

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.* (NAS)

8:2 And I will get reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me." (ESV)

8:3 And I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name *Maher-shalal-hashbaz;* (ESV)

8:4 for before the boy 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." (ESV)

8:5 The LORD spoke to me again: (ESV)

8:6 "Because this people have refused the *waters of Shiloah* that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, (ESV)

8:7 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,* (ESV)

8:8 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.*" (ESV)

8:9 Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered; give ear, all you far countries; strap on your armor and be shattered; strap on your armor and be shattered. (ESV)

8:10 Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand, for *God is with us.* (ESV)

8:11 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: (ESV)

8:12 "Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread. (ESV)

8:13 But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. (ESV)

8:14 "Then He shall become a sanctuary; But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, *And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.* (NAS)

8:15 "And many will stumble over them, Then they will fall and be broken; They will even be snared and caught." (NAS)

8:16 Bind up the *testimony*; seal the teaching among my disciples. (ESV)

8:17 And I will wait on the LORD, Who hides His face from the house of Jacob; And I will hope in Him. (NKJ)

8:18 Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. (NAS)

8:19 And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? (ESV)

8:20 To the law and to the *testimony*! If they do not speak according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them. (NKJ)

8:21 And they will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished, and it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged and curse their king and their God as they face upward. (NAS)

8:22 And they will look to the earth, but behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish. And they will be thrust into thick darkness. (ESV)

The Gentle Waters of Shiloah

Isaiah 8:1-10

You are probably familiar with how horoscopes, tarot cards, Ouija boards, and all forms of witchcraft have infiltrated our national identity. Each of these magical devices are used with one purpose in mind: people want to know their future. They have gained such a hearing because the only one who actually does know the future has been faithfully abandoned and something has to rise to fill the vacuum.

In preparing for this sermon, I took out the prior days newspaper just to see what my horoscope said was supposed to have happened to me the day before. It said, “**Even though you know better, it might be difficult for you today to yield ground to those who think differently than you.**” Isn’t this the way it always is with Satan? How ridiculous is this. Everyone on earth finds it hard to yield ground when someone disagrees with them, and everyone knows they ought to be more patient with others. This is called the our consciences condemning us from the law that has been implanted inside of us. In this way **the horoscope feeds off of the obvious**. Every day (not just the day of the so-called prediction) we find ourselves facing these situations, so **it feeds off of the common in order to try and convince us that it is really telling us the future**. And they always add the words “perhaps” or “might” or “maybe” into the prediction just so that they give themselves a loophole if by chance their simplified, generic, highly probable “prediction” actually finds a way of not occurring. Why people live their lives by such stupid con-games is really beyond me. And why people refuse to bow their knee to the only one who does know the future just shows what lengths depraved people will go to in order to avoid God.

I want you to consider God this morning; not the god of your own making, but the God of the Scripture. The first 8 verses of **Isaiah 8** are a classic example of this God’s overwhelming power, both in knowing the future and in making it come to pass. It is also a classic example of God getting his retribution against those who commit crimes of high treason against him by not living according to faith in Christ which he calls upon all men and women to do. There is a challenge before you. When you see how mighty in power and full of knowledge this God is, are you going to trust in him no matter what your situation in life? Or, will you be like faithless Judah who refused the life giving waters of Shiloah to her own destruction?

There are two predictions in these 8 verses. The first takes place in **8:1-4**, the second in **8:5-10ff**. The first prediction is the exact opposite of modern psychic fortune-telling. Isaiah gives us a glimpse into how God tells the future and how it is so very different from the way humans try to foretell it. First, **God makes the prophet purchase a great tablet**. The word (*gill¹yôn* - tablet) might be better translated “placard.” If he were living in our day, Isaiah would probably buy a giant billboard on the mousetrap, or perhaps he would rent out the giant lighted screen in Times Square. The point is, God wanted Isaiah to make his message as public and eye-catching as possible. This was not to be a private little message, but one for all the land to see. God is making sure that everyone knows who predicted this future.

Next Isaiah is to [write on it in ordinary letters](#) (or with an engraving tool of man). The message is to be “[legible and comprehensible to all.](#)”¹ There are to be no strange fonts, no cryptic messages, and no small letters. The comprehensibility of the message reminds me of a story. After the World Trade Centers were destroyed, an internet urban myth was circulating around that said that the famous pagan psychic Nostradamus predicted the disaster 500 years earlier. Someone had taken portions of several of his quatrains, added their own appropriate lines, and pieced it all together to say something like the following,

"In the year of the new century and nine months,
From the sky will come a great King of Terror...
The sky will burn at forty-five degrees.
Fire approaches the great new city..."
"In the city of york there will be a great collapse,
2 twin brothers torn apart by chaos
while the fortress falls the great leader will succumb
third big war will begin when the big city is burning"

To gullible people desiring to believe in anything, this was sure proof that Nostradamus was sent from God. But, of course, nothing could be further from the truth. I visited a pro- Nostradamus web site and found the following fascinating quote. After showing how the quote I read you is itself a hoax, the author then turns to an actual prophesy that part of it was taken from. In that text, for example, the year 1999 is used. Of course, the attack took place in 2001. He then makes the following comment. “[True prophecies are never explicit; they are usually either ambiguous, have cloaked meanings, or incorrect portions.](#)” Quite an admission, wouldn’t you say?

Here is the point. God is not like Nostradamus and Nostradamus was not sent by God. When God speaks, He is clear and unambiguous and his prophecies always come to pass. God is clear about this in [Deuteronomy 18:22](#). “[If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.](#)” Isaiah’s message was simple. He was to write the words, “[Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.](#)” The Hebrew is, “[Maher-shalal-hashbaz.](#)”

If this was all there were to the prophesy, we might think it no different from the pagans. But we are not to stop in verse 1, are we? Next we see that Isaiah is to bring reliable witnesses to attest for him that he has written this prophesy before it comes to pass. Uriah is probably the very wicked priest that Ahaz had make alterations to the temple and Zechariah was probably Ahaz’s chief royal prophet. These were not men sympathetic to Isaiah. They were perfect to bear testimony. In doing this God is saying that there will be no chance of there being an internet hoax with this prophesy. And no one will be able to claim that such a prediction was not made.

But it does not end here. For in verse 3, we begin to see the meaning of the prophesy as explained to us by God himself. And this is important. For God does not leave *his* prophesy open to subjective interpretation. I want to make this point clear to you by

¹ Moyter, *Isaiah*, p. 90.

taking a real prophesy of Nostradamus that this same sympathetic website claims is actually about the World Trade Centers attack. Here is the quatrain.

Two bodies, one head, fields divided in two,
And then to reply to four unheard ones:
Little ones for great ones, clear evel for them,
Lightning at the tower of Aiguesmortes, worse for "Eussouis"

Now, check out the interpretation given by this particular individual.

- The two bodies, one head, fields divided in two seems to be a vision of the twin towers.
- The four unheard ones could represent the four airliners.
- Little ones for great ones: This has a couple of interpretations; This could refer to the passengers who took it on themselves to take back the airliner which crashed in Pennsylvania; or it could refer to the hijackers themselves, the line is suggestive but it doesn't add a lot to the interpretation of the quatrain. In either case the end was fatal.
- Aiguesmortes looks like a combination of two French words "sharp", and "deaths"; this certainly appears to be very apropos. This was the key phrase which made me think this was a hit. And even more suggestively, Eussouis (which might be pronounced 'yew-swas', with a silent s on the end) might be a garbled version of 'USA', of course the USA didn't exist when he wrote; it's not an actual French word as far as anyone knows; sometimes Nostradamus will introduce nonsense words that in retrospect make sense, e.g. 'Hisler'.

