

# The Book of ISAIAH – Chapters 1-39

## Catholic Scripture Study

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**Memory Verse: Isaiah 9:1-2**

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shined.*

## The Assyrian Invader (8:1-9:7)

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### I. BIRTH OF CHILD AND SIGNIFICANCE OF NAME (8:1-10)

#### A. Overview

The war with Syria and the northern kingdom (Israel/Ephraim) against Judah became known as the Syro-Ephraimite war (Isaiah 8).

During this war, the Lord instructs Isaiah to write the name ***Maher-shalal-hash-baz*** on a large tablet or placard. This is a symbolic or prophetic name which means ***“quick spoils; speedy plunder.”***

God indicates the significance of the name: Damascus and Samaria (capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel) will soon be taken over by Assyria (722 BC).

Later, when Isaiah has a son by his wife (the prophetess), he gives him the name *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* as instructed by God. (The name was given to the child even before he was conceived - an example of predictive prophecy).

The Lord predicts that before the child is old enough to speak, the Assyrians will have plundered the northern kingdom (Israel).

It is not unusual in Scripture for a prophet's personal life to be used in a symbolic action. The prophet Hosea's personal life is an example.

This passage concludes the series of prophecies based on the three boys' names, dealing first with *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*, Isaiah's remaining son, then finishing with further references to the name Immanuel (vv. 8, 10).

The original historical context is established as 733-32 BC by specific references to Syria and Ephraim (vv. 4-6) and the Assyrian invaders (vv. 7-8).

### **Read: Isaiah 8:1-4**

***[1] Then the LORD said to me, "Take a large tablet and write upon it in common characters, 'Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz.'"***

***[2] And I got reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me.***

***[3] And 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;***

***[4] for before the child knows how to cry 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria."***

### **B. The Sign of Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:1-4)**

God, through Isaiah, had already declared the coming destruction of Syria and Israel by the Assyrians and the later overthrow of Judah in chapter 7.

Now by means of the symbolical name *Mahe-shalal-hash-baz*, he repeats his message, but in more detail.

The similarity of 8:1-4 to 7:10-17 (the sign of Immanuel) seems too close to be coincidental. The relation of the sign to the births and naming of a child is the same, even to the use of the same language (“she shall conceive and bear a son,” 7:14; “she conceived and bore a son,” 8:3).

Moreover, the significance of the signs is the same: before the child reaches a certain age, Samaria and Damascus will cease to be a threat to Judah.

These similarities suggest that it is to these events (8:1-4) to which 7:10-17 (at least initially) refers. The birth of *Mahe-shalal-hash-baz* could be a partial fulfillment of the predicted birth of Immanuel, which in turn predicts the birth of the Messiah.

In addition, people could verify the prophecy concerning Isaiah's son; they could witness its fulfillment. It would thus become as it were a pledge of the prophecy of the virgin's son.

Seeing that *Mahe-shalal-hash-baz* had been born in accordance with the prophecy, they could be sure that in His own good time God would fulfill the promise concerning the virgin, and that she would bear a son.

### **C. Meaning of the Sign (8:4)**

The initial meaning of the words (*Mahe-shalal-hash-baz*) first published at least nine months earlier (v. 1) become apparent. God's word is sure. Not only will Ephraim (Israel) and Syria withdraw from Judah, they themselves will be plundered.

Although the name (*Mahe-shalal-hash-baz*) seems ominous in the extreme it is precisely like Immanuel in its initial implications:

Judah's enemies will be destroyed, and God can be trusted. Within a short time, these events will take place.

## II. JUDGMENT: A MIGHTY FLOOD (8: 5-8)

### A. Overview

Verses 5-8 is a prophecy of judgment, beginning with an account of the crimes of the accused (***Because this people . . .***) and then pronouncing judgment on them (***therefore, behold the Lord . . .***).

But the two parts are linked by a new image for the terrifying might of Assyria. The people, accused of despising the gentle flowing waters of Shiloah (Shiloh), will be overwhelmed by the mighty waters of a far greater river, which is going to burst its banks and flood the whole land reaching "even to the neck."

