
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON VIII : THE FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY REGARDING ASSYRIA (8:1-9:7)

General chapter outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- A. Introduction to the Entire Prophecy (1:1-31)
- B. Early Messages of Isaiah (2:1-5:30)
- C. Judah's True Hope: The Messianic King (6:1-12:6)
 - 1. Isaiah's Vision of the Holy God (6:1-13)
 - 2. The Crisis and the Promise (7:1-25)
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OVERVIEW / REVIEW — In Isaiah 7 we saw Judah under the combined threat of Israel / Syria. Frightened of the outcome, Ahaz had intentions to seek the help of Assyria, allowing Judah to come under their authority and paying them a large sum of money if they will come to Judah's aid. Isaiah approached Ahaz with the offer from the Lord: *put your confidence in the Lord and Judah will not be destroyed by the two warring nations*. When Ahaz refused the Lord's gracious offer, the Lord said He would allow Ahaz to ask of Him a sign that what Isaiah was saying was true, yet even still Ahaz refused. Angered by Ahaz' rebellious heart, the Lord proceeded to give Ahaz a sign anyway: *a virgin would conceive and prior to the child reaching a discernable age, the two nations coming against Ahaz would be destroyed; but for Ahaz' rebellion, the Lord would then bring the nation of Assyria upon Judah!*

It is at this point chapter 8 resumes the narrative, beginning with a primary fulfillment of that prophecy with the Lord giving Isaiah another son (v1-4). Isaiah then repeats that although Judah would be spared from Israel / Syria, Assyria would come upon Judah (v5-8). Isaiah continues to exhort Judah to put their confidence in the Lord, declaring destruction if they refuse (v9-18). The chapter concludes by pronouncing judgement upon those who trust in soothsayers rather than the word of the Lord (8:19-9:1). The darkness of the Assyrian invasion is balanced with the hope only God provides, as Isaiah closes with the promise of the Messiah bringing light to the darkness (9:2-7).

3. The Assyrian Invader (8:1-9:7)

a. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:1-10)

The LORD said to me, Moreover the LORD said unto And Jehovah saith unto me, "Take a large scroll and me, Take thee a great roll, and 'Take to thee a great tablet, and

write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. And I will call in Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberekiah as reliable witnesses for me.” Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said to me, “Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. Before the boy knows how to say ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria.” The LORD spoke to me again: “Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoices over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore the Lord is about to bring against them the mighty floodwaters of the River — the king of Assyria with all his pomp. It will overflow all its channels, run over all its banks and sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching up to the neck. Its outspread wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!” Raise the war cry, you nations, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us. (NIV)

write in it with a man’s pen c o n c e r n i n g Mahershalalhashbaz. And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Mahershalalhashbaz. 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. The LORD spake also unto me again, saying, Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah’s son; Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: 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. Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries: gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces; gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us. (KJV)

write upon it with a graving tool of man, To haste spoil, enjoy prey.’ And I cause faithful witnesses to testify to me, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah. And I draw near unto the prophetess, and she conceiveth, and beareth a son; and Jehovah saith unto me, ‘Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, for before the youth doth know to cry, My father, and My mother, one taketh away the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria, before the king of Asshur.’ And Jehovah addeth to speak unto me again, saying: ‘Because that this people hath refused The waters of Shiloah that go softly, And is rejoicing with Rezin and the son of Remaliah, Therefore, lo, the Lord is bringing up on them, The waters of the river, the mighty and the great, (The king of Asshur, and all his glory,) And it hath gone up over all its streams, And hath gone on over all its banks. And it hath passed on into Judah, It hath overflowed and passed over, Unto the neck it cometh, And the stretching out of its wings Hath been the fulness of the breadth of thy land, O Emmanu-El! Be friends, O nations, and be broken, And give ear, all ye far off ones of earth, Gird yourselves, and be broken, Gird yourselves, and be broken. Take counsel, and it is broken, Speak a word, and it doth not stand, Because of Emmanu-El!’ (YLT)

THE PROPHECY FOR ALL MEN — “The word *gillayon* is broad enough to include both a ‘scroll’ (NIV) and a ‘tablet’ (RSV). *What is in view is a large writing surface, its form or material unspecified. Its size strongly suggests it was intended for public display, so that it conveyed a message and could be cited later as evidence when its prophecy was fulfilled.*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] The probable emphasis of “engraving tool of a man” (YLT) or “a man’s pen” (KJV) is that what was said was to be read by all. “The phrase ‘a man’s pen,’ has been variously interpreted. The Chaldee renders it, ‘Write in it an open, or clear writing, or an expanded writing;’ meaning that he should make it clear and distinct, so as to be easily read. The Syriac, ‘Write on it in the (usual) custom of men.’ *The word which is translated ‘man’s’ usually denotes common men, the lower ranks, in opposition to the higher ranks of society. And probably the direction means simply, ‘write on it in letters such as men commonly use; in a plain, open, distinct manner — without using any mysterious emblems or characters, but so that men may read it distinctly and easily.*’ A parallel place occurs in Hab 2:2: ‘Write the vision and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.’ ” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ — Four words were to be written: *Maher* meaning hasten, or he shall hasten; *Shalal* meaning spoil or prey; *Hash* meaning hasten or make speed; and *Baz* meaning spoil or prey. The repetition of the same idea is given for emphasis. “*The idea is, that the Assyrian would hasten to his plunder — that it would be accomplished with speed.* This name was to be given to a child of Isaiah; and this child was to be a sign of the event which was signified by the name; see Isa 8:18.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] “*The four words may be considered as the commission given to the Assyrians to destroy and spoil the cities. Make haste to the spoil; Fall upon the prey, etc.* [Clarke, *Commentary*]

