2-7 points forward to the future deliverance.
There is no reference to anything immediate.
It calls Judah and Israel to look beyond the idolatrous son of David
who makes foreign alliances that will destroy his land.
It calls *us* to remember that
even though we are beaten down and oppressed on every side,
still Immanuel–God is with us.
While the house of David may appear to have sunk in honor
below that of a woodman’s cottage
yet the throne of David will be restored to glory.

And
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.