

## Session 10

# Isaiah 8:1-22 | Sign-Children and the Assyrian Flood

*Isaiah Oracle by Oracle / Dr. Randy White*

### Introductory background

- Basic names and chronology important to this chapter:
  - **Ahaz** is king of Judah, being pressured by the Syro-Ephraimite alliance.
  - **Rezin** is king of Syria/Damascus; **Pekah** is king of Israel/Samaria.
  - **Tiglath-pileser III**, king of Assyria, is the Assyrian king to whom Ahaz appeals; he takes Damascus and kills Rezin (2 Kings 16:7-9).
  - **Pekah** is later assassinated by **Hoshea**, who becomes king of Israel (2 Kings 15:30).
- **Shalmaneser V**, a later king of Assyria, brings Hoshea under tribute/vassalage (2 Kings 17:3), and Samaria later falls after Hoshea rebels (2 Kings 17:4-6).
- This background explains the two targets in Isaiah 8:4: **Damascus** falls first, while the meaning and timing of “**the spoil of Samaria**” becomes the key interpretive question.

### Writing of Mahershalalhashbaz as a public sign (vv.8:1-8:4)

- Isaiah is told to write on a large roll/tablet with “**a man’s pen**” (v.1).
  - This likely means ordinary, legible writing—what Chabad calls “common script”—so the message could be publicly read and later verified.
- The written message is **Mahershalalhashbaz**: “hasten spoil, hurry prey” or “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil.”
  - Jewish translations often render the words rather than merely transliterate them, because in verse 1 they function as the public message before they function as the child’s name.
- Isaiah takes **faithful witnesses** (v.2).
  - **Uriah the priest** is likely the priest of 2 Kings 16:10-16 who later carried out Ahaz’s altar changes.
  - **Zechariah son of Jeberechiah** may be connected with the family of Hezekiah’s mother (2 Kings 18:2; 2 Chron. 29:1), though the identification is uncertain.
- The prophetess bears a son, and the written prophecy becomes a living sign (vv.3-4).

- Before the child can say “my father” and “my mother,” Damascus and Samaria will be carried away before Assyria.
- Rashi identifies this child with **Immanuel**; the two-child view sees Mahershalalhashbaz as a second sign-child in the same crisis.
- Much hinges on “**the spoil of Samaria**” (v.4).
- Rashi takes it as Hoshea’s tribute to Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17:3), which fits the infancy time-marker.
- Others take it as Samaria’s later fall/deportation (2 Kings 17:5-6), though that stretches the timing.

## Rejection of Shiloah and the Assyrian flood (vv.8:5-8:8)

- “**This people**” is best read here as the northern kingdom/Ephraim.
  - They had rejected the quiet **waters of Shiloah**, a figure for God’s provision in Jerusalem: covenant, Davidic rule, Temple worship, and the LORD’s presence in Zion.
  - Instead, they rejoiced in **Rezin and Remaliah’s son**—the Syro-Ephraimite alliance of Rezin and Pekah.
  - The contrast is clear: Israel rejected the quiet waters of Zion and embraced political/military power.
- The **waters of the river** is metaphorical, not literal water (v.7).
  - Because Israel rejected Shiloah, God would bring the violent “river” of Assyria.
- The image begins with Assyria’s judgment on Syria and Israel, but verse 8 carries the flood southward into Judah.
- Verse 8 marks the transition from Israel’s judgment to Judah’s danger.
  - “**Even to the neck**” suggests Judah is nearly overwhelmed but not drowned.
  - Shalmaneser is connected with Samaria’s subjugation/fall, but the flood reaching Judah fits the broader Assyrian threat, especially Sennacherib’s later invasion under Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13-16).
  - “**O Immanuel**” deliberately recalls Isaiah 7:14: Judah is still the land marked by the Immanuel promise—the land where God pledged to be “with us.”

## Warning against fear and call to trust God (vv.8:9-8:15)

- Verses 9-10 answer the Assyrian flood with the Immanuel promise.
  - The nations (note that “ye people” is plural) may associate, gird themselves, take counsel, and speak their word, but their plans will fail.
  - The reason is the same phrase behind **Immanuel**: “**for God is with us**” (v.10).
  - This does not deny the severity of the invasion; it declares that foreign powers cannot make the final word stand against God’s covenant purpose.
- Isaiah is warned not to adopt the fear-language of “this people” (note, unlike v. 9, “this people” in v. 11 is singular) (vv.11-12).
  - The LORD speaks “with a strong hand,” indicating a firm prophetic restraint against following popular panic.
  - “**Say ye not, A confederacy**” likely refers to the political alliances and conspiracy-talk surrounding the Syro-Ephraimite crisis.
  - Judah must not fear what the nation fears: neither Rezin and Pekah, nor Assyria, nor the political rumors produced by both.
- The proper fear is transferred from human powers to the LORD Himself (v.13).
  - “**Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself**” means to regard Him as holy, weighty, and

decisive in the crisis.

