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# ISAIAH 7-8

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## CHAPTER 7

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Chapters 7-12 form a natural unit, the most autobiographical section of the book. Here Isaiah encounters the earthly king, Ahaz, in a time of political crisis. Ahaz has a choice to make, whether he will have faith in God or in man. His decision leads to prophecies about a coming King, the Messiah, who will be from the same house of Judah but will rule very differently than Ahaz and the other kings from the house of David.

Chapters 7-12 should be contrasted with chapters 36-38. There Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, confronts a similar question of faith in God but with a different outcome. It's clear that Isaiah wants us to compare the two events because he uses some of the same words and phrases to tie them together.

Chapter 7 can be confusing because it uses so many people and place names. In the end, however, we're only talking about three kingdoms—Judah, Israel, and Syria—just using different titles for each:

- Syria = Damascus (capital city) = Rezin (king)
- Israel = Samaria (capital city) = Ephraim (dominant tribe) = Pekah, son of Remaliah (king)
- Judah = Jerusalem (capital city) = Ahaz, son of Jotham (king)

The events in this chapter take place about 735-4 B.C., in the midst of what is called the Syro-Ephramite war.

Motyer (80-81) sees a chiastic structure in 7:1-17:

A<sup>1</sup> The house of David threatened (1-2)

B<sup>1</sup> Isaiah's son: the plans of the northern powers (3-6)

C<sup>1</sup> The Lord's word of assurance (7-9)

D The response of unbelief (10-12)

C<sup>2</sup> The Lord's sign of judgment (13-15)

B<sup>2</sup> The virgin's son: the destruction of the northern powers (16)

A<sup>2</sup> The house of David destroyed (17)

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### EPHRAIM AND SYRIA WAR AGAINST JUDAH (7:1-9)

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The dominant power in the Near East at this time was Assyria. Its king, Tiglath-Pileser III, exerting effort to expand his kingdom, was threatening two kingdoms to the north of Judah—Syria (or Aram, as it says in the Hebrew, the ancient land of Abraham's family), led by its king, Rezin, and Israel, led by Pekah. In fact, Assyria carried away many of Israel's people (2 Kings 15:29), so the threat wasn't just theoretical. Rezin and Pekah made an alliance with each other against Assyria and wanted Judah to join them. But the king of Judah at the time, Jotham, appears to have declined, and so Israel and Syria attacked him (2 Kings 15:37). Jotham soon died and his son, Ahaz, took the throne in Judah at the age of 20. The setting for Isaiah 7 is when Rezin and Pekah sent their armies to lay siege to Jerusalem under the leadership of its new king, Ahaz, in Ahaz' first year as king, 735 B.C.

**1** And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, went up to war against Jerusalem, but could not prevail against it.

**2** When it was reported to the house of David, saying, Syria is in league with Ephraim, and his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest shake before the wind.

**3** Then the LORD said to Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, you, and Shear-jashub your son, at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool on the road to the Fuller's Field,

**4** and say to him, Take heed, and be quiet; do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint,

because of these two smoldering sticks of firewood,  
because of the raging of Rezin and Syria, and the son of  
Remaliah.

5 Because Syria, Ephraim,  
and the son of Remaliah, have plotted against you,  
saying,

6 Let us go up against Judah, and terrify it,  
and divide it among ourselves,

and let us install a king in it,  
**yea**, the son of Tabeal.

7 Thus says the Lord, the LORD, It will not happen,  
it will not come to pass.

8 For the head of Syria is Damascus,  
and the head of Damascus is Rezin;

and within sixty-five years Ephraim will be shattered,  
that it is no longer a people.

9 And the head of Ephraim is Samaria,  
and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son.

If you will not believe,  
surely you will not be confirmed.

7:1 **Rezin/Pekah**. 2 Kings 15:25 – 16:9 and 2 Chronicles 28:1-27 discuss this same period of time and events. It's helpful to compare them for additional details.

7:1 **could not prevail against it**. Judah's defenses were sufficient to hold them off for a time, but as we'll see, young Ahaz knew that he couldn't hold on for long. An alternate interpretation of this phrase is that the verse was added later and states the final outcome, helping us see that Isaiah was right all along and Ahaz was wrong.

7:2 **his heart was moved**. Or, "his heart...shook" (NASB). The king and his people was fearful of the alliance coming against them. They had good reason to be: Syria and Israel had already captured many of Judah's cities and carried people away captive (2 Chronicles 28:5-6).

7:2 **as the trees of the wood are moved with the wind**. Picture a great forest of leafy trees; the wind starts to blow and all the leaves begin to shudder and flip back and forth, making a loud noise. That's the image of the people quaking before these armies.

7:3 **Go forth now to meet Ahaz**. The Lord directed Isaiah to go meet the king at that very moment with his son

near the upper pool because the king was there at that time surveying the water supply. Isaiah thus had to be prepared and had to be prompt because the king would only be there for a short time.

7:3 **Ahaz**. The king's name means "he has grasped."

