

# Isaiah 8:11–17 — Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself

*Remnant Principles: Conspiracy, Fear, Sanctuary, Stone of Stumbling, and Waiting on the Lord*

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## Scripture Reading: Isaiah 8:11–17

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*“For Jehovah spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and he instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, Ye shall not say conspiracy of everything of which this people saith conspiracy; and fear ye not their fear, and be not in dread.*

*Jehovah of hosts, him shall ye sanctify; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.*

*For he will be for a sanctuary; and for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.*

*Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait for Jehovah, who hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him.”*

## Instructions for the Remnant

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From verse 11 of chapter 8 and onward, what God gives through Isaiah is instruction for the remnant — principles that applied to a faithful few in Isaiah’s own day but look beyond that to the future godly remnant of Israel in the time of the end. The environment described is one in which conspiracy and accusation of conspiracy fill the air on every side, in which fear and dread press upon the soul,

and in which the word of God is the only fixed point. These are remnant conditions, and these are remnant principles.

## **Conspiracy: The Reversal of the Charge**

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The people were quick to say “conspiracy” — quick, perhaps, because they themselves were busy conspiring, and those who are most engaged in a particular activity are often readiest to level its charge at others. The word of the Lord to the remnant is: do not join in that cry. Do not adopt the fears and accusations of this people.

Athaliah, the wicked queen of Judah and daughter of Ahab, illustrates a particular danger in this. When the rightful young king was crowned and the priests and people rejoiced, she tore her clothes and cried “Conspiracy! Conspiracy!” (2 Chronicles 23:13). Good was being done — the true king was being set on his throne — and the enemy of that good labeled it a conspiracy. This is what might be called the reversal of the charge: the one who is actually conspiring accuses those acting rightly. It runs through Scripture and through all of human history. Assemblies acting in genuine unity of spirit according to the truth of the one body may be charged with forming a confederacy by those whose own independency is the real departure. The charge is reversed.

God’s remedy is not to enter the argument. It is to sanctify the Lord of hosts himself. When a man is in an environment of mutual accusation, of conspiracies real and imagined, the one thing that can give a stable perspective is to go into the sanctuary of God. The psalmist in Psalm 73, troubled by the prosperity of the wicked and the spread of evil, found his view corrected the moment he went into the sanctuary of God — then he saw their end. That is the divine view of things. The first step is always to sanctify the Lord himself.

## **Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself**

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The exhortation of verse 13 is striking in its emphasis: “Jehovah of hosts, him shall ye sanctify.” Not some lesser fear, not the fear of man, not the political currents of the day. Him. Matthew’s gospel, which presents the Lord Jesus as the king, is not a politically-minded book. What it consistently puts before the soul is the sanctification of the Lord himself — not stirring up party spirit, not manipulating opinion, but letting him be everything.

The fear of man brings a snare (Proverbs 29:25). The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. These two stand in direct opposition, and the remnant is brought to choose between them. The instruction — fear not their fear, but let him be your fear and your dread — is not a call to stoic indifference to danger but to a right ordering of what occupies and governs the soul. With that ordering in place, he will be for a sanctuary. The word sanctuary is important: it is a place of refuge, of nearness to God, of safety in the midst of what is threatening.

## **A Stone of Stumbling, and a Rock of Offence**

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The same one who is a sanctuary to those who sanctify him is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both houses of Israel. This dual character runs through Scripture wherever the Lord Jesus is presented. To the sheep and to the goats; to the wise virgins and to the foolish; to those taken and those left — his coming always divides. Here it is both houses of Israel: not just the northern kingdom, not just Judah, but both. Many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

These passages are quoted and developed in the New Testament, and the Lord Jesus himself applies them to his own person. He is the stone which the builders rejected, which has become the head of the corner. He is the stone seen now on earth as a stone of stumbling; he is also the stone that, when it comes from heaven, will grind what falls under it to powder. The stumbling of Israel over him is not the last word — but it is the present word, and it has weight. Their table

became a snare to them; their fellowship, which should have been a vehicle of blessing, became a conspiring against the Lord Jesus.

## **Bind Up the Testimony; Seal the Law Among My Disciples**

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The instruction of verse 16 looks forward to the future remnant. It is not an instruction to seal the law up and put it away as done with — that would contradict the plain teaching of Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews 8, where under the new covenant the law is written in the hearts and minds of God's people. What was nailed to the cross was not the law itself but the sentence of the law against us — the handwriting in ordinances that stood out against us, the charge of condemnation. The law has its rightful place, and it has a future. The believer is dead to the law in the sense that Romans 7 describes — dead with Christ, so that the law cannot address a dead man with its condemnation. But the law is not dead; the Christian is dead.

The disciples among whom the testimony is to be sealed are those given to the Lord in the future day of Israel's darkness. They are the godly remnant who will wait and look for him while all around is conspiracy and accusation and thick moral darkness.

## **I Will Wait Upon the Lord**

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Verse 17 is a model of the right response to everything that has been described: "I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him." Three things are packed into this short verse. There was a time when Jehovah's face shone upon the house of Jacob. In verse 17, he hides his face from them. And the day will come when he will shine upon them again. That is a broad dispensational outline — past favor, present hiding, future restoration — built into a single verse.

Waiting on the Lord is the alternative to forcing matters, to taking things into one's own hand, to arriving at a theological solution by pressing one scripture against another until one of them gives way. There are things not yet clear, questions not yet answered. Faith says: I will wait upon the Lord for light on that matter. It may be a long wait. The answer may never come in this life. But that is far better than forcing a resolution that makes God contradict himself. "I will wait for him," Isaiah says — and that is a whole lot better than picking the matter up in one's own hand.

*Jehovah of hosts, him shall ye sanctify; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.*