Revelation and Redemption

**Isaiah 8:1–8** 1 Then the Lord said to me, “Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters: Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey. 2 “And I will take to Myself faithful witnesses for testimony, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.” 3 So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the Lord said to me, “Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; 4 for before the boy knows how to cry out ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.” 5 Again the Lord spoke to me further, saying, 6 “Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah And rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah; 7 “Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, Even the king of Assyria and all his glory; And it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks. 8 “Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, It will reach even to the neck; And the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.

*The Deceit of Glory*

God would have us to learn the critical lesson of misplacing God as the supreme center of our affections, the chief goal of our aspirations, and the ultimate reason for our existence. All of this is found in what the confessions say the chief end of man is, “to glorify God and enjoy Him forever”- when we are not in sync with that, we are not in sync with anything though we may think we are in sync with everything! This is all captured in the critical lesson Isaiah wants Judah to grasp at this point when they misplaced the fear of God for the fear of man and thereby surrendered their glory. In this passage we see the outworking of God’s prophetic word, His revelation, as well as God’s sovereign grace, His redemption. Throughout the book of Isaiah, these are twin themes that constantly run together showing us the severity of God’s judgment on sin and sinners, and the lovingkindness of God’s sovereign grace on undeserving sinners who are justified by faith alone. As is often the case in Isaiah’s prophecies, redemption is always present even in the midst of judgment.

*Letting All the World Become Guilty Before God*

Having given the king a sign so deep and so profound that it served to only harden the heart of Ahaz (7.14), Isaiah is now given another oracle that the impenitent people may follow in the same trial of destruction as their heathen king. What was given to Ahaz in private is now telecasted publicly for all to see and hear the word of the Lord. Like with the sign given to Ahaz, the sign given to the people is also deep and mysterious even cryptic. The latter consists of two things. The announcement that Isaiah makes upon the tablet and the son that Isaiah will name before the destruction comes.

Isaiah’s Placard:

**Isaiah 8:1-2** 1 Then the Lord said to me, “Take for yourself a large tablet and write on it in ordinary letters: Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey. 2 “And I will take to Myself faithful witnesses for testimony, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.”

Isaiah’s placard serves the purpose of giving the general public the warning of the impending Assyrian invasion. This sign was to be written on a “large tablet” with “ordinary letters.” The general meaning here is that his announcement be as public as possible though not necessarily as plain as possible. The words, “Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey” which is the translation of his son’s names (לְמַהֵ֥ר שָׁלָ֖ל חָ֥שׁ בַּֽז) would no doubt have a dual impact. On the one hand it would alert the people that Isaiah was claiming to be speaking to God’s people a word from the Lord so that the conversation would be unmistakably spiritual. Yet, the saying was shrouded in mystery so that the people would be driven to inquire of their leaders as to its precise meaning. This only makes further sense with the two “witnesses” (עוד) that God takes to himself in “Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son Jeberechiah” who represent part of the royal court of Ahaz.

Regarding Zechariah (not to be confused with the post-exilic prophet Zechariah) the son of Jeberechiah, almost nothing is known. Some contend that perhaps he was consulted as a prophet among the royal court (see, J. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 1-39, 222). It is more generally agreed that Uriah the priest is none other “Urijah” the priest who built Ahaz a pagan altar by modifying the biblical altar to appease the Assyrian king (2 Ki. 16.10-16). Isaiah’s placard would be a confrontation that the royal court would need to deal with. The king’s wise men, his advisers, also no doubt, respected and regarded as the nation’s upper echelon of spiritual leadership must now contend with this public declaration of Isaiah. This would only serve to deepen the rebellion of the wayward nation. Their rebellion will be out in the open for all to see. As many pointed out, this public announcement and the consequent rejection of its message will only serve to further indict the nation for its rejection of God and His law (5.24).

Isaiah’s Son:

**Isaiah 8:3-4** 3 So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the Lord said to me, “Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; 4 for before the boy knows how to cry out ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.”