7:3 **Shear-jashub**. Isaiah's son has the symbolic name of 'a remnant shall return' (or, because of the emphasis on *shear* or "remnant," it suggests 'only a remnant shall return'; Oswalt, 1:199). Prophets were often called upon to do symbolic things, such as to wear certain clothing or carry something around, to catch people's attention and teach them a principle. In this case, the names of Isaiah's own children reflect his teachings. Remnant theology is a powerful message of the book of Isaiah.

7:3 **thy son**. The text doesn't say the son's age but it's safe to assume that he was under 5 because Isaiah gave him a prophetic name and he only received his prophetic calling 5 years previously. Bringing his son was perhaps not just a reminder of the prophet's teachings about a remnant but a statement about Ahaz' practice of sacrificing his own sons to false gods (2 Kings 16:3).

7:3 **the conduit of the upper pool in the highway of the fuller's field**. This exact wording is re-used in 36:2, tying these two accounts together. The location of this place is unknown today but was probably either the Gihon Spring or the spring (now a well) called En-rogel (Ogden & Skinner, 2:197).

7:4 **Take heed, and be quiet**. Or, "Pay attention" (NJB) and "remain tranquil" (NAB). The first one is getting the king's attention, who was probably busy with his inspection and not noticing Isaiah and his son. The second is the important message for king: 'calm down.' Some see this as telling the king to be careful to do nothing (Motyer, 81).

7:4 **the two tails of these smoking firebrands**. Or, "these two smoldering stubs of firewood" (NIV). Isaiah compared the two kings to wood nearly burnt out; they had no power to harm Judah.

7:4 **the son of Remaliah**. Or, Pekah, who has killed the previous king, Pekahiah. Pekah means "opened" (especially the eyes), while Pekahiah means "Yahweh opened [the eyes]." Remaliah means "protected by Yahweh."

7:5 **evil counsel against thee**. The threat to Ahaz was very personal. If Rezin and Pekah had their way, he would be killed and replaced by another.

7:6 **the son of Tabeal.** This person is unknown but was probably someone in Judah who advocated for an alliance with Syria and Israel against Assyria and was thus a potential threat to Ahaz's position. Tabeal is Aramaic (though probably Tab'e'l, Oswalt, 1:193), indicating the father was from Syria/Aram; the son, of course, could have been Judean (perhaps Tabeal married a Judean woman), making him an 'inside' person.

7:7 **It shall not stand.** The alliance would collapse, the attack would not happen. The promise is that the nation is secure. This is an unconditional promise, though specific to this time.

7:8 **Syria/Damascus/Ephraim.** The verse breaks do damage to the message a bit. The first part of v. 8 should be with v. 7, and the last part of v. 8 should be with v. 9.

7:8 **within threescore and five years.** It was far less than sixty-five years—in fact, it was only about fourteen years—until the northern kingdom of Israel was carried away by Assyria in 721 B.C. However, it can be viewed that it wasn't until the time of Esarhaddon, about sixty-five years from this time, that the repopulation of Israel was complete and their identity truly lost (Grogan, 513). To Ahaz, however, a prophecy that was to be fulfilled long after his own death was unlikely to motivate personal repentance.

7:9 **If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established.** Or, "you surely shall not last" (NASB). Isaiah offered Ahaz the opportunity to show his faith in Yahweh. The implied promise is that if he did believe, he would be established and have a long and prosperous reign. However, the verb forms here are plural (unlike verse 5 where it is singular and just addressed to the king): Isaiah is speaking not just to Ahaz but to all who hear these words, promising blessings from obedience to the Lord. Isaiah uses paronomasia (wordplay) again as the two phrases for "not believe" and "not be established," *lō ta'āminū* and *lō tē'āmēnū*, respectively, are forms of the same root word. Without belief, the people will continue to be like the shaky leaves on the trees blowing in the wind.

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### FIRST SIGN TO AHAZ: THE IMMANUEL PROPHECY (7:10-16)

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Coming back to Ahaz, perhaps after giving him time to consider the previous promise or even after Ahaz has already made up his mind to ally with Assyria, Isaiah is now directed by the Lord to offer Ahaz a confirmation of his previous words. The sign is the birth of a son who is symbolically named *Immanuel* or "with us is God."

The prophecy Isaiah gave in these verses is well-known as applying to Christ (Matthew 1:23). But for it to have meaning to Ahaz, it also had to apply to Ahaz's day. We'll explore both in the text below, but the short answer is that it applies to a specific baby boy in Isaiah's day *and* to Jesus, son of Mary, who is the ultimate fulfillment.

**10** Again the LORD spoke unto Ahaz, saying,  
**11** Ask a sign of the LORD your God;

let it be in the depths of Sheol  
or the heights above.

**12** But Ahaz said, I will not ask,  
Neither will I test the LORD.

**13** And he said, Hear now, O house of David;

is it a small thing for you to try the patience of men,  
but will you try the patience of my God also?