THE WITNESSES — The Lord then commanded for Isaiah to use witnesses, probably so that when it came to pass none would doubt the authenticity of the Lord’s hand behind the moving of the nations. Nothing is known concerning *Zechariah* since the name was common, but undoubtedly *Uriah the priest* is the same man mentioned in 2 Kings 16:10 as an accomplice of Ahaz. While not a good man, his testimony would have been important to Ahaz, especially since Uriah probably did not agree with what was being written. “*The prophecy was an important one; and it was important to know, in the most authentic and undisputed manner, that such a prophecy had been delivered. It is probable that the prophecy, attested by the names of those two men, was suspended in some public place in the temple, so that it might be seen by the people, and allay their fears; and in order to remove from the multitude every suspicion that it was a prophecy after the event.... They are called ‘faithful,’ not off account of their private character, but because their public testimony would be credited by the people.*” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

THE SIGN GIVEN — as a sign of what was to come, the Lord gave Isaiah another son which was named Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; cp v18. Before the boy could speak, the alliance of Israel / Syria would be destroyed. “*If, as seems probable, the events of vv. 1-4 are set out in chronological order, the time involved — including both the pregnancy and the inarticulate babyhood of the child (v. 4) — would be between eighteen months and two years. This would place the inscribed prophecy in 734 B.C., for Damascus was occupied and probably Samaria plundered (cf. 2 Kings 15:29) by Tiglath-pileser III in 732 B.C.*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PROPHECY — The meaning behind the prophecy was that Assyria would spoil Damascus (Syria’s capital) and Samaria (Israel’s capital), not necessarily meaning the city itself but the kingdom of Samaria. The capital of Israel stood another 18 years or so before being totally destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC. “*The prophecy was accordingly*

accomplished within three years; when Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, went up against Damascus and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin, and also took the Reubenites and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and carried them captive to Assyria, 2 Kings 15:29; 16:9; 1 Chron 5:26.” [Clarke, Commentary]

JUDGEMENT UPON UNBELIEF — Although safe from Israel / Syria, the Lord proceeds to condemn the actions of Judah for rejecting the counsel of the Lord, using the metaphor of a river overflowing. According to Keil and Delitzsch, Isaiah here begins a larger sub-section which continues for several chapters: “CONSOLATION OF IMMANUEL IN THE COMING DARKNESS ISAIHAH — The heading or introduction, ‘And Jehovah proceeded still further to speak to me, as follows,’ extends to all the following addresses as far as ch. 12. They all finish with consolation. But consolation presupposes the need of consolation. Consequently, even in this instance the prophet is obliged to commence with a threatening of judgment.” [K&D, Commentary]

The gentle waters of Shiloah — Siloah or Siloam is used but three times in scripture as applied to waters: once here, once as a pool in Nehemiah, and once in Jn 9:7,11 where Jesus healed the blind man. Siloam is on the east side of the city of Jerusalem, to the southeast of the site of the temple, and its waters flow gently into the valley of Jehoshaphat. The name means sent, or sending, probably given to it because the waters were sent or made to pass through a subterranean passage or aqueduct. *“[Siloah] is used here as a symbol of the Davidic monarchy enthroned upon Zion, which had the promise of God, who was enthroned upon Moriah, in contrast with the imperial or world kingdom, which is compared to the overflowing waters of the Euphrates.* The reproach of despising the waters of Siloah applied to Judah as well as Ephraim: to the former because it trusted in Asshur, and despised the less tangible but more certain help which the house of David, if it were but believing, had to expect from the God of promise; to the latter, because it had entered into alliance with Aram to overthrow the house of David; and yet the house of David, although degenerate and deformed, was the divinely appointed source of that salvation, which is ever realized through quiet, secret ways.” [K&D, Commentary]

Rejoices over their enemies — who exactly is referred to here is difficult, for why would Judah rejoice in the kings who were coming against them? Many commentators therefore take this to be speaking to not only Judah but to Israel as well, who *rejoiced* or *confided* in the alliance between the kings. *“The prophet reproves the whole nation of the Jews for despising the mild and gentle reign of the family of David, and for seeking the aid of foreign nations; the ten tribes as seeking an alliance with Rezin and Pekah; and the kingdom of Judah as seeking an alliance with the king of Assyria.* It was characteristic of the nation — both of the ten tribes, and of the tribe of Judah — that they forsook the defense which they had in themselves. and sought foreign alliances. Hence, God says, that he will bring upon them the judgments which they deserve. That there is a joint reference to both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, is apparent from Isa 8:14.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] An alternate interpretation is the prophet is still speaking directly to Judah but condemning them for their attitude towards their enemies: “The NIV’s ‘rejoices over,’ though a little free, brings out the almost certain meaning of the language. The people were whooping with delight at the prospect of the downfall of the two northern kings.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

The coming flood — Having rejected the gentle flowing waters, the Lord would then send a flood of destruction: the king of Assyria who as it were had overflowed his banks and sweeping into Judah (*the river* without further explanation is always the Euphrates). *“The fate of Judah would be different from that of Ephraim. Ephraim would be laid completely under water by the river, i.e., would be utterly destroyed. And in Judah the stream, as it rushed forward, would reach the most dangerous height; but if a deliverer could be found, there was still a possibility of its being saved. Such a deliverer was Immanuel, whom the*

prophet sees in the light of the Spirit living through all the Assyrian calamities.” [K&D, Commentary]

THE OPPOSITION’S FUTILE EFFORTS AGAINST JUDAH — “The rebellious confidence of v.6b and the confident taunt of vv. 9-10 occupy different worlds. The former belongs to the world of trust in human alliances and weapons, the latter is the exultant cry of faith in God. Its theme is very similar to that of Psalm 2, both passages having messianic overtones. Both generalize rather than specify particular foes, for *they state a great principle that is for ever true: God’s purpose is proof against all that people or nations — any person or nation can do. They imply that not only human power (v. 9; cf. Ps 9) but also human wisdom (v. 10) must fall before the power and wisdom of God (cf. 9:4-6; 1 Cor 1:24-27).*” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

THE CONFIDENCE THAT “GOD IS WITH US” — Twice in a few short verses Isaiah notes that the Lord is with them: “Emmanuel — God is with us”. The first usage is while describing the overflowing power of Assyria coming upon Judah, uttered almost in an unspoken prayer: “The enemy is upon us ... O be with us, God”. As if taking confidence on the fact the Lord was with them, Isaiah gives two verses of bold claims, “Do your worse, we cannot be conquered for God is with us!” *“For God is with us, Hebrew ‘For Immanuel.’ It indicates the confidence of the prophet in view of the promise and the pledge. His reliance was there. Though the enemies were strong and mighty; though the confederacy was formidable; yet his simple reliance was in the name Immanuel!* In this he had confidence, in spite of all the violent efforts and designs of the foes of Judah; see Num 14:9: ‘Only, rebel not ye against the Lord: Neither fear ye the people of the land; For they are bread for us; Their defense is departed from them, And Jehovah is with us, Fear thou not.’ See also Ps 46:6,7: ‘The heathen raged, The kingdoms were moved. He uttered his voice, the earth dissolved. Jehovah of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.’” [Barnes, Notes on OT] “The prophet denounces the Assyrian invasion, which should overwhelm the whole kingdom of Israel under Tiglath-pileser, and Shalmaneser; and the subsequent invasion of Judah by the same power under Sennacherib, which would bring them into the most imminent danger, like a flood reaching to the neck, in which a man can but just keep his head above water. The two next verses, 9 and 10, are addressed by the prophet, as a subject of the kingdom of Judah, to the Israelites and Syrians, and perhaps to all the enemies of God’s people; assuring them that their attempts against that kingdom shall be fruitless; for that the promised Immanuel, to whom he alludes by using his name to express the signification of it, for God is with us, shall be the defense of the house of David, and deliver the kingdom of Judah out of their hands.” [Clarke, Commentary]

WAS EMMANUEL ISAIAH’S SON OR CHRIST? — *“Thy land, O Immanuel:* If this be understood as referring to the son of Isaiah that was to be born, then it means that the child was given as a pledge that the land would be safe from the threatened invasion. It was natural, therefore, to address the child in that manner; as reminding the prophet that this land, which was about to be invaded, belonged to God, and was yet under his protection. Its meaning may be thus paraphrased: ‘O thou who art a pledge of the protection of God — whose birth is an assurance that the land is under his care, and who art given as such a sign to the nation. Notwithstanding this pledge, the land shall be full of foes. They shall spread through every part and endanger all.’ Yet the name, the circumstances of the birth, the promise at that time, would all remind the prophet and the king, that, notwithstanding this, the land would be still under the protection of God. If the language be understood as referring to the future Messiah, and as an address made to him then, by calling the land his land, it is intimated that it could not be brought to utter desolation, nor could

the country where he was to be born remain wasted and ruined. It would be indeed invaded; the armies of the Assyrian would spread over it, but still it was the land of Immanuel; and was to be the place of his birth, and it was to be secure until the time should arrive for him to come. The probability is, I think, that the address is here solely to the Messiah; and that the purpose of God is to fix the mind of the prophet on the fact that the Messiah must come, as an assurance that the land could not be wholly and perpetually desolate. [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

b. Confidence in God (8:11-9:1)