The great river is of course the Euphrates.

The attack on Judah by the Assyrians was made possible by Judah's lack of trust in Yahweh.

**Read: Isaiah 8:5-8**

***[5] The LORD spoke to me again:***

***[6] "Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and melt in fear before Rezin and the son of Remaliah;***

***[7] therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks;***

***[8] and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass***

***on, reaching even to the neck; and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel-el."***

### **B. Imminent Judgment by Water (8:5-8)**

Isaiah delivers another oracle from the Lord. A gentle stream of water, known as the waters of Shiloah, provided drink for the people of Judah during a siege.

***Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah . . . (v.6).***

Rejecting the Lord is symbolized by rejecting the waters of Shiloah.

Because the people (Judah) rejected the gentle providence of the Lord, the Lord will overwhelm them with the waters of the "**River**," (the Euphrates), which, in this case, symbolically refers to the Assyrians. The Assyrian invasion will inundate Judah.

### **C. Judah Survives the Flood (8:8)**

Ultimately Judah will not drown "***and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck;***

The flood will stop short of total destruction. Just when the tide seems about to engulf the mouth and nose, cutting off the last breath, it halts. This seems to be the sense of ***reaching even to the neck.***

Isaiah is not offering much hope here. Rather, he's telling what a near thing it will be. But he does imply that Assyria will not annihilate Judah and Jerusalem.

## D. Immanuel the Messiah

**“. . . .And its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.”**

(The end of verse 8 is difficult to interpret).

The land over which the bird of prey (Assyria) hovers is Immanuel's land. Nothing can change that. Thus, just as the flood may reach the neck but no further, so those hovering wings will not carry off the prey.

Why? Because Judah is so wise and powerful? No, because of Immanuel – “God is with us” – the child whose birth is foretold in 7:14.

That Judah is called Immanuel's land makes it abundantly clear that Maher-shalal-hash-baz, or someone else who may have constituted the initial fulfillment of the sign, was not the ultimate fulfillment.

Ultimately, Immanuel is the owner of the land, the one against whom serious threats are ultimately lodged, the one upon whom deliverance finally depends.

That cannot be Isaiah's son, or even some unknown son of Ahaz. It can only be the Messiah who is our hope and salvation.

## III. ULTIMATE VICTORY (8:9-10)

### A. Overview (8:9-10)

In these verses the tone shifts dramatically. Isaiah is no longer envisioning a helpless Judah floundering in the overpowering Assyrian flood.

To the enemies intent on destroying Judah, Isaiah shows a holy boldness, a prophetic courage. He's well aware of the plotting of the enemy nations; he knows to a certain extent they will be successful in their plans.

But he does not fear; for in the person of the virgin's Son, God is present. He addresses the nations with fresh courage. He can well be bold, for God is with him.

As a representative of his people, yet speaking in the name of his God, he says in effect, "Do the worst that you can; do the very worst. It will come to nothing. In fact, you will be broken to pieces."

## **B. Broken to Pieces**

**Read: Isaiah 8:9-10**

***[9] Be broken, you peoples, and be dismayed;  
give ear, all you far countries;  
gird yourselves and be dismayed;  
gird yourselves and be dismayed.***

***[10] Take counsel together, but it will come to nought;  
speak a word, but it will not stand,  
for God is with us.***

Broken in pieces! Who or what will be broken to pieces?

The mighty armies from the east, overflowing the land like a flood. Evil they had planned, but broken they would be. Syria and Ephraim had plotted evil together – they had plotted to destroy Judah and Jerusalem - but their evil plans were frustrated.

Why? Immanuel! God is with us! That is Isaiah's cry and watchword. May it be the watchword of all who trust in God.

## IV. I WILL WAIT FOR THE LORD (8:11-22)

### A. Overview

Jerusalem in 735 B.C. was like a pot about to boil over. Not only was there a resurgent Assyria to worry about, there was the nearer problem of Syria and Israel. Everybody must have had a theory about what was really going on, and everyone had an opinion about what should be done. Conspiracies abounded!

