

23.01.2021 THE HARD WAY

I will wait on the LORD, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will hope in Him. Isaiah 8:17

Jesus promises that all who come to Him will find rest for their souls. Those who refuse His invitation will find that they have chosen the hard way; the way of unbelief which results in disobedience and the consequences thereof.

Prophecy Fulfilled

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. The Lord will bring the king of Assyria upon you and your people and your father's house—days that have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.” Isaiah 7:14-17

Last week we looked at the future fulfilment of this prophecy. This week we look at its immediate fulfilment. A son will be born during the reign of Ahaz and in his infancy, the land of Judah will be desolate. The child will eat curds and honey; the food of nomads, instead of the produce of the land. The child's name, Immanuel, (God with us) was both a message and rebuke to Ahaz. If God is with us, why do we need to go the enemy for help?

Foreseen Consequences

“If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established.” Isaiah 7:9

God had sent a personal message of grace to Ahaz, but he refused to believe and repent. God will not excuse deliberate wilful unbelief. This unbelief would result in further rebellion and the consequences thereof to Ahaz, his people and his kingdom.

So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, saying, “I am your servant and your son. Come up and save me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who rise up against me.”⁸ And Ahaz took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasuries of the king's house, and sent it as a present to the king of Assyria.⁹ So the king of Assyria heeded him...2 Chronicles 28:7-9

Ahaz, the rebellious adulterous king was under pressure because the northern kingdoms Israel and Syria were waging war against him (Isaiah 7, 2 Kings 16, 2 Chronicles 28). They had been successful and had taken many captives. Instead of humbling himself and repenting of his wicked ways (2 Chronicles 7:14), he chose to go to a heathen king for help. That king was Tiglath-Pileser and he ruled over Assyria, the greatest enemy of God's people. He joined forces with the Assyrian king, calling himself a servant and a son, and gave him silver and gold from the Temple and the king's treasury.

Ahaz didn't stop there with his rebellion. He accompanied the Assyrian king to Damascus and set up a statue of the Syrian god in the heart of the Temple, stating that the gods of Damascus were more helpful to him than Jehovah.

Now King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, and saw an altar that was at Damascus; and King Ahaz sent to Urijah the priest the design of the altar and its pattern, according to all its workmanship. Then Urijah the priest built an altar according to all that King Ahaz had sent from Damascus. And when the king came back from Damascus, the king saw the altar; and the king approached the altar and made offerings on it. So he burned his burnt offering and his grain offering; and he poured his drink offering and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings on the altar. 2 Kings 16:10-13

For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of the Lord, and out of the house of the king, and of the princes, and gave it unto the king of Assyria: but he helped him not. And in the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz. For he sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus, which smote him: and he said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord, and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem.

And in every several city of Judah he made high places to burn incense unto other gods, and provoked to anger the Lord God of his fathers. 2 Chronicles 28:21-25

For Reflection:

What are the 'gods of Damascus', the gods of this world that we rely on, instead of trusting in God?

What's In a Name?

Moreover the Lord said to me, "Take a large scroll, and write on it with a man's pen concerning Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Speed the Spoil, Hasten the plunder). And I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah." Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, "Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; for before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria." Isaiah 8:1-4

The near fulfilment of this prophecy centred on Ahaz, Jerusalem, and the attack from Israel and Syria. God would give Ahaz a sign that within a few years, both Israel and Syria would be crushed. This was a sign of deliverance to Ahaz. The Assyrians will overcome the kingdom of Israel but not totally destroy Judah. Isaiah's wife bears a son, whose name itself refers to the spoiling and plundering of the kingdom.

The Lord also spoke to me again, saying: "Inasmuch as these people refused the waters of Shiloah that flow softly, and rejoice in Rezin and in Remaliah's son; Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them the waters of the River (Euphrates) strong and mighty—The king of Assyria and all his glory; He will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks. Isaiah 8:5-7

Nothing to Fear when We Fear God Himself

For the LORD spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people, saying... "The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. He will be as a sanctuary, but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel". Isaiah 8:13, 14

In every age, God calls His people to fear him, to trust Him and to give Him glory for He is a holy God. To fear God is to do His will and to be afraid to be out of His will for our lives, because doing His will brings glory to His name. To all who fear and reverence Him and do His will by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ, the Lord of Hosts will be a sanctuary to them. The sanctuary is where God dwells; it is the place of protection for His people.

To those who refuse to accept His grace, He will be a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. Psalm 118:22

"Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame." Romans 9:33

Gloom of the Ungrateful Living Dead

Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. And I will wait on the Lord, who hides His face from the house of Jacob; and I will hope in Him. Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me! We are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells in Mount Zion. Isaiah 8:16-18

Isaiah responds to the appeal of God by stating that he will wait on the Lord (he will be attentive to God's calling and to His word) and he will hope in God.

Isaiah reiterates his commitment to God ('Here am I'); his children bear prophetic messages for God's people.

For Reflection:

We are also the children of God, and in these last days we are His message. Centuries later, the writer of Hebrews (2:11-13) quoted this passage to describe God's children in the church... *For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying... "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."* Just as much as Isaiah's children were living witnesses of the truth of God's word, so are we as God's children in this time of the end, when the forces of the world (Babylon) try to overcome the church.

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world **as a witness to all the nations**, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14*

Seek God's Word, which is a light unto our path, instead of the darkness of the occult.

And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. Isaiah 8:19, 20

Like King Saul, both king Ahaz and his people who had long practised pagan worship would be tempted to get help and guidance by seeking mediums and wizards. This passage makes it clear that mediums and wizards raise up evil spirits who impersonate the dead.

It makes no sense to seek the dead on behalf of the living. The dead are the dead, the living are the living.

In contrast, the living God speaks through His living Word to guide us. There is no reason to seek the dead. Go to God's Word, the Law and the Testimony – it will testify to you of Christ, who is the believer's Light and Guide; whoever follows Him shall not walk in darkness. Those who refuse to follow Immanuel will be 'driven into darkness' (Isaiah 8:22).

"I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." John 8:12