- The fear of God is not one fear among many; it displaces the fear of men.
- The LORD becomes either sanctuary or stumbling stone (vv.14-15).
  - To the faithful remnant, He is a **sanctuary**—the true place of safety when the nation is unstable.
  - To both houses of Israel, He becomes **a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence**; the same LORD who should have been refuge becomes the point over which unbelief falls.
  - **“Both the houses of Israel”** brings Judah and the northern kingdom under the same spiritual indictment, even though their political circumstances differ.
  - The language anticipates later New Testament use (Rom. 9:32-33; 1 Pet. 2:6-8), where Messiah becomes the same dividing stone: refuge to believers, offence to unbelief.
  - A note about Jewish interpretation:
    - Most Jewish translations have “It shall be. . .” in v.14, rather than the Christian “He shall be.”
- The Christian view is based on the interpretation given in Romans and 1 Peter.
- The Hebrew itself allows both. Hebrew does not supply an explicit pronoun here, so the interpreter must decide what subject is being carried forward.
  - It can be the closest referent, “the LORD,” and this is the Christian approach.
  - It can be the broader subject, which is the confederacy and plan of Rezin and Pekah to overthrow the house of David.
    - To make this work, the Jewish translation changes “sanctuary” to “portent,” since the confederacy couldn’t be a sanctuary of any kind.
    - This is possible as an interpretive translation, especially under Rashi’s reading, but it is less direct than taking the LORD as the subject and “sanctuary” in its normal sense.

## Sealing the testimony and signs in children (vv.8:16-8:18)

- The prophecy is now **bound and sealed** among Isaiah’s disciples (v.16).
  - **“Bind up the testimony”** suggests preserving the prophetic word as a fixed witness, not leaving it to public opinion or royal policy.
  - **“Seal the law among my disciples”** does not mean hiding truth forever, but securing it among those who will receive and preserve it.
  - In context, the nation is unstable, but the word of God is being entrusted to a faithful remnant.
- Isaiah’s response is patient trust (v.17).
  - He will **wait upon the LORD**, even though the LORD is presently hiding His face from the house of Jacob.
  - The hiding of God’s face signals judgment and displeasure, yet Isaiah still looks for Him rather than turning to alliances, panic, or occult counsel.
  - This waiting posture contrasts with Ahaz’s political maneuvering and the people’s fear.
- Isaiah and his children become embodied signs (v.18).
  - **“I and the children whom the LORD hath given me”** ties the prophet’s household to the message itself.

- **Shearjashub** means “a remnant shall return” (7:3), and **Mahershalalhashbaz** means “hasten spoil, hurry prey” (8:1-4).
- **Immanuel** may also be included in the sign-child pattern, though, as discussed, interpreters differ over whether Isaiah 7-8 presents two children, three children, or two names for one child.
- The children are not merely family details; they are prophetic signposts of judgment, remnant hope, and God’s rule over the crisis.
- The signs come from **the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in mount Zion.**

## Rejection of familiar spirits and consequences of disobedience (vv.8:19-8:22)

- The people are tempted to seek guidance from **familiar spirits** and **wizards** (v.19).
  - The verbs “**peep**” and “**mutter**” describe the strange, low sounds associated with occult practice.
  - Isaiah’s answer is sharp: should not a people seek unto their God?
  - The living must not seek counsel from the dead, especially when the living God has already spoken.
- The true test is “**to the law and to the testimony**” (v.20).
  - This connects directly with verse 16, where the testimony is bound and the law sealed among the disciples.
  - If a message does not agree with God’s revealed word, “**there is no light in them.**”
  - The issue is not merely bad advice; it is the absence of dawn, revelation, and hope.
- Rejection of the word leads to national misery (v.21).
  - The people pass through the land **hardly bestead and hungry**—distressed, pressured, and empty.
  - In anger, they curse their king and their God, looking upward but not in faith.
  - This is the final form of unbelief: blaming God while refusing His word.
- The chapter ends in darkness (v.22).
  - They look to the earth and see trouble, darkness, dimness, and anguish.
  - The movement is deliberate: reject Shiloah, fear men, ignore the testimony, seek the dead, and end in darkness.
  - The contrast sets up the hope of Isaiah 9: light will come only where God gives it, not where men manufacture counsel.