In the middle of the whirlpool, God comes to Isaiah with specific instructions.

- In the first place he is not to lose his focus on God.
- He should not be swept off his feet with the latest “conspiracy” theory, and
- He should not fall into the trap of fear.

The main theme of the segment is: in what, or in whom shall we trust?

**Read: Isaiah 8:11-22**

***[11] For the LORD spoke thus to me with his strong hand upon me, and warned me not to walk in the way of this people, saying:***

***[12] "Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread.***

***[13] But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.***

***[14] And he will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offense, and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.***

***[15] And many shall stumble thereon; they shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken."***

**[16] Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples.**

**[17] I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him.**

**[18] Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.**

**[19] And when they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the wizards who chirp and mutter," should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?**

**[20] To the teaching and to the testimony! Surely for this word which they speak there is no dawn.**

**[21] They will pass through the land, greatly distressed and hungry; and when they are hungry, they will be enraged and will curse their king and their God, and turn their faces upward;**

**[22] and they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.**

### **B. Hold Fast to the Truth (8:11-15)**

First comes a warning (vv. 11-15) to hold fast to the truth as it has been revealed to him, and **not to walk in the way of this people.**

The **strong hand** of the Lord, like the fire burning in the bones of Jeremiah (Jer. 20:9), is not just a way of emphasizing the importance of what is said but a reference to the prophet's overpowering experience of God.

This experience was necessary so that Isaiah would not be tempted **to walk in the way of this people.**

### C. Conspiracy (8:12)

The Lord said to Isaiah, **“Do not call conspiracy all that this people call conspiracy . . .”** The people are crying “conspiracy.” But who is conspiring? And against whom are they conspiring?

Isaiah had been attempting to dissuade Judah from seeking help from Assyria. That was contrary to the policy of Judah’s king, Ahaz. In fact, it looked like treason. However, Isaiah and other prophets urged dependence upon the Lord and not upon foreign powers.

This may have been the reason why the people accuse him of “conspiracy” because he seems to be undermining Ahaz and the stated policy of the nation.

But amid the confusion, Isaiah challenges his people to reject paranoia and see God’s hand in the events of their time.

To refuse to do so is to become more and more fearful, more and more unstable for it means that our lives are ultimately in the hands of unknown powers, too devious for us to know and control.

This in turn leads us towards the occult in an effort to gain control over these unknown and devious powers.

### D. Fear of the Lord (8:13)

“And what this people fears, you need not treat with awe.” (The people fear the two northern enemies Syria and Israel). But you need not regard with awe those two tails of smoking firebrands.

There’s only one place where your fear should be placed; put your fear in the Lord; fear Him.

### E. A Sanctuary or a Stumbling Block? (8:14-15)

***“He will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offense . . .”***

The attitude we take toward God will determine what aspect of him we will experience.

To those who regard God as holy and thus sanctify him, who give him a place of importance in their lives, who seek to allow his character to be duplicated in them, he becomes a sanctuary, a place of refuge and peace.

But to those who will not to give him such a place in their lives he becomes a stone to trip over or a rock to stumble over. God does not change; only our attitude determines how we experience him.

### F. Sealing God's Revelation

God now utters a command to the prophet himself. ***Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching . . .*** Testimony and teaching often refer to God's revelation. Isaiah is to seal this revelation (possibly the message of the whole chapter) in the hearts of his disciples.

This testimony, then, is the revelation which God has given to Isaiah, a revelation in spoken words.

### G. I Will Wait upon the Lord (8:17-18)

Isaiah ends this phase of his prophecy with a profound profession of faith in God. ***I will wait for the LORD, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.***

Because of the external threats facing Judah and Israel, especially from Assyria, and the corresponding fear and turmoil, God seems to be hiding his face – he seems to have deserted his people.