Can you say grasping at straws? Can you fanciful imagination? Let me give you my interpretation, just for fun. The two bodies with one head are Siamese twins who were separated at birth. We know this because their “fields divided in two.” Their fields are obviously their bodies. The “reply to four unheard ones” are the four doctors who, after 22 hours of surgery were able to make a successful separation. “Little ones for great ones” clearly means the very little money that the doctors took for doing such a great surgery. The “Lightning at the tower” was the power outage that occurred during the surgery as lightening hit the top of this tall hospital, making the surgery more difficult and all that more miraculous. Do you see how, with enough imagination you can make these absurd claims say virtually anything you want?

God never does this to us. Instead, he interprets his own prophesies so that we might know exactly what is to happen. And so [Isaiah goes immediately from here to his wife, whom he calls “the prophetess.”](#) She conceives after their union and bears a son. Something similar is happening here as what we saw predicted in chapter seven with the virgin giving birth to a son. However, this is not the fulfillment of that prophesy for two reasons. Isaiah’s wife is obviously not a virgin and that (chapter 7) prophesy had a later date attached to it (probably 10 years or so later) as we will see shortly.

What happens next is that God tells Isaiah to name his son “*Maher-shalal-hashbaz*,” that is swift is the booty, speedy is the prey. I hope that sounds familiar. For the rest of this little babes life, people will see him as the sign that God sent in living person to show the fulfillment of this prophesy. The fact that God keeps using little children in these chapters is not without importance. What it says to us is that God’s ways are not our ways. Whereas man wants power and prestige and great signs and mighty deeds, God often feels free to use the foolish things of this world to shame the wisdom of this age. This is the case with these little children of [Isaiah 7-9](#).

And now here is the meaning of the boy's name and the billboard that was posted before his birth. "Before the boy 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." Nothing is left open to subjective interpretation here. Within the time span of a year, give or take a couple of weeks, Assyria is going to begin their mighty assault upon the people of the west. The words for father and mother are the words of infants: אָבִי וְאִמִּי (abi and ammi). And it only takes a year to say mommy and daddy. This prophesy begins that which was predicted in the last chapter. Assyria will start with Damascus, the capitol city of the Syrians. Syria will go into captivity and be carried away along with all of their wealth.

In this way another prediction made in chapter 7:7 will be fulfilled. "Israel and Syria will not capture Judah, Ahaz. It will not take place. It will not happen." The events pictured for us in this prophesy take place in around 734-33 and in 732 Assyria did exactly what God had predicted. It all came to pass exactly as God had said. (The prophesy of the Immanuel boy in chapter 7, because it takes place "when the boy is able to know to choose the right from the wrong and not merely say mommy and daddy, is fulfilled when both Assyria and Israel are taken into captivity, and this is why the boy in chapter 8 is not the same boy of chapter 7).

Now we need to pause and consider some things. A great concern that we should all share is the way that modern evangelicals are attacking the omniscience of God. Does not this one single text prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is not guessing about the future? Are we really prepared to say that God is nothing but a highly evolved Nostradamus? Open theology teaches exactly this heresy – that God does not know the future, that he can be surprised by what we do and by what happens in this world, because even though he is an incredibly good guesser because he can figure out infinite possibilities for the future (including the one that actually happens), he sometimes simply gets it wrong because not even God can know something (the future) that is not in existence (namely, the future).

The omniscience of God is an essential of the Christian faith that we may not give up simply because we can't figure out how certain expressions in the Bible ("now I know..." or "I'm sorry I made man..." or "I did not know...") fit in with a God who knows everything. Quite simply, if God does not know the future, then he does not know if you will actually be saved or not and so your eternal destiny is in great danger while at the same time you can have no comfort for this destiny in this life. If God did not know the future, he would not be able to send Christ at "just the right time" to take away the sins of the world. If God did not know the future, he would not even be able to know for sure if some random atom would not collide with another causing a chain reaction that would destroy the entire universe which he created. If you are tempted to give this doctrine up, then you have just sold the entire Christian farm and there is nothing left to place your hope in.

But if God does know the future life this, then we must consider that he is unlike any other being in the universe. As he says later in this very book, perhaps the main test of

being a God is that you know the future. Only God can have this knowledge. Since his prophecies have continued to be fulfilled and not a one has ever failed to come to pass when he says it will, then we ought to bow down before him in great fear and trembling, because this God is worthy of our worship for this single fact alone. If you have not trusted in Christ today, then you must do so now.

But let me give you more reasons to believe in God (or to continue to live by faith in him) today. We should look now at the other prophesy in this text. It is different from the first and so I will try to bring out for you different themes that we have already, though we could talk about many of the things we have just mentioned. The purpose of this prophesy is two-fold. **First, God still wants you to understand that he knows the future and that everything he says will come to pass. But more than this, this prophesy is a call for you to trust in Christ Jesus – *the water of life*. And it is a warning that if you spurn him, then you have spurned his greatest gift of love and those things such as gentleness and patience and kindness that are held out for the world to see through his Son.** And if you do this, then for you there is only a flood that can come upon you and it will destroy you. So will you swim in the waters of life today or will you drown in them as they rise ever higher, even up to your neck (as it says here)?

The key to this understanding lays in a little stream that flowed from the Gihon spring outside of the city into Jerusalem. In order to understand the significance of this, we need to go back to chapter 7 to consider again why Ahaz was standing outside of the city overlooking his water supply. Jerusalem was one of the most impregnable cities of ancient times. Her walls were thick and tall and they would not be easily breached. Most cities in those days had their water supplies lay within the boundaries of the walls. In this way, the enemy could not thirst the people into surrender by contaminating the water.

But Jerusalem was not like this at this time. It was not until Hezekiah's (Ahaz' son) day that the water supply was brought into the city via an aqueduct and a reservoir (see **22:8-11**). The waters of Shiloah thus symbolized two things for the citizens of the city. The unprotected water outside of the city was a constant reminder to the people of their need for faith and for a Defender and Protector who would guard them from those who would seek to destroy their source of life.

But faith always needs an object and this little stream filled with the waters of life in this way pointed the faith of the people to trust in **Yahweh (the Lord of Hosts)**, who John tells us is Jesus Christ, who Matthew calls **Immanuel** and who Paul calls the **Seed** all of whom we have seen already in Isaiah's book. This Jesus said that he will **give water that will satisfy a person so that they will never thirst again. The water he gives will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4:13-14)**. And again he said, **"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:38)**. In this way water will flow from a spring that begins outside of the city and will flow directly into your heart.

Now, we are told here that the water that gave life to the inhabitants of Jerusalem is a **stream that flows gently**. Jesus told us about himself, **"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am *gentle* and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For**

my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt 11:29). It is the gentle king who comes to his people at this time. "'Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' " (Matt 21:5). Dear Christian, have you remembered that your Lord and Savior is a gentle savior to you, that he comes tenderly to forgive your sins and to sooth your sufferings? Though he is a God who is just and holy, though he is a God who will get vengeance upon his enemies, he comes to you now not in wrath or in anger, but gently – as the stream of Shiloah.

What other God is like unto this God? The nations gods demand appeasement and yet offer nothing in return. But this God who comes to you in the person of Jesus Christ is the one who himself has made the appeasement, who has taken away all obstacles to your salvation and who comes gently to call his sheep back into the sheepfold. Are you listening to his voice? Are you fleeing to Christ as your only hope of joy and salvation? Or are you spurning the waters that flow gently?

Must you hear the warning that is implicit in Isaiah's message? For it is possible that you are likened unto Judah. That people spurned and "refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently and instead rejoiced over Rezin and the son of Remaliah" (Isa 8:6). As we saw in chapter 7, Rezin was the king of Syria and Pekah King of Israel was the son of Remaliah. God's people Judah had placed their trust in a foreign nation and in a king who was not the son of David to protect them from the coming destruction. They had despised their God because they could not see how the Invisible One could protect them and they refused to obey his law and this brought the disaster down upon their own heads.