The LORD spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said: "Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The LORD Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble; they will fall and be broken, they will be snared and captured." Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples. I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob. I will put my trust in him. Here am I, and the children the LORD has given me. We are signs and symbols in Israel from the LORD Almighty, who dwells on Mount Zion. When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of

For the LORD spake thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying, Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. 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 offense 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 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. And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they

For thus hath Jehovah spoken unto me with strength of hand, and instructeth me against walking in the way of this people, saying, 'Ye do not say, A confederacy, To all to whom this people saith, A confederacy, And its fear ye do not fear, Nor declare fearful. Jehovah of Hosts — Him ye do sanctify, And He [is] your Fear, and He your Dread, And He hath been for a sanctuary, And for a stone of stumbling, and for a rock of falling, To the two houses of Israel, For a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them have stumbled and fallen, And been broken, and snared, and captured. Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among My disciples. And I have waited for Jehovah, Who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob, And I have looked for Him. Lo, I, and the children whom Jehovah hath given to me, [Are] for signs and for wonders in Israel, From Jehovah of Hosts, who is dwelling in Mount Zion. And when they say unto you, 'Seek unto those having familiar spirits, And unto wizards, who chatter and mutter, Doth not a people seek unto its God? — For the

the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn. Distressed and hungry, they will roam through the land; when they are famished, they will become enraged and, looking upward, will curse their king and their God. Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness. Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the Gentiles, by the way of the sea, along the Jordan — (NIV)

speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. And they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry: and it shall come to pass, that when they shall be hungry, they shall fret themselves, and curse their king and their God, and look upward. And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness. Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. (KJV)

living unto the dead! To the law and to the testimony! If not, let them say after this manner, ‘That there is no dawn to it.’ — And it hath passed over into it, hardened and hungry, And it hath come to pass, That it is hungry, and hath been wroth, And made light of its king, and of its God, And hath looked upwards. And unto the land it looketh attentively, And lo, adversity and darkness! — Dimness, distress, and thick darkness is driven away, But not the dimness for which she is in distress! As the former time made light The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, So the latter hath honoured the way of the sea, Beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. (YLT)

FURTHER WARNING AGAINST UNITING WITH ASSYRIA — A strong prophetic impulse, the *Lord’s hand upon Isaiah*: urged Isaiah to continue his warning against uniting with Assyria against Israel / Syria. *That I should not walk*: that Isaiah should not join nor approve of the design of Ahaz to call for aid from Assyria. *Do not call conspiracy*: understood by some to refer to a confederacy, a union, either between Israel / Syria or Judah / Assyria. If it is to be taken in that sense, Isaiah is stating “*do not join in on the common cry for Judah to join with Assyria for protection against Israel / Syria, rather put your trust in the Lord.*” Keil and Delitzsch differs: “The warning runs thus: The prophet, and such as were on his side, were not to call that keshet which the great mass of the people called keshet (cf., 2 Chron 23:13, ‘*She said, Treason, Treason!*’ keshet, keshet); yet the alliance of Rezin and Pekah was really a conspiracy — a league against the house and people of David. Nor can the warning mean that believers, when they saw how the unbelieving Ahaz brought the nation into distress, were not to join in a conspiracy against the person of the king; they are not warned at all against making a conspiracy, but against joining in the popular cry when the people called out keshet.... *[T]he reference is to the conspiracy, as it was called, of the prophet and his disciples. The same thing happened to Isaiah as to Amos (Amos 7:10) and to Jeremiah. Whenever the prophets were at all zealous in their opposition to the appeal for foreign aid, they were accused and branded as standing in the service of the enemy, and conspiring for the overthrow of the kingdom. In such perversion of language as this, the honourable among them were not to join.* The way of God was now a very different one from the way of that people. If the prophet and his followers opposed the alliance with Asshur, this was not a common human conspiracy against the will of the king and nation, but the inspiration of God, the true policy of Jehovah. Whoever trusted in Him had no need to be afraid of such attempts as those

of Rezin and Pekah, or to look upon them as dreadful.” [K&D, Commentary] *Note v12,13 this is used by Peter in 1 Pet 3:14-15 in reference to Christ in such a way as to show Peter’s unqualified acceptance of Christ’s deity.*

THE LORD OUR SANCTUARY — “The word translated sanctuary means, literally, a holy place, a consecrated place, and is usually applied to the tabernacle, or to the temple; Ex 25:8; Lev 12:4; 21:12; Jer 51:51. It also means an asylum, or a refuge, to which one might flee in case of danger, and be safe; see Ez 11:16. Among all ancient nations, temples were regarded as safe places to which people might flee when pursued, and when in danger. It was deemed sacrilege to tear a man away from a temple or an altar. That the temple was so regarded among the Jews is manifest; see 1 Kings 1:50; 2:28. In allusion to this, the prophet says, that *Yahweh would be a sanctuary; that is, an asylum, or refuge, to whom they should flee in times of danger, and be safe*; see Ps 46:1: ‘God is our refuge and strength;’ Prov 18:10: ‘The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.’ ” [Barnes, Notes on OT] *“The temple was not only a place of shelter, but also of grace, blessing, and peace. All who sanctified the Lord of lords He surrounded like temple walls; hid them in Himself, whilst death and tribulation reigned without, and comforted, fed, and blessed them in His own gracious fellowship.”* [K&D, Commentary]

