

## General Comments on Isaiah 8

Note: this chapter appears in 2 Ne. 18.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion of a three chapter review of Isaiah's ministry and relationship with Israel. This chapter fulfills the prediction of 7:14 and explains that Isaiah and his family are to stand as witnesses and examples of the Lord (cf. v. 18). They are to symbolize the family that is faithful to the Lord, one that is not relying on the arm of flesh as is the majority of Judah (v. 11-16).

It is interesting to note that Isaiah's ministry involves his wife and children united as disciples of the Lord. The families of the wicked are portrayed as being out to destroy one another, cf. 9:20, 19:2.

The present text presents a dichotomy: the people of Judah in general (v. 5-8c), and Isaiah's family in specific (v. 8d-10). This dichotomy is present throughout ch. 6-8. In ch. 6 Isaiah see the Lord in vision (6:1-7) and is called to condemn his people by delivering a message which they will reject (6:8-13). Isaiah then receives a revelation (7:1-9) which king Ahaz rejects (7:10-16). A sign which cannot be denied is given (7:14), but Ahaz and Judah reject it. The result is they are told they will be punished for their rebellion (7:17-25). The sign is fulfilled in their very eyes (8:1-4), but they fail to repent. They will therefore be punished by the nation which they relied on (8:5-8c). The Lord then warns all of His disciples to be like Isaiah and not like Judah (8:8d-16).

This dichotomy is the one used in the messianic context of acceptance or rejection of Jesus, cf. Matt. 21:44, Luke 2:34, Romans 9:30-33. Just as ancient Judah rejected Isaiah's warning and the sign of his child, so too will they reject the messiah when he is born. Only the faithful disciples (8:11-16) will accept the messiah when he is manifested to Judah (9:2-7). The pattern of rejection predicted here is the same one commented on by Jesus in Matt. 13:14-15 and John 5:45-47, also cp. Matt. 21:32, Matt. 23:29-37, John 12:37-43.

Overall, the message is the majority tends to reject the Lord and His messengers, even when the majority is the Lord's covenant people. The same rejection Isaiah saw is what most prophets see.

KJV Isaiah 8

1 MOREOVER the LORD said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. 2 And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. 3 And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. 4 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. 5 The LORD spake also unto me again, saying, 6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; 7 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: 8 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.

9 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. 10 Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God [is] with us. 11 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, 12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all [them to] whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. 13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and [let] him [be] your fear, and [let] him [be] your dread. 14 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

JPS Isaiah 8

The LORD said to me, "Get yourself a large sheet and write on it in common script 'For Maher-shalal-hash-baz';<sup>2</sup> and call reliable witnesses, the priest Uriah and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah, to witness for Me."<sup>3</sup> I was intimate with the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son; and the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz. <sup>4</sup>For before the boy learns to call 'Father' and 'Mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria, and the delights of Rezin and of the son of Remaliah, shall be carried off before the king of Assyria."

<sup>5</sup>Again the LORD spoke to me, thus:

<sup>6</sup>"Because that people has spurned  
The gently flowing waters of Siloam"—

<sup>7</sup>Assuredly,

My Lord will bring up against them  
The mighty, massive waters of the  
Euphrates,

The king of Assyria and all his multitude.  
It shall rise above all its channels,  
And flow over all its beds,

<sup>8</sup>And swirl through Judah like a flash flood  
Reaching up to the neck.

But with us is God,  
Whose wings are spread  
As wide as your land is broad!

<sup>9</sup>Band together, O peoples—you shall be  
broken!

Listen to this, you remotest parts of the  
earth:

Gird yourselves—you shall be broken;  
Gird yourselves—you shall be broken!

<sup>10</sup>Hatch a plot—it shall be foiled;  
Agree on action—it shall not succeed.

For with us is God!

<sup>11</sup>For this is what the LORD said to me, when  
He took me by the hand and charged me not to walk  
in the path of that people:

<sup>12</sup>"You must not call conspiracy  
All that that people calls conspiracy,  
Nor revere what it reveres,  
Nor hold it in awe.

<sup>13</sup>None but the LORD of Hosts  
Shall you account holy;  
Give reverence to Him alone,  
Hold Him alone in awe.

<sup>14</sup>He shall be for a sanctuary,

inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.

16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. 17 And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. 18 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. 19 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? 20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, [it is] because [there is] no light in them. 21 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. 22 And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and [they shall be] driven to darkness.

1 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.

#### Specific Comments on Isaiah 8

1 MOREOVER the LORD said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning Maher-shalal-hash-baz. 2 And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. 3 And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz. 4 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.

A stone men strike against:  
A rock men stumble over  
For the two Houses of Israel,  
And a trap and a snare for those  
Who dwell in Jerusalem.  
<sup>15</sup>The masses shall trip over these  
And shall fall and be injured,  
Shall be snared and be caught.  
<sup>16</sup>Bind up the message,  
Seal the instruction with My disciples.”