**14** Therefore the Lord himself will give you sign,

Behold, the virgin will conceive,  
and bear a son, and call his name Immanuel.

**15** Butter and honey will he eat,  
when he knows to refuse the evil,  
and choose the good.

**16** For before the child knows to refuse the evil,  
and choose the good,

the land whose two kings you dread will be deserted.

7:10 **Again the Lord spoke.** Not necessarily on the same occasion as vv. 1-9 but probably a separate encounter. It seems likely that between the first encounter and this one, Ahaz had made his decision to move forward with an Assyrian alliance to counter the Syro-Ephraimite alliance, hence the Lord's call to Isaiah to return a second time.

7:11 **Ask a sign.** The word "sign" (Hebrew *ʾōt*) is used many times in the OT and has several meanings. It was the "mark" set on Cain (Genesis 4:15); the "token" given to Noah that the Lord would not flood the earth again (Genesis 9:12-13, 17); it was the "token" of the covenant of circumcision given to Abraham (Genesis 17:11); and it was the "signs" Moses gave to Pharaoh and Egypt to signify God's power and will (Exodus 4:8, 9, 17, 29, 30); it was the "ensign" marking the division of the houses of Israel's sons (Numbers 2:2); it was the "sign" of stones Joshua set up to remember the Lord bringing the people

across the river (Joshua 4:6)—and many more. In other words, signs could be miraculous but signs could also be simple symbols of a covenant, a relationship, or an event. The word is used eleven times in Isaiah, with various meanings (7:11, 14; 8:18; 19:20; 20:3; 37:30; 38:7, 22; 44:25; 55:13; 66:19).

Based on the context, I propose that Isaiah's meaning here is likely an invitation to Ahaz to confirm the covenant with the house of David, a reassurance that his line would not be destroyed. The sign ultimately given was not miraculous in Isaiah's day but purely chronological, a symbol of when God would act according to his revealed word to the prophet.

7:11 ***either in the depth, or in the height above.*** The "sign" of the covenant could be anything, from bottom to top; Ahaz was invited to pick the token. Nothing miraculous is implied, just that the choice was wide open.

7:12 ***I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.*** This is not Ahaz suddenly getting righteous, though he is likely drawing on Deuteronomy 6:16, the same scripture Jesus quoted to Satan during the temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4:7). Rather, he was probably being politically correct for the group around him, showing token belief in Yahweh while giving no one any reason to doubt his plan (Oswalt, 1:206). To "tempt" is to test or prove; in other words, Ahaz was saying he was going to make God prove the covenant. In the meantime, he has already made an alliance with Assyria to save his kingdom, rejecting the Lord's council to be still and trust the divine hand.

7:13 ***Hear ye now, O house of David.*** In verse 11, the verb forms were singular, addressed just to Ahaz. But his rejection of the Lord's invitation for a renewal or confirmation of the covenant leads to these plural verbs, a call to the entire house of David to listen.

7:13 ***a small thing for you to weary men.*** Ahaz had likely engaged the whole city in preparations for the attack and people were working hard to get all in order. The word translated "weary" can also mean to offend. However, it is a plural verb and likely points to the history of the whole house of David wearing out and offending men with their demands and sins.

7:13 ***my God.*** In verse 11, it was 'your God' when speaking to Ahaz. With the decline of the sign opportunity, Isaiah turns it around to "my God," indicating Ahaz's rejection of the Lord.

7:14 ***the Lord himself shall give you a sign.*** The token of the covenant with the house of David would be manifest in Isaiah's next pronouncement. Because of the meaning of "sign," it could be both an everyday event—in the case of Ahaz's day—or a miraculous one—in the birth of Christ.

7:14 ***a virgin shall conceive.*** The Hebrew word translated "virgin" in the KJV is *ʿal<sup>o</sup>māh*, which can have the basic meaning of "young woman," married or not (the Hebrew uses the definite article "the" instead of the KJV "a," pointing to a specific woman). Because of this, some modern translations use "young woman" (e.g., TNK, JPS, and NJB). But in that society, a young unmarried woman was almost always a virgin, so the term certainly carries that connotation as well; however, it can also refer to a married young woman of upright character. The emphasis on "virgin" in the Christian church (and most Christian translations) likely comes from the LXX translation that Matthew (1:23) and other NT authors drew on, which translated the Hebrew word as *parthenos*, which does mean virgin. Because that applied perfectly to Mary, Jesus' mother, they emphasized and utilized that aspect of the meaning.

Isaiah could have used other terms here, such as *ʾišša* (woman) or *b<sup>o</sup>tūla* (virgin); the former would have been more applicable to all women, the latter to single women without any sexual experience. That he chose *ʿal<sup>o</sup>māh* with nuanced meanings speaks to the multiple fulfillments of the prophecy; using that word allows it to work for Ahaz and his day and Jesus as well.

