

Isaiah 8:1–22 — The Overflowing Scourge

Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the Waters of Shiloah, Emmanuel's Land, and the Future Assyrian

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 8:1–22

“Moreover the Lord said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write thereon with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.

And the Lord said unto me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria.

Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria. And he shall pass through Judah, he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck. And the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.

Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel.

Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.

Behold, I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion.

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

The Name Written Before the Birth

Maher-shalal-hash-baz means swift for spoil, hasty for prey. It is one of the most unusual names in all of Scripture, in Hebrew and in any language. Before the child was conceived, the name was written on a great tablet with public witnesses so that when the child was born and named, there could be no question that this was a prophetic act and not a retrospective claim. Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah are named as the witnesses. The name of Uriah appears also in 2 Kings 16:10–11 in connection with a very revealing incident: King Ahaz went to Damascus, saw an altar there, sent its pattern back to Jerusalem, and Uriah the priest built a copy of it and installed it in the temple, displacing the altar of burnt offering. This is the man who stood as witness to the prophetic name. It gives a hint of what was already happening in Jerusalem before the Assyrian flood arrived.

The two names of Isaiah’s children together tell a story. Shear-jashub: a remnant shall return — implying captivity and departure, but mercy at the end. Maher-shalal-hash-baz: swift for spoil, hasty for prey — swift judgment. Mercy first, then judgment, in the order of their birth. Had the order been reversed, the emphasis would have been different. God names things in an order that conveys his mind.

The Real Cause of the Invasion

Men read history in terms of political causes, military alliances, economic pressures, and cultural conflicts. A secular history of the ancient Middle East would explain the Assyrian invasion of Palestine in those terms. Isaiah 8:6 gives the actual cause: “forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly.” That is the real reason. The relationship between Israel and Jehovah — their rejection of what he gently and quietly provided — is what brought the flood.

Shiloah means that which is sent — water sent of God, flowing gently, for refreshment. The people refused it and rejoiced instead in Rezin and Remaliah’s son, trusting in human power and confederation rather than in God’s provision. The contrast is absolute: the waters of Shiloah go softly; the waters of the river — the Euphrates — come strong and many, overflowing all banks, passing through Judah all the way to the neck. The gentleness of the one thing they refused is replaced by the violence of the thing they get instead.

There is a deeper application. The waters of Shiloah speak of Christ himself — the Word sent of God, who went softly when he was here, who did not quench the smoking flax or break the bruised reed. The people refused him too. And the consequence of that final rejection is the overflowing scourge that these chapters foreshadow — the worst tribulation that has ever come upon Israel or ever will.

Emmanuel’s Land: God Allows, but Woe to the Instrument

The flood of the Assyrian fills the breadth of the land, and the land is called Emmanuel’s land (v.8). God allows this to happen. The people deserve it. And yet the land is his. The instrument being used to chastise is still trespassing on the apple of God’s eye, and woe to it. Isaiah 10 makes this explicit: when God has used the Assyrian as the rod of his indignation, he will then break that rod. It is not a good position to make oneself God’s instrument against Israel. The rod will be broken when the work is done.

Verse 10 gives the answer to all the confederacy of nations: “Take counsel together, and it shall come to naught; speak the word, and it shall not stand, for God is with us.” Immanuel — God with us — is the ground. Emmanuel’s land cannot ultimately be taken from him. Whatever is planned against it will fail, because he is there and his name is what it is.

The Future Assyrian: Daniel 8 and the King of the North

The events of Isaiah 8 were historically fulfilled: Damascus and Samaria fell before the king of Assyria just as the name of the child foretold. But these things are also typical of what is yet to come. The Assyrian appears many times in Isaiah, and there is a large role for this power to play at the end. He is called the Assyrian in the prophetic books and the king of the north in Daniel.

Daniel 8 gives important background. A he-goat with one notable horn — Alexander the Great and the Grecian empire — strikes the ram that represents the Medo-Persian empire. After Alexander’s death, four generals divide his empire. Scripture focuses on two of those four divisions: the one to the south of Israel (Egypt, the king of the south) and the one to the north (the area of Assyria, the king of the north). These powers are traced through history in Daniel 11 down to verse 35, after which the prophecy jumps to the end time. A willful king — the Antichrist — appears, and against him arise a king of the north and a king of the south.

That king of the north is the final Assyrian. Daniel 8:24 says his power shall be mighty, “but not by his own power” — meaning there is another power behind him, greater than himself, enabling him. Many expositors have understood this to indicate Russia. The Gog of Ezekiel and the final Assyrian are thus connected in a confederacy at the end time, aligned in their common hatred of Israel. Psalm 83 gives a list of the nations in that final confederacy: Edom, Ishmael, Moab, the Hagarenes, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, Tyre, and Asshur — all the

nations round about Israel, coming against them with one purpose: “Let us cut them off from being a nation.”

The king of the north — the final Assyrian — sweeps down through the land, goes on to Egypt and Ethiopia, and then hears tidings from the north and east and returns in haste. At that point Christ has appeared, and the western powers are sending armies. He goes back to destroy and is broken without hand (Daniel 8:25) — the Lord directly deals with him. And the Lord will deal with each of Israel’s enemies sequentially, in accordance with the character of their hatred and their relationship with his land.

Sanctify the Lord Himself: The Resource of the Remnant

From verse 11 onward, there are words that seem directed particularly at the future godly remnant of Israel who will pass through these terrible times. The Lord spoke to Isaiah with a strong hand and instructed him not to walk in the way of this people, not to say “confederacy” when they say confederacy, not to fear what they fear. Instead: “Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.”

The same one who is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both houses of Israel, and a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, shall be for a sanctuary to those who sanctify him. The distinction between stumbling at him and finding sanctuary in him runs through these chapters. Many shall stumble and fall and be broken and be snared and be taken. But there is a remnant — those who look for him, who wait upon the Lord that hides his face from the house of Jacob.

A.C. Brown used to remind the saints of the force of Micah’s word: “Hear the rod.” Not feel the rod — they felt it right enough. But to hear it is to receive a message through its instrumentality and take it to heart. That was never the character of Israel as a whole. But it was the character of the remnant, and it is

the character of those who bind up the testimony and seal the law among the disciples of the Lord — those who say, in the darkness of the times, “I will wait upon the Lord, and I will look for him.”

To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. That is the test in every day of darkness. Not the sign-seekers, not those who consult familiar spirits and wizards that peep and mutter — but those who hold to the word of God when everything around them is trouble, darkness, and dimness of anguish.

I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.