While the earlier Son, Immanuel (7.14), had implications for the distant prophetic future; Isaiah’s son was born into the prophet’s times and served as an *incarnate* sign of the prophetic word of God and also as a typological fulfillment of that earlier messianic sign revealed through Immanuel. Here was a special child being born at God’s direction and with Gods’ intervention and while the Immanuel prophecy was that God would gather and dwell with His people in the bond of fellowship, this child is promised for the scattering and separation of the people from their God and their land. One was promising covenant blessing the other covenant curse as their “wealth” and “spoil” will be carried away before the Assyrian king in plunder. Because they did not heed the prophet’s sign and son, the apostasy of the king and kingdom would be a public affair.

*Gentle Grace or Fierce Wrath*

These enigmatic signs were all leading to a great an inevitable choice; would Israel repent and believe or would they refuse and apostasize from the covenant? These two alternative spiritual conditions would unleash two antithetical realities of blessing and curse from the hand of the One God of the covenant. Would they have the gentle grace of God or the fierce wrath of God? Isaiah’s public announcement would force the issue and make it so that every Hebrew in Judah would face the covenant ordeal of blessing and curse for themselves. Their option however was the same as Ahaz, “If you will not believe, you surely shall not last” (7.9). The prophet gives us two images to underscore the redemptive work of the Lord consisting either of grace or wrath.

The Grace of Shiloah:

5 Again the Lord spoke to me further, saying, 6 “Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah And rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah; 7 “Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, Even the king of Assyria and all his glory; And it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks

Wrath is coming! And the reason given here is clear, because the people have “rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah” (v.6). These gentle waters are metaphorical of God’s salvation, kingdom, God’s providential care and protection for His people. These waters were part of a slow-moving gentle stream of water from Gihon that provided steady sustenance to the city of Jerusalem and later the water from this stream under Hezekiah’s rule would eventually be tunneled under the city and pooled in Jerusalem at what we now call, “the pool of Siloam” (cf. John 9.7, 11). With the beauty of this imagery there is also a profound danger that we must all take heed to. If we are not careful, we may think that the steady stream of God’s grace is not enough for us. That His care for us, though often imperceptible, and in the eyes of many unimpressive. While the people regarded this stream as weak and meagerly in the face of what the powerful forces of the world could offer, there is a redemptive analogy here. God would have His people fear Him and trust in His provision rather than to look elsewhere. So the Lord will go on to say:

**Isaiah 8:12–13** 12 “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. 13 “It is the Lord of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, And He shall be your dread.

Because His kingdom is not of this world, its does not follow the ordinary course of power (cf. John 18.36). Like Shiloah, God’s kingdom is an undercurrent, weaving its way throughout the land, mocked for its apparent weakness, undermined in potential, and rejected for excess. But the quite stream of redemption is feeding the city of God, and building a kingdom that cannot be shaken (cf. Heb. 12.28). While the Euphrates was the envy of the world, Shiloah, is the envy of those who by faith have tasted and seen that the King of Zion is good. Shiloah is to be preferred to all the rivers of the world in the same way that Jerusalem (or Zion the mountain of God) was, because of its relation to the King and His kingdom (cf. Ps. 68.15-16).

The Wrath of the Euphrates:

7 “Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, Even the king of Assyria and all his glory; And it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks

The reference to “these people” (v.6) has been the subject of some debate. Motyer considers this a reference to the earlier “Samaria” of v.4 which then would represent the Northern Kingdom of Israel who have sided with Rezin (Syria) and Pekah, the “son of Remaliah” (Israel) rather than trying to remain faithful to the house of David. Most however see this as a reference to Judah which is the subject of the present judgment. Still, the context in the following verses does seem to suggest that the prophet is referring to the Northern kingdom and then to Judah as the Assyrian invasion will first overwhelm and destroy Israel to the north and “then it will sweep on into Judah” (v.8). Even here however, the main point is redemptive. Because Israel decided to trust in the world’s power and provision and not the Lord, God would show them the true nature of their hope; a hope that would turn on them:

**Isaiah 8:7-8** 7 “Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, Even the king of Assyria and all his glory; And it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks 8 “Then it will sweep on into Judah,”

Is that not the case with sin. It promises a Euphrates of hope and pleasure but in the end it only serves as a torrent of destruction. Here is where Israel went astray. Thinking that they could appease the enemy they did two things. They devalued the grace of God and they pledged allegiance to their own wisdom to their own ways. If they will not glory in God, God will overwhelm them with glory they will not enjoy, “the king of Assyria and all his glory” which is to say all of his power, his armies, his rule and dominion.