7:14 ***bear a son.*** The son could potentially be many things in Ahaz's day, of which three show the most promise:

- *Ahaz's own son, perhaps Hezekiah.* From the chronology, it would appear that Hezekiah was born prior to this encounter, however the dating is unclear, so it is a possibility.
- *An unspecified pregnant woman at the pool.* Isaiah could have simply pointed to a nearby woman and said this would happen with her pending birth.
- *Isaiah's wife, and thus a future son of the prophet.* I believe this is the most likely. Some have suggested that he must have then married a young virgin as a second wife and she conceived this son, but Isaiah's wife surely qualified as an *ʿal<sup>o</sup>māh*, so a second wife is not required.

7:14 ***Immanuel.*** Matthew correctly interprets this as "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). The birth of Isaiah's

predicted son would be the sign to Ahaz that God was with Judah to save them from this invasion. However, by implication, it also means that Assyria isn't truly with them and thus both serves as promise and condemnation.

The birth of Jesus later was also a literal fulfillment that God had come down among the people, and so the Christians correctly drew on this same prediction for their day.

7:15 **Butter and honey shall he eat.** Or, "He will eat curds and honey" (NASB and NIV). Butter/curds is any kind of processed milk, including yogurt, butter, curds, or even ghee, all of which were design to increase the shelf life of the goat's milk which would quickly spoil otherwise. Honey was rare as bees were not yet domesticated at this time, so it had to be obtained by going into wild bee hives. The term could also mean something derived from pressing dates or grapes, because of the sweetness (the root meaning of the term; see Walton, 4:43).

Some see this as an indication of a time of poverty—the people have only goat's milk and wild honey to eat (see the footnote in the LDS edition and compare v. 22)—but an alternate interpretation is that it is toddler food, alluding to the child's age, not the state of the economy.

7:15 **that he may know.** Or, "by the time he learns" (NAB). Going with v. 16, this means

7:16 **refuse the evil, and choose the good.** 'Before he can tell right from wrong.' In other words, before the child is very old and can discern.

7:16 **forsaken of both her kings.** The siege of Damascus by Assyria started in 734 B.C., just a year after this. Damascus and much of Israel were destroyed and the people carried away by 732 B.C. So it was only about three years before both Aram and Israel were conquered by Assyria and Pekah and Rezin were dead. That demonstrates that the child had to a real baby born in that day for the sign to be meaningful.

Ahaz must have been thrilled when he heard these words—so far Isaiah has just told him good news and potentially confirmed that his plan to use Assyria to destroy Pekah and Rezin's will succeed. But unfortunately for Ahaz, Isaiah is just getting started.

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### ASSYRIA'S INVASION OF JUDAH (7:17-25)

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These verses describe the devastation that Assyria would inflict on Judah. This pronouncement was surely

a surprise to Ahaz, who thought his alliance would protect him. So complete would be the conquest that they would cover the land like flies and bees who go in holes and on plants that they normally would ignore. Captured men would be shaved, signifying slavery and shame. But there is a glimmer of hope, showing God's hand in the preservation of a remnant.

These verses have four "in that day" occurrences, giving structure to the message (see Motyer, 88-89):

- 18-20: The completeness of the conquest
  - 18-19: The land totally occupied
  - 20: The people stripped and humiliated
- 21-25: The results of the conquest
  - 21-22: The people in poverty
  - 23-25: The land in decay

**17** The LORD will bring upon you,  
and upon your people,  
and upon your father's house,

days that have not come,  
from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah—  
even the king of Assyria.

**18** And it will come to pass in that day,

that the LORD will whistle for the fly  
that is in the distant rivers of Egypt,  
and for the bee  
that is in the land of Assyria.

**19** And they will come,  
and all of them rest in the ravines,  
and in the crevices of the rocks,

and upon all thorn bushes,  
and at all the watering places.

**20** In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is  
hired beyond the river—  
the king of Assyria—

the head, and the hair of the feet,  
and it will also clip off the beard.

**21** And it will come to pass in that day,  
that a man shall keep alive a heifer of the herd and two  
sheep;

**22** And it will come to pass  
because they will give an abundance of milk,

he will eat butter;

and everyone who is left in the land will eat butter and honey.

**23** And it will come to pass in that day,  
Every place that used to have a thousand vines worth  
a thousand pieces of silver  
will become thorns and briers.

**24** Men will come there with arrows and bows,  
because all the land will become briers and thorns.

**25** And on all the mountains that were once cultivated  
with the hoe,  
one will no longer come there out of fear for briers and  
thorns,

but they will become places where cattle are turned  
loose  
and where sheep tread.

**7:17 *thee/thy people/thy father's house.*** The punishment that came as a result of Ahaz's decision to ally with Assyria would not just impact him and his people, but those who would sit on the throne for generations to come. Indeed, the impact was immediate for both Ahaz and his son, Hezekiah, but also for several successive kings down to the time of Josiah.

**7:17 *days that have not come.*** What Isaiah prophesies is unique in the history of Israel and Judah. How they will be unique is demonstrated in verses 18-25.