But Isaiah will not lose his faith in God - ***I will wait for the LORD . . . I will hope in him.***

- This waiting upon God is often a prerequisite to receiving His blessing, for in the act of waiting we confess our own helplessness and our complete dependence on Him.

Part of Isaiah's ability to depend on God, even though God's immediate aspect was grim, was his awesome experience of God.

Also, Isaiah sees in his children signs of hope which are reflected in their names. He is probably thinking of Shear-jash-ub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

### **H. Control over the Future (8:19-23)**

***"Consult the mediums and the wizards . . ."***

For those who did not have the certainty Isaiah had, the temptation was strong to turn to the occult, to idolatry - to fortune-tellers, psychics, palm-readers, mediums, etc to seek knowledge and control. Just as we do today!

- Revival of superstition accompanies loss of faith in God.

Mediums and wizards are of course condemned in Biblical law (Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10f) as in the story of Saul and the Witch of Endor (1 Sam 28).

Verses 19-22 tell us what happens when people refuse to trust and obey God. They have God's word given to them in the Torah and the Prophets (***the teaching and to the testimony***) yet they refuse to consult it just as we have the Bible and the teaching of the

Church, but often seek answers in the occult – **consulting the dead on behalf of the living?** How ironic!

What is the result? See verse 21-22!

**“Distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish; and they will be thrust into thick darkness.”**

## V. APPLICATION

### A. The fear of God

Today we do not hear much about the fear of the Lord.

In a “feel-good” age we want to hear that God loves us no matter what we do and that he will never leave us or forsake us. Both of those sentiments are profoundly true, and without them there would be no Gospel for us to proclaim.

However, the conclusion that is often drawn from these truths is profoundly untrue, namely, that since God’s love is unconditional and since he will not forsake us, therefore how we behave is fundamentally unimportant.

- Of course, we think, we need to try to do our best, but since we will always sin anyway, we need not expect too much of ourselves.

How far this thinking is from the perspective of Isaiah! God tells his people to stop worrying about what the Assyrians and the Syrians and the Israelites are going to do and to start worrying about what **He** is going to do!

This is not just some legalistic Old Testament idea. Jesus echoes almost the same words.

This is not to say that we should live in shivering terror that God is suddenly going to strike us dead because He has decided he does not like the way we're acting.

Jesus goes on to say that we are worth more to God than the sparrows or the lilies he cares for so lavishly.

So what does “fear the LORD” mean for us?

- It means we have to reorder our priorities.
- Instead of asking how we can please ourselves, we must ask how we can please God.
- Instead of spending all over time worrying about how to take care of ourselves, we ought to be asking how well we are living the life of the One who called us to be holy and as he is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16).

If we pay attention to this we can trust God to take care of us in far better ways than we can ourselves.

## **B. The Secret of Contentment**

God will either be our sanctuary or the stumbling block we keep falling over. Many people in the West today have chosen to make God their stumbling block.

We have accepted the conventional wisdom that there's nothing in life except the physical and material; power and pleasure. We have attempted:

- to jettison the realities of the spiritual world, and
- To function merely as if we were “naked apes.”

But a strange thing has happened to us superior Westerners. We have discovered that incredible physical pleasure and material wealth have not made us happier, more contented people.

Instead, we found something strangely missing. Of course, that something is God. But we have not turned back to the old fashioned biblical God of our ancestors. No, we have turned to something much more “modern” and “scientific” – the horoscope, the psychic, the occult, and mother goddess.

Much too educated to believe in miracles, we swallow with alacrity the most amazing hodge-podge of superstition and paganism. Then we are surprised at the rapid increase of spiritual darkness all around us.

God has become the stumbling block, and we are falling all over him. The only question is how far he will have to let us fall before we finally get the picture.

## Preparation for Isaiah Week 9 – Unto Us a Child is Born

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1. Read Isaiah, Chapter 9
2. Read Chapter 3 in *Come and See Catholic Bible Study – Isaiah*.
3. Answer questions 1-5 in *Come and See* pgs 29-30.