A STONE OF STUMBLING, A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND A TRAP — “Isaiah used two analogies to picture this judgment. God is often described in the OT as a Rock (e.g., Deut 32:4, 15, 18; Ps 18:2; 71:3), normally with implications of shelter and refuge. Here the prophet turned this familiar figure against the people. *God the Rock is for his people who trust him, but he is against those who refuse to believe. To them he will be either a boulder over which a man falls in the darkness or loose rock at the edge of a ravine.* Isaiah has already pictured men under the divine hand of judgment having to become hunters again (7:24); now he speaks of God as the divine hunter, who uses bird-snares and spring-traps as toils for his victims.... *The NT writers saw the ultimate, divinely given object of faith to be Christ. Men reveal their attitude to God by their faith in Christ or by their rejection of him; so the NT writers applied this prophecy to him (Matt 21:44; Luke 2:34; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:8). The importance of this passage for the NT is shown by the fact that so many different NT writers quote or allude to it.*” [Grogan, Isaiah]

THE COMPLETION OF THE PROPHECY — This is either a command or a prayer. If a command, the sense is for Isaiah to seal up the prophecy he’d given regarding the Assyrian invasion. “Perhaps, also, it is implied that it would be useless any further to address a rebellious and headstrong people. He had delivered his message, but they disregarded it.” [Barnes, Notes on OT] It may be taken as a prayer of Isaiah to the Lord. *“And so the prophet here prays that Jehovah would take his testimony with regard to the future, and his instruction, which was designed to prepare for this future — that testimony and torah which the great mass in their hardness did not understand, and in their self-hardening despised — and lay them up well secured and well preserved, as if by band and seal, in the hearts of those who received the prophet’s words with believing obedience.”* [K&D, Commentary] *Note verses 16-18 are applied to Christ in Heb 2:13.*

WHILE OTHERS REBEL, ISAIAH TRUSTED — *And I will wait upon the LORD:* This is the commencement of a new subject. *The prophet had closed his former message; but had seen that in regard to the great mass of the nation, his exhortation had been in vain. He now says, that having delivered his message, he would patiently look to God alone. His hope was in him, though the nation looked elsewhere; and though calamities were coming, yet he would still trust in God only.... Behold, I:* By ‘signs and wonders,’ here, it is meant that they, by the names given

them, were intended to teach important lessons to the Jewish people. Their names were significant, and were designed to illustrate some important truth; and especially the prophet here intimates that they were to inculcate the truth in regard to the presence and protection of God, to induce the people to look to him. Thus the name Immanuel, ‘God with us,’ Isa 7:14; and Shear-jashub, ‘the remnant shall return,’ Isa 7:3, were both significant of the fact that none but God could be the protector of the nation. And in like manner, it is possible that his own name, signifying the salvation of Jehovah, had been given him with such a reference. But at all events, it was a name which would remind them of the truth that he was now inculcating, that salvation was to be found in Yahweh, and that they should look to him. Names of children were often thus emblematic (see Hosea 1); and the prophets themselves were regarded as signs of important events; Ez 24:24. **This passage is quoted with reference to the Messiah in Heb 2:13.**” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

ASTROLOGY CONDEMNED — Some claim to be searchers for truth while rejecting the word of God. ***The Lord condemns astrology, mystics, palm-readers and such, including horoscopes!*** “*And when they shall say:* When the people, instead of putting confidence in God, shall propose to apply to necromancers. In the time of Ahaz the people were, as they were often, much inclined to idolatry; 2 Kings 16:10. In their troubles and embarrassments, instead of looking to Yahweh, they imitated the example of surrounding nations, and applied for relief to those who professed to be able to hold converse with spirits. That it was common for idolatrous people to seek direction from those who professed that they had the power of divining, is well known; see Isa 19:3; 29:4. It was expressly forbidden to the Jews to have recourse to those who made such professions; Lev 20:6; Deut 18:10,11. Yet, notwithstanding this express command, it is evident that it was no uncommon thing for the Jews to make application for such instructions.... *That hath familiar spirits:* The word ‘familiar,’ applied to spirit, is supposed to have been used by our translators to imply that they were attended by an invisible spirit that was subject to their call, or that would inspire them when they sought his direction. The Hebrew word is used to denote a necromancer, a conjuror; particularly one who was supposed to have power to call up the dead, to learn of them respecting future events; see 1 Sam 28:7-19; Deut 18:11.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] ***“What an unnatural thing, for the people of Jehovah to go and inquire, not of their won God, but of such heathenish and demoniacal deceivers and victims as these! What blindness, to consult the dead in the interests of the living!”*** [K&D, *Commentary*]