**7:17 *the day that Ephraim separated from Judah.*** This refers to the events at the death of Solomon when the northern tribes rejected the reign of Solomon's son, Rehoboam, and instead chose to follow Jeroboam, creating the kingdom of Israel.

**7:17 *even the king of Assyria.*** Ahaz was worried about his two northern neighbors—Syria/Aram and Israel—but Isaiah warned him that the real threat was Assyria to the northeast, the very country Ahaz was partnering with to rid him of his short-term problem. This declaration likely surprised and perhaps even angered Ahaz, who saw no better way to extricate himself from his present circumstances. He could not trust the Lord's word through Isaiah and just put his faith in God.

**7:18 *hiss for the fly... for the bee.*** To "hiss" is to whistle. Compare to 5:26 where the coming enemy was unnamed; now it is clearly spelled out. The Lord's act of whistling to bring the armies shows his power: "To create a universe, God had only to speak; to gather his

instruments of punishment, he had only to whistle" (Grogan, 518).

Flies were common in Egypt and bees in Assyria, making them appropriate symbols for each (Motyer, 1:89, though Oswalt, 216, argues that "no clear evidence supports this interpretation," but rather the prophet is just depicting their vulnerability). Egypt will not play a role in the immediate situation but will in about thirty years (see chapters 28-31), making this a longer-term declaration (aligning with v. 17).

**7:18 *the rivers of Egypt.*** Though the Nile is "the river" in Egypt, it is broken into many streams and irrigation canals to move the water to many needed areas in the desert.

**7:19 *desolate valleys/holes of the rocks/thorns/bushes.*** Or, "in the steep ravines and in the crevices in the rocks, on all the thornbushes and at all the water holes" (NIV). "Everywhere, from the inaccessible (*ravines*) to the frequented (*water holes*), from the place to flee to (*crevices*; cf. 2:21) to the place to shun (*thornbushes*), the enemy has taken over" (Motyer, 89).

**7:20 *shave with a razor.*** Captured slaves would be shaved to humiliate them and to indicate their status, so they could be easily recaptured if they were to escape.

**7:20 *razor that is hired.*** God is in charge and, in this case, has "hired" Assyria to chastise Syria/Aram, Israel, and Judah, who all need to repent. Later (chapter 10), he will show that Assyria may do thee Lord's will, but they also fall under his judgment.

This may instead or also be a reference to Ahaz's deal with Assyria; he "hired" them to take out his enemies. If his agreement with Tiglath-pileser III was secret, having Isaiah reveal it publicly in this way put Ahaz in a compromised position.

**7:20 *head/feet/beard.*** Representative of the whole body, visible and hidden hair, a total humiliation. Just as the land is completely taken over, so are the people.

**7:20 *the hair of the feet.*** "Feet" here is "a euphemism for the genital area" (Ogden & Skinner, 2:201; also Motyer, 89).

**7:21 *nourish a young cow, and two sheep.*** This represents paucity and poverty, for little can be done with so few animals. The man tries to "nourish" them (the Hebrew means keep them alive or preserve them),

but it is a great struggle with the enemy all around and the people carried away.

7:22 **butter and honey.** This might sound like a good thing but it represents the famine in the land when the only food is butter (or curds/yogurt/ghee) from milk and honey from foraging in the forest. They have too few animals to eat or provide them more than a little goat's milk, and the honey requires great effort. The language also echoes back to v. 15, perhaps indicating that the people are child-like in their suffering.

7:23 **a thousand silverlings.** Or, "a thousand silver shekels" (NIV). This was a huge investment that became a total loss.

7:23 **briers and thorns.** Because of neglect, the vineyards and terraced farms on the hills would instead be covered with weeds. This harkens back to 5:5-6 where the Lord's vineyard, Israel, became a place for briers and thorns. Isaiah repeats this phrase three times, once each in verses 23, 24, and 25.

7:24 **With arrows and with bows.** Where once wild animals were kept out by walls and guarded towers (compare 5:2), now hunters come hunting those beasts.

7:25 **digged with the mattock.** "Mattock" is hoe. Hard work is also wasted as the army destroys formerly well-cared for farms. Now farms are good for nothing except grazing oxen and sheep or goats ("lesser cattle").

## CHAPTER 8

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Chapter 8 begins with a second sign that ends up being a continuation of the first, with Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hash-baz being the same child. At first the people must have been pleased—Ahaz's plan to use Assyria to destroy their enemies would be fulfilled, Isaiah declared! But as the prophecy continues, we hear the echoes, now made more specific, of chapter 7: partnering with Assyria may solve the short-term problem, but creates devastating long-term issues. If only the king and the people would turn to Yahweh in faith, God would support and sustain them. But the promise is given that after the destruction and darkness brought on by current decisions, eventually there will be a great light.

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### SECOND SIGN TO AHAZ: MAHER-SHALAL-HASH-BAZ (8:1-4)

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Sometime after the two encounters with Ahaz (perhaps a year, based on the chronology), Isaiah received additional instruction from the Lord, captured in these four verses. It was to provide a second sign to Ahaz and the people—and a fulfillment of the first one. Isaiah made a sign (like a poster) with large letters that proclaimed coming events. Then his wife bore him a son who received the same name as was on the sign. This relates back to the sign of Immanuel in chapter 7 and ahead to the discussion of the Messiah in chapters 9-12.

**1** Moreover, the **word of the** LORD said unto me, Take a great tablet, and write on it with an ordinary stylus, Maher-shalel-hash-baz.

**2** And I took for me faithful witnesses, Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.

**3** And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived, and bore a son. Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

**4** For **behold**, the child will **not** have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, **before** the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria.

8:1 (JST) **the word of the Lord said unto me.** In some verses in the Old Testament (such as Numbers 3:16 or Deuteronomy 34:5), "the word of the Lord" is the *pēh* or 'mouth' of the Lord. But in most occurrences of the phrase—and all of them in KJV Isaiah—it is the *dabar* or 'speech' of the Lord. The exact phrase, "the word of the Lord said unto me," is found only in these verses in Isaiah and 2 Nephi, though many other verses refer to the word of the Lord saying something (e.g., 2 Samuel 7:4; 1 Kings 13:9; Jeremiah 1:4).

In total, the phrase "the word of the Lord" occurs about 242 times in the Old Testament, 225 of which refer to God speaking to his prophets, with a focus on the content of the message—what is said—more than the method of communication. In the New Testament, Jesus is designated as the Word of God (John 1), giving meaning to the abundance of this phrase: "the word" is the pre-existent Jehovah speaking personally to the prophets of the Old Testament.

8:1 **Take thee a great roll.** Or, “Get yourself a large sheet” (JPS). The Hebrew is “tablet” but the sense is a large sign or placard that could be hung up somewhere visible for all to see.

8:1 **write in it with a man’s pen.** Or, “write on it with ordinary letters” (NASB). Isaiah was to write so everyone could read it, probably in a large script so it could be seen from a distance.

8:1 **Maher-shalal-hash-baz.** This transliteration captures the Hebrew well, and means ‘speed, spoil, hasten, plunder’ (see verse 4). The phrase seems to have been a standard battle cry, something an attacking army would yell as it stormed a city, having the sense of ‘let’s hurry up and get our reward!’ Writing that on his sign and hanging it up for all to see was a clear warning of a coming destruction.

8:2 **Uriah/Zechariah.** The two “faithful” (meaning reliable or confirming) witnesses were to attest that Isaiah wrote this before the birth of his son and before the events themselves happened, so later everyone would be compelled to say that his prophecy came true.

Uriah (*ʾurīāh*) means “my light is Yahweh” and Zechariah (*zēkarēyāhū*) means “remember Yahweh.” We know nothing about the second outside the book—Zechariah was an especially common name, with at least twenty-nine people in the OT with that name. But Uriah appears to be the same as Urijah the priest in 2 Kings 16:10-16 (in Hebrew, the names are the same). This priest built an altar for Ahaz after the manner of the one the king saw when he went to pay tribute to Tiglath-pileasar in Damascus, then followed Ahaz’s directions to change the temple worship practices to use this pagan altar instead. So he may have been a “faithful” witness but was evidently not a faithful priest.

8:3 **the prophetess.** The footnote correctly identifies this with Isaiah’s wife, but why did he call her that? The term is a feminine form of the word for prophet, a term that is only applied to four other women in the OT: Miriam, Moses’ sister (Exodus 15:20); Deborah, one of the judges (Judges 4:4); Huldah, at the time of Jeremiah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chronicles 34:22); and Noadiah, a false prophetess working against Nehemiah (Nehemiah 6:14). So it is possible that Isaiah’s wife had prophetic gifts in her own right. Another thought is that she receives that title because the child she bore is divinely predicted, making her “the bearer of the Lord’s word, incarnate in her son” (Motyer, 90).

8:3 **Maher-shalal-hash-baz.** Isaiah’s son has the longest name in the Old Testament, and like Isaiah’s first son, Shear-jashub, is a symbolic name (see v. 1). This time it refers to the coming destruction by the hand of Assyria who will speed to the spoil and hasten to the plunder.

The boy’s four-part name is in contrast to the four-part name given to the Messiah in 9:6 (wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace), which would be the longest name if it were transliterated (the simple version would be *pele-yoez-el-gibor-abi-ad-sar-shalom*).

I favor the argument tying the Immanuel prophecy of chapter 7 to the birth of this son. There are several parallels in 7:14-17 and 8:3-7 that associate the two (see table in Parry, *Understanding*, 73). In my view, Ahaz was promised a sign of a son named Immanuel—God with us. But he rejected the Lord and trusted instead in the arm of flesh, so God could no longer be fully with him. When the promised son was born, his name was changed to something that reflected the new outcome. However, it should be noted that until v. 5, this so far should be interpreted as good news—Judah’s enemies will be destroyed by Assyria, which is exactly what Ahaz sought.

