

Immanuel the Stone – Isaiah 8

Introduction – Chapter 8 continues the narrative and expands the prophecies of Chapter 7. The sign for Ahaz becomes a sign for the whole nation: Immanuel, God with us. The nation doubts this is so. They are more concerned about the supposed conspiracies of their neighboring nations than to the presence of God in their midst. They endeavor to divine the future through magical means rather than seek the Lord's will and obey Him. God may be "with us," but God's people act as though that has little to do with any of the daily affairs of life, their national policies and practices, or their rising or falling economy. But Immanuel, God is there like a stone. He will be a stone of sanctuary and a stone of stumbling. The Stone does not change; the difference is in the heart of the one who stands before the Stone.

Overview – Isaiah's private prophecy to Ahaz "goes viral" as he announces the prophetic birth of his son as a sign to all of Judah, writing it out with witnesses for all to see (vv1-2). Isaiah "draws near" to his wife and she gives birth to *Mahe-Shalal-Hash-Baz*, "*Speed the Spoil, Hasten the Booty*," for Syria and Israel will quickly fall to the king of Assyria (vv3-4). But because Judah has rejected the LORD as their spring of life (symbolized in the gentle stream Shiloah) and instead trusts in the mighty River (the king of Assyria) that mighty river will overflow the banks of Judah one day and overwhelm the land (vv5-8). This will be the judgment of Immanuel, "God with us" (v8). At the same time, the nations are warned that their victories are not the final word just as judgment and destruction on Judah will not be the final word, for "God is with us" (vv9-10). Judgment is unto salvation when God is with us. Isaiah and any disciples who will listen to God's "strong hand" are charged not to listen to the conspiracy theories that cause the people to fear certain catastrophe, but instead to fear the LORD (vv11-13). The LORD is a stone and that stone is a sanctuary for the faithful as well as a stumbling block and a trap for those who will not trust Him (vv14-15). They are to bind up these prophecies and wait on the LORD; they are promised that they will be for signs and wonders of His powerful salvation (vv16-18). While waiting, refuse the temptation of the rest to turn to any popular superstitions or teachings rather than these promises and commands in the Word (vv 19-20). Those who have turned from the LORD will be driven to hunger and want, they will curse the king they trusted, the God they thought they knew, and will fall into deep distress, darkness, and gloom (vv21-22).

Streams of Living Waters – Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well that if she knew the gift of God she would ask Jesus for the drink that would be streams of living water (John 4:1-26). She looked at the well, looked at Jesus, and wondered where he could get that living water; she couldn't see it. Ahaz and all of Judah could not trust in the peaceful streams of Shiloah when the mighty River, Assyria was right there for them. Those who trust in God must look deeper than appearances; they must hear His Word/promises and believe that which often cannot be seen.

Learning to Apply the Promises (v12)– Some think that doing what I just did above (taking a specific promise given to Judah at a particular time and applying it generally and even into our own contemporary situations) is to misuse Scripture. Certainly, such promises can be perverted into a "name-it-claim-it" religion. But this is where we must let Scripture teach us how to do this properly and with wisdom. Writing to Christians in lands unfavorable to the Gospel, Peter encourages these believers not be afraid of the threats but to set themselves apart for God's purposes (1 Pet 3:13-17). He quotes Isaiah 8:12, applying that specific command to their contemporary situation. Set apart Christ in your heart and be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you.

The Stone Sanctuary (v14) – Peter quotes Isaiah 8:14 in a cascade of quotations surrounding the metaphor of Christ being "a living stone" (1 Pet 2:4-10). These prophecies are ultimately about Jesus Who is Immanuel, and the New Israel coming out from the Old. Falling upon the Stone, we become living stones and a holy priesthood. We are spiritual Levites in the spiritual temple. He is the Stone that saves and the Stone that judges and destroys. "*They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed*" (1 Pet 2:8). God's perfect sovereignty is never an excuse for our own responsibility, our own sin. Same stone, different outcomes. Two races. Two destinies.

Children of Signs and Wonders (v18) – Isaiah declares that he and his children are for signs and wonders. But the author of Hebrews tells us that this is actually speaking of Jesus and all those who are in Him (Heb 2:10-13). If you are a child of Immanuel, He has for you destroyed him who had the power of death by His death. He has also released us from the fear of death (Heb 2:14-15).

Back to the River – And this all ties us back to the motif of the river. Old Israel rejected the peaceful river of Shiloah (Isaiah 8:6), but God is at work and another river will flow through Judah one day, bringing glory to the City (Isaiah 66:12). That river shall be the Gentile nations flowing into the New Jerusalem where all men will finally be at peace (Isaiah 2:2, 4). We are that New Jerusalem, and that river has begun to flow to all nations (Rev 22:1-5).