*Hope for the Vilest Offenders*

Isaiah’s oracle of judgment may have sounded like something Ahaz could have taken advantage of or used for his own political ends but the invasion of the northern kingdom would result in a deluge that would overwhelm the borders of Judah as well. But this would never be the final word. There are many biblical covenants in the Bible that most people are aware of. There’s a covenant with Abraham, the covenant with Noah, and the covenant with Moses or David; however, there are two theological covenants which Reformed theologians see as governing all of the biblical covenants, namely the covenant of works (Gen. 2.15-17) and the covenant of grace (cf. Gen. 3.15).

Like Adam who broke the covenant of works, Israel is witnessing the enforcement of God’s judgment and wrath even is Adam and Eve did upon the breach of the original covenant at creation. Just like Adam and Eve Israel will be banished from the land of blessing (cf. Gen. 3.22ff.), the land of Canaan which is a redemptive reenactment of Eden (cf. Dt. 30.15-20). Like Adam and Eve, Judah will find themselves in exile. As a matter of fact, we can see the continued nature of the curses of breaking God’s covenant by the inversion of another biblical metaphor. While God often portrays himself in avian form, protecting and hover over His people (63.9 cf. Ex. 19.4; Dt. 31.11, 15, 18 also see, Gen. 1.2); brooding over them and shielding them with His wings (cf. Ps. 91.4), here, it is Assyria, the enemy power, that will spread its wings over them so that “Immanuel” (v.8) will come to here to mean, God with us for judgment not for protection. This too was promised:

**Deuteronomy 28:47–50** 47 “Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; 48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you. 49 “The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, 50 a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.

However, this is not the end of the story. It was not the end of the story for humanity in the original garden situation and it is not the end of the story here. Just when it may have seemed as if all hope is gone, God is moved by another principle namely the principle of *Grace*. The covenant of grace which was first also given to Adam and Eve in the form of the great redemptive promise never ceases to be in operation regardless of what covenant is active in redemptive history. The covenant of grace is simply God’s gospel promise to save a people for himself by grace through faith and that faith being built upon the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ, the messianic Seed of the woman, the Isaianic suffering Servant who crushes the head of the serpent bringing everlasting triumph over death and hell (Is. 53).

Therefore, in Isaiah, even though the great and mighty Euphrates of wrath is churching, the gentle streams of Shiloah are always flowing and trickling down to the faithful in full and unrelenting grace. It is unrelenting because He should have wiped them all of the map but He does not, even as indicated (1.9, 27; 6.13; 7.3). Thus, in a strange stroke of providence, it is *grace* that gets the final word (cf. 4.2-6). Of course, that is not to say that many did not perish, they did, even as it was foretold (6.11), but it is to say, that amid the destruction, in the wasteland of wrath for hell-deserving sinners- there is a banner rising, a signal for salvation that no amount of sin and darkness can extinguish (cf. 9.2). It is the standard of salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ who is *Immanuel* (Mt. 1.23). The One in whom all of God’s promises are made ‘yes and amen’ (cf. 2 Cor. 1.20). The gospel is illustrated here so beautifully (cf. 1 Cor. 10.6, 11). Like Judah, the sinner that is up to his/her neck in sin, and that of course accounts for everyone, may you with your last breath before the deluge of wrath and judgment billow over you, may the last breath be, ‘save me Oh God and deliver me for I am ruined.’ Here again we are reminded of Isaiah’s vision. His throne room experience. Like Isaiah, the only hope for vile sinners now is to heap condemnation on their own sin and misery and repent before God’s condemnation is heaped upon you at your end. The fear of man is a snare and Ahaz and the people fell into it. And today this very snare remains and countless people are falling into it and so Jesus speaks to this very point:

**Matthew 10:24–28** 24 “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 “It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household! 26 “Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 “What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops. 28 “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

The only thing Ahaz and the people needed, the very thing they would not do, repent and belief, fear God not man. But for those who repent, over them will flow the gentle waters of Shiloah to cleanse, to purify, and to make them new again. Though the sin of Judah may be like scarlet they may be white as snow if they would but reason with God (1.18). In the words of the old hymn, “the vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives”