

Sermon 14 - The Sign of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz

Isaiah 7:18-8:10 - Now, chapters 7 and 8 of Isaiah contain prophecies and events/actions, That took place during the time of the Syro-Ephraimite war with Judah, which is dated 735 to 734 BC. This war took place during the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah. The circumstances, as we see scripture and from other historical texts, tell us that Syria and Israel named in this passage chapter 7 by the title of Ephraim being perhaps the most influential tribe at that time or the one that led this war. Syria and Israel were concerned about the rising power of the nation of Assyria and the threat that this posed to them, for they knew the ambitions of the king of Assyria. And therefore, to counter this threat, they entered into alliance together, Syria and Israel. But they realized they also needed Judah if they were going to be strong. And so it was their desire that Judah entered into this alliance as well. The southern kingdom of Israel, remember the kingdoms were divided. After Solomon, 10 tribes went to the northern kingdom, which we call Israel. And the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed the southern kingdom that is known by the kingdom of Judah. But Judah refused to enter into this alliance with Syria and Israel. And so Israel, Syria went to war with Judah to force them into compliance. Their goal was to also place a ruler on the throne of Judah that would be their puppet that would dance to their tune.

And so this is the circumstance that we find ourselves in historically in chapter 7 and in chapter 8. If you look there in your Bibles in chapter 7 of Isaiah,

Isaiah 7:1 - It refers to the first phase of the war. We now come in verse 2 to the second phase of the war when they are again seeking to invade the land of Judah with the goal of putting their own chosen son of Tabiel, verse 6, on the throne of Judah. Now in the midst of this political crisis, Isaiah is sent with a message to Ahaz, the king of Judah, calling upon him to put his trust in Jehovah, to put his trust in the Lord, not to fear Syria and Israel. They are mere smoking firebrands. They will not be able to prevail against Judah. And that Ahaz should put his trust. Ahaz and the people of Judah should put their trust in the Lord alone, not become involved in these political alliances, imaginations, and international politics and so forth.

And the reason why this challenge is so needed is Ahaz is at this very time forming his own alliance, an alliance with the Assyrians. And his logic is that if he will hire the king of Assyria to invade the countries of Syria and of Israel, they will be forced to withdraw their campaign from Judah, hurry back to their own lands to defend their own borders against the Assyrians. And therefore Judah will be delivered. Judah will be delivered by the Assyrians. Now this plan, these actions of Ahaz are completely contrary to God's intentions and purpose for his people. To trust in the arm of the flesh, no. To make alliances with pagan nations, no. To trust in God to protect them, yes.

And Isaiah comes to Ahaz with this message. And he calls upon him to believe and warns him that if he will not believe, verse 9, you will not be established. God is gracious to this king because Ahaz is an evil king, an unbelieving king. He's an idolater. He's walking in the ways of the kings of Israel in terms of their idolatrous worship. But he is the one who occupies the throne of David. And for David's sake, God sends his prophet to Ahaz and calls upon him to believe and then offers him a test, a demonstration that would prove that God will keep his promise. He does not need to go to the Assyrians. God will deliver Judah and its capital city Jerusalem from the alliance of the Syrians and the Israelites. He offers a sign but Ahaz rejects the sign and piously yet hypocritically says in verse 12, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.

It's certainly not a tempting of God when he says to you through his prophet, Ask of me a sign, I will give it to you. But he doesn't want the sign, because if the sign comes to pass, he's going to be in an awkward position of having to believe, and he doesn't want to believe, and so he rejects this offer. And the response is that God says, okay, verse 13, you don't want a sign, you're not going to get one. But I'm going to give a sign myself, a sign that will be of no benefit to you, Ahaz, nor to those who walk with you in your ways of disobedience, but a sign that will be a proof to my people, to all who believe in me, that the plans, the designs of others to overthrow the kingship of David and to place with on the throne a puppet ruler will not come to pass. My promises are sure through David and I am going to fulfill my promise and I'm going to give a miraculous sign.

And that sign is going to be Emmanuel verse 14 therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name Emmanuel. And so Ahaz has refused God's sign but God gives his own. And it's to confirm his promise of deliverance but not the deliverance of Ahaz in Judah but the deliverance of David's throne the deliverance of God's people, and the fulfillment of His promises to David. And that incident of the encounter between Ahaz and Isaiah and the sign of Emmanuel closes in verses 15 to 17 with the prophecy of judgment.

Particularly verse 17, the Lord shall bring upon thee, that is Ahaz, and upon thy people, that is Judah, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come from the day of Ephraim, and he departed from Judah, even the king of Assyria. The very one Ahaz that you were looking to for deliverance from the Syrians and the Israelites and their alliance against you, that king is going to be the very means of your own destruction. The very one that you put your trust in will be the means of your overthrow. This is often the way the justice of God works in history, in families, in churches, in individuals. When we turn away from God, when we turn away from His Word and His promises, and we put our trust in the arm of the flesh, we put our trust in men, in our own will and abilities, God then turns those very things

that we trusted in as the means of our own overthrow. It's one of the great messages of that passage that we studied last week.

This morning's text records further prophecies that were given by Isaiah during this time of the Syro-Ephraimite war, during the time of this political crisis. It continues the historical context that we have just surveyed, which we had studied the weeks prior in chapter 7. But these are prophecies that are given on different occasions than the one wherein Ahaz and Isaiah met in the first 17 verses of the chapter.

Now, for an overview of the text, We're studying this morning the conquest of Judah by Assyria. That conquest that was prophesied in verse 17 of the seventh chapter begins by a message, a prophecy of the coming desolation in Judah that would come about by the infestation of the land by the Assyrians and the Egyptians. And primarily the Assyrians, which then are focused on in verses 20 to 25. And we look at the effects of their invasion. And then in chapter 8, verses 1 to 4, continuing the same theme, in the same historical setting, we have the message of Maher Shallah Hashbaz. And then in verses 5 to 8, another prophecy. The prophecy of the invasion of both Israel and Judah by the Assyrians and this passage closes this section closes with a warning to the nations. In other words is directed to the Assyrians and any other nation that would lift its heel against God's people in rebellion against God.

This is another of the messages, the prophecies given by Isaiah during the time of this war and it is placed here in the written text. The record of his prophecies because it explains it further describes the evil times that he has just spoken about to Ahaz in verse 17 though it was delivered on a different occasion. Now this desolation that is to come, we know very clearly from our study of the book of Isaiah, is a judgment that God is going to bring upon the people for their sin. They have been a very rebellious people. Chapter 1 of the book surveyed the conditions in Judah. And then beginning in chapter 2 through 5, we have seen further descriptions of their sin and their rebellion. And so the Judeans are a sinful people. The people of God, the church of God, they have rebelled against the Lord and now they're going to receive justice, judgment from the hand of God. Two agents are mentioned in this particular historical setting and they are that of Assyria and Egypt, the chief one though being the Assyrians. And Isaiah uses a metaphor here of insect infestation to get across his point. He prophesies of the land being filled with Assyrians from the north and the Egyptians from the south, and he uses the picture of an insect infestation where flies and bees have filled the land that covered every nook and cranny of the land. Prominent in this section is the phrase, And it shall come to pass. This is a prophetic formula that is used to announce a future fulfillment of God's plan.

Notice in chapter 7 and verse 1 how that verse begins, And it came to pass in the days of Ahaz. Here it is changed, the verb is changed to a future, It shall come to pass. But you see, the same phrase can be used with just a change of the verb when we're talking about prophecy. The one, and it came to pass, is a description of historical events. They're already passed. We know they're going to happen. We've seen them. They have had their fulfillment, their actualization in history. And so we can say, and it came to pass, this is what happened. But notice here in prophecy, that same phrase can be used in reference to what's in the future. Because this is according to God's plan being revealed to the prophet, and it is just as sure as what has already happened. Someone has said prophecy is history written beforehand. And it is just as sure as yesterday. The tomorrow of God's plan is just as sure as yesterday's plan, because His hand is in it all. He works all things according to the counsel of His own will. One of the great truths of God that is emphasized in Isaiah is His sovereignty over the affairs of men and history. And we can think of that in the sweep of historical events that envelop the whole world, but don't forget that that sovereignty of God and control of all events comes right down into your very life. And He controls that as well. It shall come to pass, mentioned, spoken by the prophet, numerous times because of the certainty of this series of events that is found in the single event of the infestation of the people of Judah by the Assyrians and the Egyptians.

It says in that day he shall hiss verse 18 the Lord Lord being there with all capitals remembering that is the divine name probably most likely pronounced as Yahweh. The Lord shall hiss for the fly that's in the uttermost part of the river of Egypt and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. The word hiss could be perhaps translated by the idea of whistling. And this phrase was a word that was used to refer to a signal that was given, someone or something to come. Particularly it was used of the call of a shepherd to his sheep. And through his particular whistle, his flock would know that it was time to come. It would give them direction, it would give them a call to come.

Here it is applied in the context of insects. Whether or not insects could be controlled by whistles, I don't know. But the point of the matter here is God is showing His sovereignty over the nations. He is going to use Egypt and Assyria for His purposes. They're going to come into Judah because He is going to call them to come. He is going to whistle for them. And He is going to bring them into the land in obedience to His own will. God is sovereign. And these mighty nations, Egypt and Assyria, are only mere instruments in His will, in the fulfillment of His will. And it is according to His will that Judah be judged. And so He will call them and they will come and accomplish God's will. Though they will not be aware of the fact that they are doing the will of God. Their motivations will not be to fulfill the righteousness of God in bringing discipline upon His people. They will be coming with their

own selfish, self-centered, lustful, conquering, empire building thoughts. But they will come because God has ordained it.

If Ahaz would have believed God, the Lord would have kept them from the land, but He has not believed. And the Lord will hiss and He will call them. Egypt is pictured here as a fly. Egypt, of course, was famous, or should we say infamous, for its flies. And these are the flies of the biting kind, the biting insects. Very, very troublesome, very disturbing to have your land filled with insects that bite. Also, the Assyrians are noted under the metaphor of a bee. And historians and archaeologists tell us that the choice of the bee here would have not been arbitrary because the Assyrians apparently were famous for their bees and their apiaries and their use of the bee. But a bee also is not something you want to have an infestation of. You don't want to have your every square inches that were covered with insects that sting. And so, an insect that bites and an insect that stings, that comes in and infests your land, how would you like to have your house filled every square inch with such insects? This is not a good picture at all. This is a picture of torment. This is a picture of a very undesirable circumstance. And let us look now at the effects of that infestation of the Assyrians and the Egyptians.

And the focus shifts here now and actually Egypt drops out of the picture because the Assyrians will be uppermost in this. You know, the Assyrians and the Egyptians were the major powers of the day, these peoples. And you know what stood right between them in the middle of them? The land of Palestine, the land of Judea, The land bridge that went between the Euphrates River and its valley and the peoples that were there and then down to the Nile River and the Egyptians that were there, the land bridge was along the coast, along the Mediterranean, through Israel, through Judea. That's why Judea was often strategic in the ancient world and the powers were fighting over it. And the Assyrians and the Egyptians both want to claim Judea for their own. And they both have their incursions into the land. And they both bring their torment into the land. But the effects of the Assyrian invasion is uppermost, for they were the ones who had the uppermost hand in that struggle with the Egyptians. And they are the ones who at that time in history were victorious.

And let's look what they do to the people as we read this. The first thing that's mentioned here is the humiliation of the Judean people in verse 20. In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired. He's going to shave them with a razor, that is the barber who has the razor, who has been hired to give a shave. Again, here we have a metaphor being used. And the removal of the hair is going to be the fact of the removal of the dignity of this people. But the idea of a razor that is hired goes back to Ahaz's own actions. He's the one that has hired the Assyrians and he hired them to shave Syria. He hired them to shave Israel. But God is going to use the very one that he hired to shave his enemies to shave him.

That's what he's saying. That razor that was hired, Isaiah says, is going to be used against Judea. And he's going to shave the whole body. All the hair is going to be removed. And this is a sign, by the way, of humiliation. As it has been pointed out even, the hair of the feet is euphemistic. referring to the hair of private parts everything's going to be exposed, everything's going to be taken, all the dignity of the people is going to be removed by their conquerors. This is a fearsome picture of humiliation.

The hair of the head is specifically the glory of the woman. We can even biblically that is even stated in the book of First Corinthians chapter 11. Her hair is all going to be taken off The beard. In that time, in that day, in that culture, the beard was a sign of the man's dignity. And the loss of one's beard was a sign of shame.

We have a little bit of a picture of this in 2 Samuel chapter 10, when David sent emissaries to Ammon, the Ammonites, and they humiliated them by shaving off part of their beards. They were so ashamed they would not come back into public until they had their beards back on them. But every part, they're going to be humiliated. One of the ways in which God disciplines is through humiliation, where our dignity is taken from us. We all cling to that. Rightly so. We want that dignity and self-respect. God takes it from those who rebel against Him. Because our dignity and self-respect is ultimately tied into our relationship with our God. That's where the center of human dignity is to worship God and to serve Him. And those who cast that aside are going to lose these things.

The second thing that's noted in this passage is the destruction of Judean agriculture in verses 21 to 25. The glory and the wealth of Judea was its agriculture. They had some flocks, sheep and goats and cattle, but that was not the wealth of the people. That was not their chief industry. They were an agricultural society. They lived and thrived and prospered on their fields and on their vines and their olive trees. They were people who were productive in grain and oil and wine. And this was their strength and this was the glory of their nation. And what's being described here is the end of all of that. And they're going to cease to be an agricultural people. And they will be like those wandering Bedouin who make their living off the butter and the milk of their flocks. In other words, this is a picture of the overthrow of the industry, we might say, of the nation. Its wealth is going to be wiped out and they're going to live on a subsistence level, eking out an existence, those who remain through milk and butter and honey, honey probably being like we read in our passage today in the book of Mark. John lived on wild honey.

This is a picture then of an agricultural society being destroyed. And they will live under primitive conditions The cultivated fields and the beautiful vineyards and olive groves are going to turn into a wild condition where there's thorns and thistles and wild animals. And the people are living, those who remain, not many remain. In fact, the picture I think that's

being spoken up here about the abundance is not a picture that there will be great abundance of production. But the milk that's produced will be abundantly sufficient for the very few who live. And they will eke out an existence like wandering nomads from beautiful farms to that.

And it's going to be destroyed because when the Assyrians come in, they're going to cut down your olive trees, they're going to destroy your vineyards, they're going to burn your fields, trample your fields, steal your grains. And one cow and two sheep is not much when you think of someone who may have owned hundreds or scores of acres of flowing fields of grain and oil and wine. And so there will be no grain or oil or wine anymore. Their diet will cease to be one of agricultural based to that of a nomad.

Verse 23 speaks specifically of their vineyards. And it speaks of the great amount of them, the thousand vines at a thousand silverlings. In other words, the silverlings refers to a silver coin. These were quality vines. Remember back in chapter 5, the parable, the song of the vineyard had these very things being spoken of under the image of the Vineyards of Israel at that time. Remember, they specifically spoke there about the choicest vine that had been planted. That was symbolic of Israel being a choice people. But it reflected the truth that Judea had the choicest vines, ones that were bought with silver coins. These were not just wild type vines. They were cultivated. They're all gone.

In their place is going to be briars and thorns, just as the song of the vineyard in chapter 5, verses 5 and 6 spoke of. Verse 24 speaks of the wild conditions that men will not dare go forth unless they have bows and arrows, which would have been in that day a means of self-defense or of hunting, but primarily be used against wild animals, just like a pioneer in our days or someone in the Wild West. because of the dangers of wild animals will not go out without their rifle to protect themselves, so someone will not even venture out without their bows and arrows because of the need for protection against wild animals. Wild thorns, wild animals is the picture from the land that was settled, productive, beautiful agricultural land.

And in verse 25, the hills that were dug with the mattock, that were cultivated, Where the vineyards once stood will now be a place for grazing, not for men. Men will not go there because of the fear of the thorns and the thistles and the briars. But the cattle and oxen will not care with their thick skins. They'll push right through and there they will feed on these things. And so what we have here in these verses is a description of the humiliation of the Judean people and the destruction of Judean agriculture.

A prophecy. When this was first given, remember, this had not yet come to pass, and probably the Judeans thought Isaiah was crazy as they looked at all the beauty and

prosperity that was around them, that this could ever come to pass. But it did. God's word is true. And they learn the lesson that nations never really seem to learn. Even though they look around their current prosperity and how things are going, that that can always be that way. Listen, God can overturn that in a heartbeat. He can hiss, whistle for whatever powers He chooses to use to humble nations, and we ought not to forget that.

That leads us into another prophecy that is given through a symbolic action. And that's in chapter 8, verses 1 to 4. The message of Maher Shalal Hashbaz. This also took place, this action This writing and this birth of this son took place during the time of this same historical period of the war that took place between Judah and Syria and Israel. Assyria was not yet on the scene, but these are prophecies about what's going to be happening in the future, that is from the standpoint of Isaiah's day. And verses 1 to 4 of chapter 8 begin a new section of these prophecies, but they relate to the same time. and it's speaking here of the Assyrians and what they're going to do.

Now this message in verses 1 to 4 has two parts. First is what I would call cryptic message. The second would be the sign oracle. A sign is given and it's interpreted. Oracle meaning the verbal oral interpretation of the sign. Verses 1 and 2, we have the message, the symbolic action, you could call it. In verses 3 to 4, we have the sign oracle, or the interpretive word.

Now these two parts go together. The second is the interpretation of the first. The first prepares the way for the second, that is for the interpretation. And notice here, and I didn't read this yet, let me read this, and notice with me a few things. Moreover the Lord said unto me, Take thee a great roll, and write in it with a man's pen concerning Maher Shalal Hashbaz. And I took unto me faithful witnesses to record Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah. And I went unto the prophetess, and she conceived and bare a son. Then said the Lord unto me, Call his name Mahershalal Hashbaz. For before the child shall acknowledge the cry, My father and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria. Two parts, the symbolic action and the interpretive word.

But notice that there's a time lapse of at least nine months in history of this between verses one and two and three and verse four, the birth of the child. These things not happen simultaneously. First, Isaiah is instructed to take this role and to write it with a man's pen this name and to post it in a public place. After he does that, his wife conceives. And after his wife conceives, the period of time between that and the birth is what's taking place time-wise in this passage. And it's at the birth of the child. Notice she conceived and bare a son. At the time of the birth of the child, the Lord instructs Isaiah to name the son Maher

Shalal Hashbas, bringing the symbolic action and the sign together because verse 4 then gives the interpretation.

This son becomes the occasion and the sign, the word oracle, of what this placard that he wrote of in verse 1 meant. And it has to do with the judgment of Israel and Syria. Damascus is the capital of Syria. Samaria is the capital of Israel. And both of these countries that Judah is fearing, that Ahaz is fearing, are going to be spoiled invaded and stripped of their wealth by the king of Assyria, from the time in which this child is born until he can say, Mama and Papa, or Mama, Dada. Not very long. That's what's happening in the passage.

Let's quickly look at it in a little bit more detail. Before we do, let me mention something else. Remember in chapter 7 we also had a sign oracle? And that was the one about Emmanuel. But there was a difference between the Emmanuel and the Maher Shalal Hashbaz oracles. You see, there were two kinds of these signs with interpretive words. Sign oracles, we're going to call them. A sign with a word attached to it to interpret it. First is when a sign was given that preceded a prophecy of judgment. or of salvation, and that sign served as a pledge that would confirm the coming fulfillment of the promise. And that's the Emmanuel one. The birth of Emmanuel will be that which precedes the salvation itself. It's the sign of the coming of the salvation. It's confirming its fulfillment. However, this sign is in the form of a symbol or a symbolic action where an event is enacted or a riddle is written. And the meaning of the symbolic action emerges afterwards, later on, by a divine word of interpretation. That's why Isaiah chapter 7 is the first, a sign proceeding. Here this is a sign where a symbolic action is interpreted only later on by a divine word. In the one, the divine Word is given with the sign. The other, there's a period of time that elapses between them.

The symbolic action that is given here in verse 1 is Isaiah is told to take a great roll or a large scroll, some kind of a placard, some kind of a poster, a large surface that he can write on. And he's supposed to write four words on it: Maher, Shalal, Hosh and Boz. Four Hebrew words. Literally, they could be translated Haste, spoil, speed, booty. That is what the Hebrew would say literally. He needs to take this placard, this tablet of wood or stone, perhaps even maybe of metal, He is to write these four words on the man's pen, which probably means something that's easily legible. That's a tough Hebrew phrase, a man's pen. It probably means something that's easily legible by the common man, someone who can, something to be easily understood. It's written largely and simply, and the people walk by, they will be able to see and discern and read these four words. It's to be given in the common Hebrew letters of the day. And then he used to put this inscription in a public place where it can be seen. And in the act of doing this, he is to take unto himself faithful witnesses to record this prophecy and the action that he's taking by divine direction. He's going to take Uriah the priest and Zachariah the son of Jibarakiah to be witnesses to this.

Skinner says this about the passage. He says, We must suppose that Isaiah actually put up the inscription in some public place, in the presence of two witnesses who could afterwards certify the date of this singular action.

Now, you can imagine this would puzzle the people to see these four words on a big plaque are put up by the prophet with ceremony, with witnesses that says, haste, spoil, speed, booty. What does this mean? What does this message convey? We're not even sure that Isaiah knew it at the time. Perhaps he did.

Well, what is given in verses 3 and 4 is the interpretation. And it's tied into the birth of a son to Isaiah himself. The prophetess here is not a reference to the fact that she conducted a preaching prophetic ministry. but simply to the fact that she was the wife of the prophet. She was the queen, the king and the queen, the prophet and the prophetess. And after this had been done, the writing of this placard, and his wife come together, she conceives, and they bear a son. So you have that time period.

Think about this now what's happening. There's a time period of at least nine months from the putting up of the sign. And for nine months, at least, people are saying, What does this mean, Isaiah? What in the world is this crazy man doing now, putting up these words? It's a mystery. It is a riddle. Here's a fact before him. Four words written on a placard, but they can't give a right interpretation or assign meaning to it. But at God's timing, at the birth of this son, He gives the interpretation to Isaiah and He instructs him to make it known. And he tells Isaiah to call his name, Mahershalal Hashbat. It's the very four words that are on the placard. Why? Here's what it means. Cry my mother and my father. The riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria. In other words, these terms, haste, Spoil speed booty means something like this, that Assyria is hasting to the spoil and they are speeding to the booty. And the spoil and the booty that are in their focus are the very nations that Judah is trembling over. And that is Damascus, the symbol of Syria, just like we talk of Washington being Washington D.C. is used to refer to America, the capital city, Damascus and Samaria being the capital cities of the respective nations.

The prophecy means this, God is going to spoil and bring to nothing, overthrow these countries of Damascus and Samaria by the king of Assyria. You know, there's, as we meditate on this passage, there's a couple of things we might point out. Just by way of an extension here, not specifically applying the passage to our circumstance, but I was struck by the role of witnesses, called into certify what was taking place here, what Isaiah was doing. And he took them as the prophet of God, to certify his actions. And they were faithful witnesses, men whose word could be trusted, men whose word would be trusted by the

people. And we just see here an insight into the role of using faithful witnesses to confirm our words and our actions when these words and actions have important ramifications.

The second thing that I find interesting here is the application of the whole idea of how we know and assign meaning to facts, especially things that baffle us. The people looked at this sign, they looked at these words, and it was before them. The facts were there, very clear, right? Here's this placard. Here are these four words. There's the facts. But what do the facts mean? That's the big question in all of life. Things happen to us. Words are spoken to us. The facts are before us, always manifesting themselves around us. And we can look at them, and your neighbor can look at them, and we can do these. But the question is not what the fact is, but what does it mean? Do they understand what's happening here? Because they can say, well, down there on the street corner, there's a placard with these four words. No. Describing something does not mean you understand it, its essence, its meaning, its significance. And this is a parable Todd works in life. They couldn't know its meaning, its significance until God interpreted for him by His Word.

And when the Word of God was spoken, it was there. Another thing to look at this, another way to look at this is we say that all facts are God-created facts. All of them. The sun, the moon, the stars, physical laws, laws of logic, Since we believe in the sovereignty of God and His providence, all historical events, they're God-created facts. And in the Christian worldview, all facts are God-created facts. This was a God-created facts. So who gives the interpretation of the placard and the words? The one who created them. God, though His prophet was the instrument, God created that whole scenario, and He assigns the reason for it. He gives the significance to it.

Now, if all facts that we encounter are God-created facts, who should we look to to interpret them and give significance and meaning to them? God. And how does He do that? Through His Word. For example, you're suffering. Do you ever suffer? Ever in tribulation? It's a God-created fact. It's not knowledge to know that you're suffering. It's to know why, the purpose, the reasons. How can you interpret and give meaning to this seemingly unfair, difficult circumstance that maybe others aren't having? And you're here suffering. It could be physical suffering, could be other kind of. How do you know? How do you give significance to it? You look to the Word of God. and let the word of God interpret the event for you to interpret the fact of your suffering and give meaning and significance to it. And you can know why you're suffering.

Now there's two levels upon which we know about our suffering and one of them is just the more general and that is often all we can have in this world. And sometimes the depths of the matter are not given to us. But if you study the Bible you'll see there's a whole series of Scriptures that interpret for men the purposes of God in suffering. And when you go to

those texts and you read them, you can begin to sign meaning and purpose to your tribulations, to your sufferings, to your failures, to your sicknesses, to your illness, to whatever that suffering entails. One good place starts James chapter 1 where he speaks of trials. They're used to produce character in us. So we don't have time to explore that whole realm of trials. But I'm saying when we go to the Word of God, we're able to assign meaning to the things that happen to us. And that's when true knowledge comes to pass. That's why we say in the realm of science, those who do not approach science from a Christian perspective really don't know anything, truly. They can analyze the created world. They can look at a particular object and they can tell us its characteristics. They can look at the phenomena around it. They can analyze its chemical properties. They can do all this for us. They can describe the fact, but they can't tell us what it means. To show you that they're even worse than ignorant, they're rebellious. Unbelieving scientists look at the creation and say it means that there is no meaning it means the chance it means that there is no intelligence there is no design there's no life beyond a physically described phenomena the Bible says that There's a Creator. And if we took a tree of his example, a scientist could spend his entire life studying the trees, their various component parts, how they grow and the cycles and all of this, and absolutely know nothing about what a tree is. You can describe it, but you know what he is. A tree, and we'll be simple here, but a tree is the unique, creative genius of God. for His glory and for the good and use of men. That's what a tree is. It's the creation of God. If you don't know that, you don't know anything about a tree in terms of its meaning and its significance. All facts are God created facts. And to know a fact truly, you have to know it in light of Scripture.

And I'm using this passage, that's not the purpose of this text, but it's a parable, an illustration of how we have this fact before Israel, a great role, four words written on it, They describe it, but they don't know what it is until the Word of God comes forward and says, This is a sign. These four words mean that Assyria is quickly going to spoil the riches of Damascus and Samaria. And now you know what it means.

In verses 5 to 8, we move on to another prophecy. The Assyrian invasion of Israel and Judah is given here, and we do not know when this prophecy was delivered, but it's gathered together here. As we don't know specifically when it was given, we know it was given generally during the time of the crisis of the Syrophony-Ephraimite war. But here's a prophecy now again about Assyria and it deals with both Israel and Judah. Verses 5 to 7 describe the invasion of Israel and verse 8 describes the invasion of Judah. In other words, both Israel and Judah, which are part of the covenant people of God, though divided because of the problems that came into the kingdom through Solomon's apostasy. But both of them, both peoples of God, the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom will be judged. And they will be judged by Assyria.

In verse 6, when he refers to this people, he's talking about the Israelites in the northern kingdom. The Lord spoke also unto me again, saying, Forasmuch as this people refuses the water of Shiloah, that goeth softly, and rejoice in resin and remilia's son. Now therefore, behold, the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the river, the strong, and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory. And he shall come up over all his banks, channels, and go over all his banks, and he shall pass through Judah, he shall overflow. and go over he shall reach even to the neck and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land oh Emmanuel 5 to 7 is the northern kingdom they're the ones that rejoiced in resin and remilia's son Judah didn't do that. We saw that in chapter 7 resin being the king of Syria and remilia's son the king of Israel. These the people of the northern kingdom who put their Hope and joy and these two kings are going to be overflowed, flooded is the way I should say it, by an overflowing river, the king of Assyria.

Here we have the metaphor of a flood now being used. The insect infestation overflowing the land, now we have waters overflowing the land. This should be very picturesque to all of us after what just happened in the Midwest. the Mississippi overflowing its banks and spreading out over the land and all the devastation and destruction that it brought and the people have refused the waters of Shiloah and that is a reference to the spring of Gihon no doubt that was in Jerusalem a little spring that provided the water for the people of Jerusalem the northern kingdom had rejected Jerusalem they had rejected the waters of Shiloah they had rejected peaceful relations with their brothers in the south. Instead, they chose to go to war against them. They rejected that peaceful water for the people or the kings of Rezin and Remilia. And now God's going to give them a flood. And it's going to be the Assyrians.

And then verse 8 moves on. The idea is that it will also pass through Judah. They're going to overflow their banks in the Euphrates River, which did overflow its banks and flood the land periodically and actually regularly each season. It's going to overflow its banks and it's going to flood into the land of the north. But it's not going to stop in the northern kingdom of Israel. It's going to keep on going. And it's going to come down and flood the land of Judah as well. What was striking about this passage is the end of it. Oh, Emmanuel. Chapter 7, verse 14, the child's name was Emmanuel. Here he is spoken of again. And this is significant. And this confirms the Messianic interpretation of chapter 7 and verse 14. Here we're told that the land of Judah belongs to Emmanuel, the one that the prophet has beheld. through the Word of God and this coming deliverer who would certify and bring to pass all of the promises to David. And though the land of Judah will be overflown, it is still the land of Emmanuel. The ultimate purpose of the nations against Judah cannot be fulfilled. The land of Judah belongs to Emmanuel. And that can only be a reference to the Lord God and His Messiah. And that's why all of the naturalistic interpretations of the

Emmanuel prophecy that we looked at a few weeks ago when we studied that passage don't fit. He's crying out to Emmanuel. The whole section comes to a close, leading from that phrase, O Emmanuel, to verses 9 and 10 where a warning is given to the nations.

He turns away from Judah and Israel whom he's been prophesying about in the verses before. And he now speaks to these nations such as the Egyptians and the Assyrians who will be serving God's purposes and becoming proud and believing that they themselves are the lords of history. There's a warning given to the nations by the prophet here. And it's a proclamation of their ultimate defeat. even though they appear at this time to be prospering and crushing underfoot the people of God. And the theology that's given here in verses 9 and 10 is the same theology and perspective as Psalm 2. You could put that in your margin if you mark your Bible. 9 and 10 are the same theology and teaching as Psalm 2. It says, Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces. Give ear, all ye far countries. Gird yourself, that is, prepare yourself for war, and you shall be broken in pieces. Gird yourselves, and you shall be broken in pieces, says it twice to make it very emphatic. Take counsel together, you rebellious nations, is the idea, and it will not come. It will come to naught. Speak the word. Lay out your plan. Speak what you're going to do and it will not stand. And literally, Emmanuel, the last words, the Hebrew, God is with us. Same phrase, interpreting God is with us.

So Emmanuel is spoken of again. Here in the sense of the significance of that name, it means God is with us. And that's why the nations are not ultimately going to prevail against God's people. And in our day in history, and we see the nations of the world, we see those who are declared enemies of God in our own nation, circling the Church of God, seeking to destroy it, taking their counsel, how they can destroy it, how they can render the testimony of the church naught, how they can break us. And throughout history, many have conspired to do that, be it nations or be it ideologies, be it political groups activists gathering together making their plans we've got them now the church shall fall God's word is this it will come to not it shall not stand why won't God's people be overthrown ultimately though they may be under the disciplinary hand of God which is what the context here is God may raise up Assyrians and Egyptians to discipline us but they will not destroy us they will not overcome us Why? For God is with us. Isaiah understood the significance and theology of the Emmanuel prophecy. It wasn't about Hezekiah, like we talked about, some think. It wasn't about some unnamed young maiden in Israel. It was about the one who can stay the hands of nations and the enemies of God who would destroy His church.

But let's take this to another perspective of application. Let's make it personal. Psalm 23 speaks of God's shepherding of His people. It speaks of the promise of God to a troubled, tried and tested believer walking through The valley of the shadow of death. And the valley

of the shadow of death in Psalm 23 is not specifically referring to the death process when we walk through death, though it can be applied to that. It means any dangerous, difficult, trying circumstance where our enemies are trying to destroy us, be it the world, the flesh, or the devil. But David says, I will not fear, for thou art with me. Thou art with me. And so the world, the flesh and the devil can associate itself together against you individually and seek to bring its counsel against you, to destroy you. But it will not come to pass if you're God's child. You may be tested to the limit, you may be humbled, you may be disciplined, but they will not succeed in overthrowing the faith that God has given to you through His Word and Spirit because God is with you. God is with us.

That's our hope in the midst of calamity and trials and difficulties. And though our enemies take counsel against us, we can flee to this passage. 10 and remember that it will not stand for Emmanuel, that is Christ, God is with us. We can also apply this to the church. Believers in a corporate sense We see the Psalm 23 in the individual sense, but we also hear the words of Christ as He sends His church out into the world, out into history, to face all of the foes of the Kingdom of God, all of the powers of darkness, all of the nations and kings who hate the truth, all of the enemies of God, they go out to face them with this message, unarmed, they have only the Word of God to take forth the truth. In the commission to disciple the nations, an impossible commission except for these words that he concludes it with, For I am with you, even to the end of the age. Isn't that striking? Matthew's gospel begins with the Emmanuel prophecy, God with us. It ends, the very last words are God with us, but Christ personally speaking them saying, I am with you, you will prevail. And that's the only basis upon which we could ever believe such a thing. Otherwise, we should fold our tents now and surrender to the enemy. If God is not with us, we cannot prevail because we're so much like the world ourselves. We're so infected with sin and unbelief and disobedience ourselves. So our hope is not in how good we are, how faithful we are. Ultimately, in all of history, God's people Even Isaiah in his day of darkness, when his people are in rebellion and the Assyrians are coming and the land is going to be humiliated and stripped of its wealth, put yourself in that man's position, please. His words were as he stood up in the midst of that day and shook his fist at God's command against those nations and saying, though you would destroy us, you're not going to ultimately succeed because God is with us. Let us pray.