SEARCH FOR TRUTH IN THE RIGHT PLACE — “*Should not a people seek:* Is it not proper that a people should inquire of the God that is worshiped, in order to be directed in perplexing and embarrassing events? Some have understood this to be a question of the idolaters, asking whether it was not right and proper for a people to seek counsel of those whom they worshiped as God. I understand it, however, as a question asked by the prophet, and as the language of strong and severe rebuke. ***‘You are seeking to idols, to the necromancers, and to the dead, But Yahweh is your God. And should not a people so signally favored, a people under his special care, apply to him, and seek his direction?’*** ... **Judge everything on the word of God** — “*To the law ...* To the revelation which God has given. This is a solemn call of the prophet to try everything by the revealed will of God; see Isa 8:16.... ***According to this word According to what God has revealed. By this standard all their pretended revelations were to be tried. By this standard all doctrines are still to be tried....*** *No light:* The word usually means the morning light; the mingled light and darkness of the aurora; daybreak. It is an emblem of advancing knowledge, and perhaps, also, of prosperity or happiness after calamity, as the break of day succeeds the dark night.... The meaning is, probably, this: ***‘The law of God is the standard by which all professed communications from the invisible world are to be tested. If the necromancers deliver a doctrine which is not sustained***

by that, and not in accordance with the prophetic communications, it shows that they are in utter ignorance. There is not even the glimmering of the morning twilight; all is total night, and error, and obscurity with them, and they are not to be followed.’ ” [Barnes, Notes on OT]

THE COMING DESTRUCTION UPON THOSE WHO REJECT THE LIGHT OF GOD’S WORD

— What follows for the next several verses is a description of the coming judgement upon those who’ve rejected the counsel of the word of God. Their dreams will have been shattered and they will wander the land, disappointed and perplexed. They will be *hungry* due to the invasion of the Assyrians. They will be *enraged* at their own folly and will *blame* the king and of course the Lord. *This is noteworthy: the unsaved will refuse to listen to God’s warnings against sin and will refuse to submit to His claims of authority over their lives, yet will blame Him when sin has run its natural course! Even more so, the judgment of God does not convert them but only heightens their wickedness, as in Rev 16:11,21, after the pouring out of the fifth and seventh vials of wrath, men only utter blasphemies, and do not desist from their works. This reveals the depth of man’s depravity.* “*And look upward:* For relief. This denotes the condition of those in deep distress, instinctively casting their eyes to heaven for aid. Yet it is implied that they would do it with no right feeling, and that they would see there only the tokens of their Creator’s displeasure. *And they shall look unto the earth:* They would look upward and find no relief, and then in despair cast their eyes to the earth to obtain help there. Yet equally in vain. *The whole image is one of intense anguish brought on the nation for leaving the counselor the true God.... And they shall be driven to darkness:* a darkness that is driven, or that is urged upon itself; that becomes condensed, accumulated, until it becomes terrible and frightful.... *The prophet has thus accumulated every possible idea of gloom and obscurity, and probably there is not anywhere a more graphic description of gathering darkness and trouble, and of the consternation of those involved in it, than this. So fearful and terrific are the judgments of God when he comes forth to punish people!*” [Barnes, Notes on OT]

HOPE IN THE MIDST OF DESPAIR — “Verse 1 is numbered 8:23 in the MT, the verses following as 9:1, etc., to the end of chapter 9. Verse 1a clearly links up with the end of chapter 8. Despite the fact that Israel had rejected God’s word through Isaiah (8:11, 17, 19-20), God has planned to give his people light again, though the timing of this is not specified. The humbling of the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali refers of course to the invasion and annexation of the northern parts of Israel by Tiglath-pileser III in 733/732 B.C.... *These lands the first to feel the ominous tread of the warrior’s boot (v. 5), would be the first to see the new and great light God would focus on Israel. Matthew rightly saw the fulfillment of this in the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (Matt 4:15-16; cf. Luke 1:79; John 8:12; cf. John 7:52 with its reference to Galilee).*” [Grogan, Isaiah]

c. The Messianic King (9:2-7)

<i>The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned. You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people</i>	<i>The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee</i>	<i>The people who are walking in darkness Have seen a great light, Dwellers in a land of death-shade, Light hath shone upon them. Thou hast multiplied the nation, Thou hast made great its joy, They have joyed before Thee as the</i>
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rejoice at the harvest, as men rejoice when dividing the plunder. For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor. Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. (NIV)

according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (KJV)

joy in harvest, As [men] rejoice in their apportioning spoil. Because the yoke of its burden, And the staff of its shoulder, the rod of its exactor, Thou hast broken as [in] the day of Midian. For every battle of a warrior [is] with rushing, and raiment rolled in blood, And it hath been for burning — fuel of fire. For a Child hath been born to us, A Son hath been given to us, And the princely power is on his shoulder, And He doth call his name Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. To the increase of the princely power, And of peace, there is no end, On the throne of David, and on his kingdom, To establish it, and to support it, In judgment and in righteousness, Henceforth, even unto the age, The zeal of Jehovah of Hosts doth this. (YLT)

THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS — “*The people that walked in darkness:* The inhabitants of the region of Galilee. *They were represented as walking in darkness, because they were far from the capital, and from the temple; they had few religious privileges; they were intermingled with the pagan, and were comparatively rude and uncultivated in their manners and in their language.* Allusion to this is several times made in the New Testament; Jn 1:46: ‘*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?*’ Jn 7:52: ‘*Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet;*’ Matt 26:69; Mk 14:70.... *Have seen a great light:* Light is not only an emblem of knowledge in the Scriptures, but of joy, rejoicing, and deliverance. It stands opposed to moral darkness, and to times of judgment and calamity.... *In the land of the shadow of death:* ... The idea is that of death, as a dark substance or being, casting a long and chilly shade over the land — standing between the land and the light — and thus becoming the image of ignorance, misery, and calamity.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

THE ENLARGING AND REJOICING OF THE NATION — Commentators differ as to what exactly is the reference of this blessing upon the nation. Some relegate it to the land upon the return from Babylon, with ancient historians confirming the truth of that happening. Others (myself included) take this as Messianic, speaking of the glory that is yet future. *The connection is “We are enlarged and rejoice (v3-5) ... for (v6) a Child is born, a Son is given.”*

OPPRESSION SHAKEN OFF — “This verse, and the following, show the way in which the occasion of the joy had been furnished.... *The yoke*: This word is often used to denote oppression, or tyranny; Lev 26:13; Deut 28:48 — where oppression is described as ‘an iron yoke’ *The staff of his shoulder*: The word rendered staff here may mean a bough, a branch, a staff, stick, or rod.... *The rod of his oppressor*: This, doubtless, refers to the chastisement which was inflicted on those in bondage, and is a phrase denoting oppression and servitude.... *For every battle of the warrior*: The expression used here has caused great difficulty, from the fact that it occurs nowhere else in the Scriptures.... ‘For all war-shoes put on at the noise of battle, all garments dipped in blood, shall be burnt, shall be the food of fire.’ The idea ... is that the great future redemption will be like the deliverance under Gideon; ‘because, far from being accomplished by force of arms, with it all contention and war shall cease’.... *Rolled in blood*: This is a description of the usual effect of war. The image of war is that of a clangor made by the armor of soldiers, and by garments that have been dipped in human blood. It is a most revolting but just image.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

A CHILD IS BORN — “*The introductory conjunction ‘For’ is very important here (v. 6). All these wonderful events must have an adequate cause*.... It seems likely that the prophet intended us to understand that the child has four names, not five. The first two suggest divine wisdom and power, for the word translated ‘wonderful’ has overtones of deity. The last two set forth the ends he accomplished by the exercise of these attributes — his fatherly care of his people and the bringing of peace with all its attendant blessings. In the context this quartet of names comes to its climax with ‘Prince of Peace,’ as a glance at vv. 4-5 makes clear. Its implications are spelled out in v. 7.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] “*Unto us: For our benefit. The prophet saw in vision the darkness and gloom of the nation, and saw also the son that would be born to remove that darkness, and to enlighten the world. A child*: This word usually denotes a lad, a boy, a youth. It is commonly applied to one in early life; but no particular stress is to be laid on the word. The vision of the prophet is, that the long-expected Messiah is born, and is seen growing up amidst the surrounding darkness of the north of Palestine, Isa 9:1.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

A SON IS GIVEN — “*A son*: This word does not differ materially from the word translated child.... *Is given*: The Messiah is often represented as having been given, or sent; or as the rich gift of God; Acts 4:12; John 3:16; Eph 1:22; John 17:4. *The Messiah was pre-eminently the gift of the God of love. Man had no claim on him, and God voluntarily gave his Son to be a sacrifice for the sins of the world.*” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

GOVERNMENT SHALL BE UPON HIS SHOULDERS — “*The sense of this passage is, that he shall rule, or that the government shall be vested in him.* Various interpretations have, however, been given of the phrase ‘upon his shoulder.’ Some have supposed, that it means simply he shall sustain the government, as the shoulder is that by which we uphold any thing.... Others, that it means that he should wear the royal purple from a child.... [Others] supposes that it refers to the ensign of government — the scepter, the sword, the keys, or the like, that were borne upon the shoulder, or suspended from it. It is evident, from this latter place, that some ensign of office was usually borne upon the shoulder.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

WONDERFUL COUNSELOR — Commentators differ as to whether this is one or two titles. “*Wonderful*: This word is derived from the verb [meaning] to separate, to distinguish, or to make great. It is applied usually to anything that is great or wonderful, as a miracle; Ex 15:2; Lam 1:9; Dan 12:6. It is applied here to denote the unusual and remarkable assemblage of qualities that distinguished the Messiah.... *For the Messiah was wonderful in all things. It was wonderful love by which God gave him, and by which he came; the manner of his birth was wonderful; his*

humility, his self-denial, his sorrows were wonderful; his mighty works were wonderful; his dying agonies were wonderful; and his resurrection, his ascension, were all suited to excite admiration and wonder.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] Counsellor: “The second name Counsellor, because, by virtue of the spirit of counsel which He possesses (Isa 11:2), He can always discern and give counsel for the good of His nation. There is no need for Him to surround Himself with counselors; but without receiving counsel at all, He counsels those that are without counsel, and is thus the end of all want of counsel to His nation as a whole.” [K&D, *Commentary*] *“The name ‘counselor’ here denotes one of honorable rank; one who is suited to stand near princes and kings as their adviser. It is expressive of great wisdom, and of qualifications to guide and direct the human race.”* [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