8:4 **My father, and my mother.** Many first words of small children are the titles of father (daddy) or mother (mommy). If this child was typical and began saying such words at about two years old, it matches perfectly with the chronology of when Syria/Aram and Ephraim were destroyed.

8:4 **the king of Assyria.** Not just the nation but the specific man with whom Ahaz has allied.

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### REJECTING THE LORD (8:5-18)

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As he did in chapter 7, Isaiah takes what might at first appear to be good news a step further, and turns it into condemnation for Judah’s sins—mainly rejecting the support of the Lord for the arm of flesh. And what is the method of the Lord’s punishment for these sins? The very nation and king they are relying on to save them from attack—Assyria and Tiglath-Pileasar III.

5 The LORD spoke also unto me again, saying,

6 Because this people refuse the waters of Shiloah that flow gently,  
and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah’s son;

7 Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings upon them the waters of the river,

strong and many,  
even the king of Assyria,  
and all his glory;

and he will come up over all its channels,  
and go over all its banks.

**8** And he will sweep into Judah;  
he will overflow and go over,

until he will reach the neck;  
and he will stretch out its wings, filling the breadth  
of your land, O God is with us [Immanuel].

**9** Band together,  
O you people, but you will be broken;  
and give ear,  
all you from the distant parts of the earth;

gird yourselves,  
but you will be broken;  
gird yourselves,  
but you will be broken.

**10** Counsel together, but it will come to nothing;  
speak a word, but it will not stand;  
for God is with us [Immanuel].

**11** For the LORD spoke to me when he took me by  
the hand,  
and warned me not to walk in the way of the people,  
saying,

**12** Do not say,  
A conspiracy,  
to them to whom this people will say,  
A conspiracy;

do not fear what they fear,  
nor be afraid.

**13** You will regard the LORD of Hosts as holy;  
he is your fear,  
and let him be your dread.

**14** And he will be a sanctuary,

but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence  
to both the houses of Israel,  
a trap and a snare  
to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

**15** And many among them will 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,  
who hides his face from the house of Jacob,  
And I will hope for him.

**18** Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has  
given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel  
from the LORD of Hosts, who dwells in mount Zion.

8:5 *spake also unto me again*. This implies once more  
that some time passed between the events in 8:1-4 and  
these words.

8:6 *refuseth the waters of Shiloah*. The people,  
especially the king, had rejected the Lord's counsel and  
had instead tried to form an alliance with Assyria that  
would later do them great damage. The waters of Shiloah  
(possibly related to the Gihon Springs and the pool of  
Siloam mentioned in the NT) were quiet, still waters,  
compared to the powerful but dangerous waters of the  
Euphrates River (verse 7), representing Assyria. Jesus  
was compared to living water (Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:10-  
11; 7:38), which is pure and gently flowing.

8:8 *reach even to the neck*. Judah would be 'flooded' by  
Assyria and nearly drown. This was fulfilled when  
Assyria conquered much of the land but did not conquer  
Jerusalem itself.

8:8 *stretching out of his wings*. Shifting metaphors to a  
huge bird, Isaiah portrays Assyria also as a bird of prey  
whose wings cover the land in their shadow.

8:8 *O Immanuel*. This is given in the Hebrew here but is  
repeated in verse 10 in translated form ("God is with  
us"). Though it appears that Assyria is in control, the land  
actually belongs to Immanuel, giving hope for  
deliverance. This phrase helps tie it all back to chapter 7.

8:9 *broken in pieces*. As Immanuel, the Lord speaks to  
the invading armies, saying that if they band together  
against the land and take up arms, they will eventually  
be "broken in pieces" (repeated two times for emphasis;  
the third time is probably a later copying error as it's not  
in the Dead Sea Scrolls version of Isaiah).

8:10 *counsel together, and it shall come to nought*. The  
wisdom of man will not succeed; the people should  
instead follow the counsel God has provided, who is still  
with the people, if they desire him.

8:11 **with a strong hand.** Or, “with mighty power” (NASB). The Lord spoke to Isaiah as he did in chapter 6, with power and authority, telling him to be different than the other people around him. Compare Ezekiel 1:3 and 3:14, which bracket his visionary experience.

8:12 **A confederacy.** Isaiah continued to counsel the people not to make alliances with Assyria that would later harm them but to trust in the Lord who would deliver them.

8:13 **Sanctify the Lord of hosts.** “Sanctify” in this context is probably to recognize the holiness of God and to separate him from the human machinations in v. 12.

8:13 **let him be your fear.** Often we see the word “fear” in the scriptures relating to God, and automatically change it to “reverence.” That type of respect is a good way to think about it, but there is a very real sense that we fear God—our sinful nature compared to his purity, our slothfulness compared to his perfection, our unrepentant state next to his judgment. God cannot tolerate sin and fear is almost always the first reaction of anyone coming into his presence (hence the common command to “Fear not” when having a divine manifestation).

8:14 **he shall be for a sanctuary.** The people felt like having the temple in their midst would somehow protect them—a thought that carried down to Jeremiah and Lehi’s day. But the true protection came from obedience to the Lord, the sure foundation.