<sup>17</sup>So I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding His face from the House of Jacob, and I will trust in Him. <sup>18</sup>Here stand I and the children the LORD has given me as signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of Hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

<sup>19</sup>Now, should people say to you, “Inquire of the ghosts and familiar spirits that chirp and moan; for a people may inquire of its divine beings—of the dead on behalf of the living—<sup>20</sup>for instruction and message,” surely, for one who speaks thus there shall be no dawn. <sup>21</sup>And he shall go about in it wretched and hungry; and when he is hungry, he shall rage and revolt against his king and his divine beings. He may turn his face upward <sup>22</sup>or he may look below, but behold,

Distress and darkness, with no daybreak;  
Straitness and gloom, with no dawn.

<sup>23</sup>For if there were to be any break of day for that [land] which is in straits, only the former [king] would have brought abasement to the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali—while the later one would have brought honor to the Way of the Sea, the other side of the Jordan, and Galilee of the Nations.

v1-4 Isaiah receives a revelation, apparently a reiteration of that appearing in 7:14, and the Lord has him write it down in the presence of two reliable witnesses (cf. Deut. 19:15). The event is the imminent sack of Samaria and Damascus by Assyria, signified by the conception and birth of a child. Before the child is capable of speaking, these two nations will be sacked. This section of text closely parallels 7:14-17.

"Maher-shalal-hash-baz", this is variously translated to "to speed the spoil, he hasteneth the prey" or "swift is the booty, speedy is the prey" or "pillage hastens, looting speeds". It refers to the sack of Samaria and Damascus being quite soon.

v2 "the prophetess", Isaiah's wife, not necessarily a prophetess in the sense of Deborah, cf. Judges 4:4.

**5 The LORD spake also unto me again, saying, 6 Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; 7 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: 8 And he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach [even] to the neck;**

v5-8c As the northern ten tribes of Israel have allied themselves with Syria (v. 6) the Lord will bring Assyria against them as a flood (v. 7). This flood will even engulf Judah, but not completely overpower her as it will Israel (v. 8a-c).

v6 "that people", pejorative usage, not "My people". The people being referred to is Northern 10 tribes of Israel, and not Judah, as they are the ones who have conspired with Syria against Judah.

"Siloam" or KJV:Shiloah. The JPS provides an interpretive footnote which states:

The conduit-and later the tunnel-of Siloam conveyed into Jerusalem the waters of the Gihon, which symbolize "the Lord of Hosts who dwells on Mount Zion" (v. 18). For the nature of the rejection, see [7:13].

This is a common reading. For example, the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) says it is representative of the Lord's protection which is rejected. The original rift between Israel and Judah started because the king didn't want the northern ten tribes going down to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple there (cf. 1 Kings 12:27). The waters of Siloam can represent the living waters available at Jerusalem.

v7-8 The impending invasion of Assyria is compared to a flood. This imagery conjures two major OT images: The Flood, and the Yahweh versus Yam and Neharim myths. With Noah's flood, the Lord cleansed the earth of wickedness, but then promised He would never deluge the earth again with water. The Lord is using the King of Assyria to cleanse the earth in the same fashion as Noah's flood.

The Yahweh versus Yam (Sea) and Neharim (Flood) mythology invokes imagery similar to the War in Heaven account where Yahweh overpowers the sea serpent Leviathan. Isaiah references this mythological account in ch. 27, also cp. Hab. 3:8.

Isaiah frequently uses the term "flood" in reference to the wicked being destroyed as do other prophets, cp. 28:2, Hosea 5:10, Amos 9:6, Zeph. 3:8. Psalms 18:16-17 present "mighty waters" as the "enemy", cp. Ps. 32:6. Also related is the Exodus where the Israelites passed through the sea and the pursuing Egyptians were consumed by it.

v7 "the river", making reference to the Euphrates, the largest river in the Assyrian nation.

v8a-c The JPS footnote on this verse states "Judah shall be imperiled, but, in contrast to Aram and Ephraim, not destroyed". Historically, Judah had its borders encroached upon by Tiglath-pileser's invasion, but Jerusalem was not besieged.

**and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel. 9 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. 10 Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God [is] with us.**

v8d-10 The strophe is bracketed by the Hebrew "Immanuel" or "God is with us" indicating the righteous know in whom they trust and where the real power lies. Use of this phrase invokes confidence in divine support, cp. 7:14. While Israel and Judah are to be harmed by Assyria (v. 5-8d), the righteous remnant does not fear these things.

v8d "the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land", invoking imagery of being over, above, or superior to. Typically in reference to political might or protective power, cp. 40:31, 46:11, Exod. 19:4, Deut. 28:49, Deut. 32:11. This is referring to the Lord's power in protecting His faithful ones.

**11 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, 12 Say ye not, A confederacy, to all [them to] whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. 13 Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and [let] him [be] your fear, and [let] him [be] your dread. 14 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. 15 And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken. 16 Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples.

v11-16 This is the Lord's advice to Isaiah and all of the Lord's disciples (the JPS translation footnote indicates the usage of plural terms in the Hebrew) under the conditions of general apostasy. The Lord informs His disciples to avoid following the crowd's popular opinions, for unto such the Lord will be a stumbling block. The NJB says of this passage, "Isaiah is explaining his mission and attitude by sharing council given him by the Lord". Isaiah knows he is in the minority, but he also knows there are more disciples than just himself.

v14 This verse is quoted or paraphrased in Luke 2:34, Matt. 21:44, Romans 9:30-33 as a proof text of the rejection of Jesus as Messiah. When Israel rejects the Lord, the Lord turns against them and strikes them. He does this to get them to repent, cf. Lev. 26:40-45.

v16 Compare D&C 88:84, D&C 109:46 where this is done for the salvation and protection of the faithful against "the day of burning". It is also interesting to note the Latin roots to the English word "religion" mean "to tie, fasten or bind".