And so the people of Judah would get their water. It would not be the gentle flowing stream of Shiloah, the water of life for Jerusalem. Rather, it would be the waters of the Great River – the Euphrates as it symbolized the might and power of the king of Assyria and all his glory (vs. 7). This water would not pour forth salvation, but judgment, even as it was in the days of Noah and in the days of Moses and Pharaoh. God tells the people that he is bringing up against them the waters of the River. They will be many and they will be mighty. If it is water that they will have to drink, and if it be not God's water – then they will have the very water of their own choosing. They will drink from the same water as their own saviour. And it will "rise over all its channels and go over all its banks" (vs. 7). This water beyond the Euphrates will "sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck" – that is right up into the city of David itself. And its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land.

You see, friends, if you will not have the waters of Shiloah, you will drink from the waters of judgment instead. But woe to him who refuses the water of life only to drink from the water of the nations of God's judgment. It will be terrible for them for it will drown both themselves and all they have in this life. You remember what Jesus said about another time? "Let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again" (Matt 24:16-21). The same result is found here in

Isaiah in **verse 9-10**. “Be broken, you peoples, and be shattered; give ear, all you far countries; strap on your armor and be shattered; strap on your armor and be shattered. Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing; speak a word, but it will not stand.”

Let’s finish the word this morning with those final words of verse 8 and verse 10. The same phrase is used and translators see the first reference to a proper name (Immanuel) while the second reference is perhaps calling our attention merely to the meaning of that name (God is with us). Whatever may be the case, what is clear is that we have here an allusion back to chapter 7 again.

The child that was promised as the sign of things to come was to be named Immanuel. Matthew rightly sees this child as being born in his own day of the Virgin Mary. His name was Jesus the Messiah. Immanuel suddenly and unexpectedly comes back into the picture in this prophesy. And when we said that the waters of Shiloah symbolize the waters of the Christ, it is because it is this same Christ – Immanuel – who the Lord is ultimately speaking to in this passage. Do you see that? God is speaking to Immanuel!

The waters are sweeping up into Judah and Judah is *Immanuel’s* land. God is speaking here beyond anyone living in Isaiah’s day to the One who is the real owner of the land that is about to be purged. As if plunging deeper and deeper into the dark implications of his sign, Isaiah is “suddenly brought up short by the deepest implication: God is with us and, best of all, will be with us, not merely in the impersonal developments of history, but somehow as a person.”² This truth ought to make each of us sit up and listen. There is a hope here for God’s people who do belong to him. This is much to be heard here by those who are Christians – as is true with virtually all of Scripture. Sermons that are primarily for unbelievers almost always miss the point main point. Though I plead with any of you here who do not trust Christ to turn from your sin and believe in him today – my main message is for those who already do trust Christ. The hope that is constantly put forward to Judah throughout the prophesies that is though God will punish her for her sins, he will not utterly forsake his people. Why? Because in keeping a remnant for himself, God is making a way to bring glory to himself through Jesus Christ. Those who are the continuing remnant in our day (the church) may be sure and confident that whatever else befalls them in this life – **God is with us**. He will not leave us nor forsake us. He will deliver us from all of our enemies – though it will be in his timing and not ours. He will not let anyone snatch us out of the Father’s hand. He will ensure that we be conformed perfectly to the image of Christ. He will sanctify us and glorify us even has he has elected us and called us and justified us in God’s sight.

So take comfort in the sign Immanuel today. Flee to the gentles waters of Shiloah. Do not despise them. And know until such a time as we meet again to refresh the covenant that God has made with us that this God is with us whatever our circumstances, whatever befalls us, whatever attacks us, whatever tries to overpower us; God is with us.

² Oswalt, *Isaiah*, p. 227.