8:15 **stone of stumbling.** If they didn’t believe in Christ, he would be a “stone of stumbling” to them, causing them to fall and suffer injury.

8:15 **stumble/fall/broken/snared/taken.** There is a progression to the punishment: first Judah trips over the rejected stone, then falls and is broken, then captured in a trap, then taken captive. Compare this to how we are pulled down and entrapped by sin, step-by-step.

8:16 **Bind up the testimony, seal the law.** The scroll on which Isaiah had written these things was sealed up as a witness to be opened later, to show that his words were true. Isaiah receives the command that, in this encounter, he has preached the true word of the Lord and should now seal it up ahead of the coming judgment (compare D&C 88:84; 109:38, 46; 133:72).

8:17 **I will wait upon the Lord.** After giving his testimony, Isaiah renews his own personal covenant to have faith and trust in the Lord.

8:17 **I will look for him.** Or, “I will put my trust in him” (NIV), or, “I will hope in him” (RSV). As we’re waiting for the Lord to act in his own time and way, we show faith and have hope in his promises.

8:18 **I and the children who the Lord hath given me are for signs.** The prophet states that he and his sons are signs of the truth of his words. All three of their names represent key messages of the prophet.

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SEEK UNTO GOD (8:19 – 9:2)

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As the prophet seals up his testimony against the coming destruction, that includes the fact that he and his family are signs to the people of what the Lord will do. He testifies that though we walk in darkness, light is coming.

**19** And when they will say unto you,  
seek unto them that have spirits of the dead,  
and unto wizards that peep and mutter—

should not a people seek unto their God  
for the living to **hear from** the dead.

**20** To the law and to the testimony;  
and if they speak not according to this word,  
it is because there is no light in him.

**21** And he will pass through the land,  
distressed and hungry;  
and it will come to pass that when he becomes hungry,

he will become enraged,  
and curse his king and his God,

and he will look upward,  
**22** and he will look to the earth;

And behold, distress and darkness,  
the gloom of anguish;  
and he will be thrust into darkness.

**1** But there will be no gloom for those who were in  
anguish.

In former times he held the land of Zebulon  
and the land of Naphtali in contempt,

but afterwards he honored Galilee of the nations,  
by the way of the **Red** sea,  
along the Jordan.

**2** The people who are walking in darkness have seen a  
great light;

Those that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined.

8:19 **peed/mutter**. “It was apparently a common belief in the ancient Near East that the dead spoke in birdlike, whispered voices” (Oswalt, 237). Compare 29:4.

8:19 **for the living to hear from the dead**. The KJV text ties the last phrase, “for the living to the dead,” to the “familiar spirits” and “wizards that peep,” as reflected in the NASB translation: “When they say to you, “Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,” should not a people consult their God? *Should they consult* the dead on behalf of the living?” The JST and Book of Mormon change prefigures what will be taught in Isaiah 29/2 Nephi 27, that a scripture will come forth as one speaking from the dead. Thus the contrast at the beginning and end of the verse is emphasized: those who seek counsel from spiritualists, and those who seek counsel from God and the scriptures.

8:20 **the law and to the testimony**. Anyone that speaks contrary to the Law of Moses and the testimony of the prophets and the Spirit has “no light in them.”

8:21 **they shall pass through it, hardly bestead and hungry**. Or, “They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry” (RSV). With the destruction, people will wander looking for anything they can eat.

8:21 **curse their king and their God**. The wandering people who have lost everything will curse the king (Ahaz) that made this terrible covenant with the

destroyer and their God (Yahweh) who, they believe, should have protested them.

8:22 **dimness of anguish/darkness**. After looking up and being angry at God (v. 21), the people look down “unto the earth” and find nothing but “trouble and darkness.” In their gloom and fear, they see no light.

9:1 **the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation**. Or, “there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish” (NASB). With faith and patience (“wait” on the Lord), the suffering and darkness of 8:21-22 will give way to light, joy will replace gloom.

9:1 **Zebulun/Naphtali/Galilee**. These lands were located around the Sea of Galilee. In Isaiah’s day, they were “afflicted” as Assyria destroyed Israel and carried away its people. But this will be the place of the greatest light in the world when Jesus comes and lives in this same area.

9:1 **afterward did more grievously afflict her**. The northern kingdom was first “lightly afflicted” by being attacked placed under tribute in 733 B.C. but then was greatly afflicted by being carried away captive in 721 B.C.

9:2 **seen a great light**. The same regions that were conquered by the Assyrians would later be blessed with the presence of Christ.

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AT – Author’s translation

JPS – Jewish Publication Society (also called Tanakh)

JST – Joseph Smith Translation

KJV – King James Version

LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)

MT – Masoretic Text (Hebrew)

NAB – New American Bible

NASB – New American Standard Bible

NIV – New International Version

NJB – New Jerusalem Bible

NLT – New Living Translation

RSV – Revised Standard Version

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