17 And I will wait upon the LORD, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him. 18 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.

19 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? 20 To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, [it is] because [there is] no light in them. 21 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. 22 And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and [they shall be] driven to darkness. 1 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.**

v17-9:1 Isaiah states with resolve that he will heed the Lord's advice to him and his family and reject the popular sentiment (v. 17). Isaiah also identifies himself and his children as signs and portents to Israel (v. 18). While the Israelites are adopting the practices of the Canaanites, he will rely on the Law of Moses and the testimony of the Prophets (v. 19-20). When Israel rejects the Lord for vain spiritism, they wander in darkness and suffer for it (v. 19-9:1).

v18 The names of his children have been previously mentioned, but Isaiah's name means "The Lord is salvation". This is particularly poignant as Israel and Judah are seeking for physical salvation from invaders. Instead of relying on the Lord for protection, they rely on diplomacy (the subject of ch. 6-8).

v19-9:1 The Israelites are relying on necromancy for instruction, an act that is specifically forbidden in the Torah, cf. Deut 18:8-14. The JPS rendering on this passage is rather obscure. Gileadi's translation, which is much clearer, follows:

8:19 When men tell you to inquire of mediums and spiritists who huddle together and mutter, [say to them], Should not a people inquire of their God? Should one inquire of the dead on behalf of the living 20 for doctrine and for a testimony? Surely, while they utter such words devoid of light 21 they roam about embittered by hunger, and when they are hungry, they become enraged and, gazing upward, curse their king and their God. 22 They will look to the land, but there shall be a depressing scene of anguish and gloom; and thus are they banished into outer darkness.

9:1 But it shall not be gloomy to those who have been in anguish for her. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, but at the last he will exalt the Sea Route by the Jordan [in] Galilee of the nations.

v23 In the KJV this verse appears in chapter 9 as verse 1. Interpretation of this verse is problematic, there are a number of possible readings:

1) The JPS rendering favors an interpretation that two of the kings of the Northern kingdom of Israel, the former king and the later king, are being referenced, the footnote reads:

Meaning of the verse uncertain. The rendering assumes that "the former [king]" refers to Pekah (cf. 2 Kings 15:29) and "the later" to Hoshea (2 Kings 15:30).

This follows the general tenor of ch. 7 in that the leadership of Israel, Pekah the son of Remaliah", and Judah, Ahaz, is castigated. Both of these kings are leading Israel into sin, and so Israel wallows in darkness, the subject of v. 19-22. Because of them, it is not until the messiah comes with the presence of the Lord that the light breaks through into darkness (cf. 9:2-7).

2) According to the Gileadi rendering the "Sea Route" is a way for the return of scattered Israel. This is similar to the the New American Standard (NAS) reading:

But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier time He treated the land of Zabulun and Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

This rendering treats the text as a segue to that of 9:2 where those formerly afflicted are now blessed. The way of the sea would presumably be invoking Exodus imagery to signify the miraculous manner in which the Lord will ultimately redeem Israel after punishing her.

3) Nyman offers the following interpretation:

Verse 1 in the RSV shows a transition stating that the former anguish or darkness was to be changed to a glorious status. The Matthew account (Matt. 4:15-16) introduces the great Galilean period of the Savior's ministry, which was the first and possibly the most successful of the various periods of his ministry (as usually designated in New Testament studies). When the land of Canaan was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel, the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali lay to the west of the Sea of Galilee and formed the northern border of Israel next to the gentile nations of the Galilee. The [KJV] phrase "way of the sea" has puzzled many scholars, but the Book of Mormon has retained the identity of this body of water as the Red Sea. The land of Naphtali and Zebulun was the



first area captured by the Assyrians in the time of Isaiah (see 2 Kings 15:29). The phrase "afterwards did more grievously afflict by the way of the Red Sea beyond Jordan in the Galilee of the nations," as translated in the Book of Mormon (which is basically the same as [KJV] Isaiah, with the exception of the identity of the sea), probably has reference to a later captivity by Assyria rather than the promise of "making glorious the way of the sea," as translated in the RSV. The blessing which was to have come to this area, but which had been lost by Israel's wickedness and subsequent subjection by Assyria, would come through the "light" of Christ as he ministered unto Judah in Galilee, as noted in Matthew.

Given the obscurity of the text, it is difficult to determine which is best. All have merit.

"Zebulun...Naphtali", two of the 10 tribes previously conquered by Assyria in its initial attack on the Northern Kingdom.

"the way of the Sea", the 2 Ne. 19:1 rendering identifies the sea as the "Red Sea", but does not make interpretation of the verse any easier.

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