

EXPOSITORY NOTES ON THE PROPHET ISAIAH

by

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ISAIAH CHAPTER EIGHT -

MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ

THIS chapter is remarkable because of the long and, to our ears, outlandish name of another of the prophet's sons. We have met Shear-jashub already and noted his name's significance, "the remnant shall return." Now we are introduced to Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the interpretation of which is, "*In making speed to the spoil he hasteneth the prey.*" The name was given him for a sign but must have caused him no end of annoyance when he mingled with other lads.

"Moreover the Lord said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning 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" (vss. 1-4).

Some critics have insisted that this was the maiden's son referred to in the previous chapter, and that the young woman was the prophet's wife. But there is no possible identification between Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz. The one denotes, "*God dwelleth among men in the Person of His Son*" (and this is confirmed in chapter nine), but this young lad with the long name was so called in view of something of an altogether different character. For this purpose the name was given and recorded in the temple records before the child was born. The significance of the name was this: Damascus, the Syrian capital, which had been at enmity with Judah and confederate with Israel was about to be spoiled by the Assyrians, and at the same time Israel was to fall a prey to this great and mighty power. All this would transpire before the child was well grown.

"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" (verses 5-8).

The allied peoples of Syria and Samaria (or Israel, the northern kingdom) had refused to recognize the value of association with Judah, and so had spurned the waters of Shiloah (that is “peace”), and had joined forces under Rezin the Syrian king, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, the upstart king of Israel, in order to destroy Judah. Therefore the Lord was bringing against them the armies of the king of Assyria which would flow over their lands like a great river and would even reach into Judah also, as we have seen already, thus overspreading Immanuel’s land: that is, the land promised by covenant to Abraham and his seed, which seed, as we know, is Christ.

We, as Christians, delight to use the term “**Immanuel’s land**” in a spiritual sense, and we are justified in doing this, but actually, “Thy land, O Immanuel,” refers to the land of Palestine, the land the Lord had claimed as His own when He declared, “**The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine.**”

To ward off this danger, Ahaz sought an alliance with Egypt, but no such association would avail to avert the threatened judgment. So we read,

“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. 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 or 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, 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” (verses 9-15).

Instinctively in times of stress and danger men think of confederacies and associations of some kind as the best means of preserving the traditions and conditions which they hold dear. It was so in Judah. It is so in Christendom today. So we have various associations and federations of individuals and of churches which it is hoped will prove to be bulwarks against the onrushing tide of evil. But again and again it has been demonstrated that all such confederacies tend to deteriorate as time goes by, and afterward the children of those who formed these associations revert to the evils against which their fathers protested.

The only real recourse in a day of evil is to cleave to the Lord Himself with purpose of heart. No matter what failure may come in, He remains unchanged and unchangeable. So the prophet exhorts, “**Sanctify the Lord of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread**” (verse 13).

When He is given His rightful place He will be as a sanctuary to those who put their trust in Him, but He will ever be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense as He was when He appeared in human form to both the houses of Israel, and for a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (verse 14).

These words are applied definitely to our blessed Lord in the New Testament; when He, the long-looked-for Messiah came in lowly grace, the nation stumbled over Him as over a stumbling stone, and so was broken and scattered as predicted in verse 15.

God's Word is the sure resource for His obedient people, and so we read,

“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 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” (verses 16-22).

Just as Paul, after predicting the coming apostasy in the Ephesian church, said, **“I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace”** (Acts 20:32), so here Isaiah, speaking in God's behalf exclaims, **“Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.”** To those who are willing to be taught of God, the Word becomes increasingly precious as the days grow darker.

Verse 17 is the voice of him who takes the place of dependence upon God: **“I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him.”** He may seem to be indifferent to the trials His people are passing through, but actually it is not so. His face may be hidden but His heart is ever toward them.

Isaiah and his family were called to be a testimony to all Israel. **“Behold,”** he says, **“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”** (verse 18). Part of this verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:13, and is applied to the Lord Jesus and to those who receive life through believing in His Name.

The remaining part of the chapter gives us a solemn warning against what is now known as Spiritualism or any form of necromancy. When urged to seek unto spirit-mediums for light and help, the answer is, Should not a people seek unto their God? Should the living seek unto the dead? All such attempts to get into contact with the spirits of the dead are forbidden in Scripture. (See Deuteronomy 18:9-12 and Leviticus 20:27).

It is a grievous offence in the eyes of God for anyone to turn from His revealed Word to those who profess to have power to summon the spirits of the departed in order to give light and help. Such are either charlatans deceiving those who go to them or else possessed by impersonating demons misleading all who follow them.

God's sure Word abides and if any speak contrary to it, it is because they are in darkness themselves and there is no morning for them. That is, when the day dawns for the eternal blessing of the redeemed, there will be outer darkness for those who spurned the light of truth only to be misled by falsehood.

Such will be exposed at last for what they really are, blind leaders of the blind, who will look in vain for help when those who obeyed the Word of God find light and blessing.

Spiritism is a satanic cult which can only disappoint those who follow the will-o'-the-wisp of its direction and shall at last be driven into the darkness.

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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