MIGHTY GOD — *“This is one, and but one out of many, of the instances in which the name God is applied to the Messiah; compare John 1:1; Rom 9:5; 1 John 5:20; John 20:28; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:8. The name ‘mighty God,’ is unquestionably attributed to the true God in Isa 10:21.”* [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] Adam Clark: *“the prevailing or conquering God.”* “There is no reason why we should take El in this name of the Messiah in any other sense than in Immanu-El; not to mention the fact that El in Isaiah is always a name of God, and that the prophet was ever strongly conscious of the antithesis between El and âdâm, as Isa 31:3 (cf., Hos 11:9) clearly shows. And finally, El gibbor was a traditional name of God, which occurs as early as Deut 10:17, cf., Jer 32:18; Neh 9:32; Ps 24:8, etc. The name gibbor is used here as an adjective, like shaddai in El shaddai. The Messiah, then, is here designated ‘mighty God.’ *Undoubtedly this appears to go beyond the limits of the Old Testament horizon; but what if it should go beyond them?*” [K&D, *Commentary*]

FATHER OF ETERNITY — “The Chaldee renders this expression, ‘The man abiding forever.’ The Vulgate, ‘The Father of the future age.’ Lowth, ‘The Father of the everlasting age.’ Literally, it is the Father of eternity.... *It may be used in accordance with a custom usual in Hebrew and in Arabic, where he who possesses a thing is called the father of it.* Thus, the father of strength means strong; the father of knowledge, intelligent; the father of glory, glorious; the father of goodness, good; the father of peace, peaceful. *According to this, the meaning of the phrase, the Father of eternity, is properly eternal. The application of the word here is derived from this usage. The term Father is not applied to the Messiah here with any reference to the distinction in the divine nature, for that word is uniformly, in the Scriptures, applied to the first, not to the second person of the Trinity.... It may be added, that this attribute is often applied to the Messiah in the New Testament; John 8:58; Col 1:17; Rev 1:11,17,18; Heb 1:10,11; John 1:1,2.”* [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

PRINCE OF PEACE — “This is a Hebrew mode of expression denoting that he would be a peaceful prince. *The tendency of his administration would be to restore and perpetuate peace. This expression is used to distinguish him from the mass of kings and princes who have delighted in conquest and blood.* In contradistinction from all these, the Messiah would seek to promote universal concord, and the tendency of his reign would be to put an end to wars, and to restore harmony and order to the nations; see the tendency of his reign still further described in Isa 11:6-9; the note at Isa 2:4; see also Mic 5:4; Hos 2:18.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] Adam Clarke: *the Prince of prosperity, the Giver of all blessings.*

THE THRONE OF DAVID — This was in accordance with the promise made to David; 1 Kings 8:25; 2 Sam 7:12,13; Ps 132:11. *The primary idea is the Messiah would be descended in the line of David,* and accordingly the New Testament writers are often at pains to show that the Lord Jesus was of that family; Luke 2:4.

"This is an illustrious prophecy of the incarnation of Christ, with an enumeration of those characters in which he stands most nearly related to mankind as their Savior; and of others by which his infinite majesty and Godhead are shown. He shall appear as a child, born of a woman, born as a Jew, under the law, but not in the way of ordinary generation. He is a Son given — the human nature, in which the fullness of the Godhead was to dwell, being produced by the creative energy of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin. See Matt 1:20, 21, 23, 25, and Luke 1:35, and Isaiah 7:14. As being God manifested in the flesh, he was wonderful in his conception, birth, preaching, miracles, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension; wonderful in his person, and wonderful in his working. He is the Counsellor that expounds the law; shows its origin, nature, and claims; instructs, pleads for the guilty; and ever appears in the presence of God for men. He is the mighty God; God essentially and efficiently prevailing against his enemies, and destroying ours. He is the Father of eternity; the Origin of all beings, and the Cause of the existence, and particularly the Father, of the spirits of all flesh. The Prince of peace — not only the Author of peace, and the Dispenser of peace, but also he that rules by peace, whose rule tends always to perfection, and produces prosperity. Of the increase of his government — this Prince has a government, for he has all power both in heaven and in earth: and his government increases, and is daily more and more extended, and will continue till all things are put under his feet. His kingdom is ordered — every act of government regulated according to wisdom and goodness; is established so securely as not to be overthrown; and administered in judgment and justice, so as to manifest his wisdom, righteousness, goodness, and truth. Reader, such is that Jesus who came into the world to save sinners! Trust in HIM!"

[Clarke, Commentary]