



# **Fear Killer**

A Study of Isaiah 8: 11-18

by

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**Abstract:** Fear is the one thing that weakens the strongest of human beings, making them unable to do what must be done. But there is one thing that can break fear once and for all and this is found in Isaiah 8:11-18. Learn more about this great liberator through this sermon.

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# Fear Killer

A Study of Isaiah 8: 11-18

## I. Shaky Times

**E**ver been afraid of something? For me it's people. I don't like to talk to ones I don't know, even if I'm interested in finding out more about them. For others it's the times we live in. They're afraid to get on a plane because it might be blown out of the sky. They're afraid to go to a public place, since they may be attacked. They're afraid of sending their kids to a public school, since they will be corrupted and turned away from the Truth. We're all afraid of something and if we let that fear stand, we'll be destroyed. What we really need is a Fear Killer, something that will help us overcome our fears.

In many ways Isaiah lived in a time similar to ours, where fear was rampant, and people were constantly looking to find ways to protect themselves. During his day and age the little kingdom of Judah was nothing more than a play thing for the more powerful powers, such as the northern kingdom of Israel, now ruled by Pekah Ben Remaliah, and Aram, ruled by the cruel Rezin of Damascus. These two were planning to depose Ahaz, king of Judah, and replace him with Ben-Tabel, undoubtedly one of their minions in Judah. In looking for a way to secure himself, Ahaz decided to ally himself with the biggest bully on the block, Assyria. People were whispering, conspiring, trying to find a way out. Undoubtedly various conspiracy theories were rampant as to what was really going on up at the palace.

In the midst of all of this was Isaiah, his wife and two sons, and his disciples. Isaiah is the *key* book of the Old Testament, because it holds much of the salvation theology in the Bible. Some people have called his book the Romans of the Old Testament, a very apt comparison. Isaiah's ministry began right at the time of King Uzziah's death in about 740 BC and continued on until at least 680 BC, when he was said to have been slain by the evil King Manasseh. He is often called the Prince of Prophets, which is underscored by the tradition that he was of noble blood and related to the House of David. He attempted to advise Ahaz, who would not have anything to do with Isaiah's suggestions about how to run his kingdom, feigning piety to put off the prophet. Neither God nor Isaiah were put off by Ahaz's self-centered, godless perspective, and God continued to use Isaiah to speak forth His truth.

It seems, though, that some time around 734, Isaiah may have become a bit discouraged and so God sends him this message, right after the birth of his second son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz<sup>1</sup>. I will begin reading in Isaiah 8:5.

<sup>5</sup> Again Yahweh spoke to me further, saying,

<sup>6</sup> "Because this people has rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah, <sup>7</sup> now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the Euphrates, the king of Assyria and all his glory; and it will rise up over all its channels and run over all its banks. <sup>8</sup> Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck and the spread of its wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!"

<sup>9</sup> Be broken, O people, and be shattered.

Listen, all you distant lands.

Gird yourselves for battle and be shattered;

Gird yourselves for battle and be shattered!

<sup>10</sup> Devise a plan and it will be thwarted

State a proposal and it will not stand

For God is with us!

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrew: מַהֵר-שָׁלַל-חָשׁ-בַּז = *maher-shālāl-hāš-bāz*

<sup>11</sup> For thus spoke Yahweh unto me, *laying* a hand of great strength *upon me* and admonishing me from being caused to walk in the way of this people, saying:

<sup>12</sup> “Do not say ‘conspiracy’ to all this people say conspiracy to.

And their mighty fear do not fear and do not cause yourselves to tremble.

<sup>13</sup> Yahweh, Lord of Hosts, you are to hallow:

He, your mighty fear and He, your cause of trembling.

<sup>14</sup> And Yahweh will be a sanctuary and a stone of striking and a rock of stumbling to the two houses of Israel and a bird-trap and a lure in a fowler’s net to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

<sup>15</sup> And many of them will stumble and they will fall and will be broken and they will be snared in a fowler’s net and will be captured.”

<sup>16</sup> Bind up the testimony! Seal up the law with those I taught!

<sup>17</sup> But I will wait for Yahweh as He hides His face from the house of Israel, I will wait eagerly for Him.

<sup>18</sup> Behold here am I and the boy-children which Yahweh had given to me to be signs and portents in Israel from the hand of Yahweh, the dweller on Mount Zion.<sup>2</sup>

## II. Sanctuary (vv. 11-14a)

Isaiah had a real issue to deal with. Here were the vast majority of the people in his land walking away from God, some blissfully ignorant of that fact, others doing it out of spiteful self-interest. Either way, he’s left with a small minority in a rapidly tottering land which is about to be overrun by the mightiest war machine of its time. There is no question that the safety of his family and his pupils would not be upper-most in his mind. The thing is that they were not merely in danger of being conquered, if the Assyrians took over, they would be forced to abandon Yahweh, the one true God, and worship the false deities of the Assyrians. Yes, Isaiah had reason to fear. But God cuts into all that.

<sup>11</sup> For thus spoke Yahweh unto me, *laying* a hand of great strength *upon me* and admonishing me from being caused to walk in the way of this people, saying:

<sup>12</sup> “Do not say ‘conspiracy’ to all this people say conspiracy to.

And their mighty fear do not fear and do not cause yourselves to tremble.

<sup>13</sup> Yahweh, Lord of Hosts, you are to hallow:

He, your mighty fear and He, your cause of trembling.

<sup>14</sup> And Yahweh will be a sanctuary

In order to underline how important this was to Him, God gave Isaiah an extremely potent experience to let him know how serious He, God, was about this. Often when a message from God is connected to an emotional experience it sticks with us longer, as we are emotional beings. It melds to our souls and makes us remember more clearly. This was such an experience for Isaiah, and when we look at the rest of this oracle, that continues on into chapter nine, we find that the message that God gave to His servant was one that would have to stick with him.

The point here was that Isaiah not allow himself to slip into the path of the people who were not walking close to God. That is so easy to do. One little look the other way and we can easily float off of the path, if just slightly. The Enemy is so good at producing palatable counterfeits that cause us to rely on ourselves, and not on God.

And in many ways that is what the sons of Israel were doing. These “conspiracies” here were not so much conspiracies of the people against the government, or the government against the people, it was more of the people conspiring against God. Yahweh has told His people again and again that He is their mainstay and that they should trust in Him and all will be well. But, no, they decide that they want to go after other gods and take their destiny into their own hands. God promised to punish them and part of that punishment is the fear that they have.

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<sup>2</sup> Author’s direct translation from the Hebrew with some reliance on the NASB.

In a sense the things that they feared were quite great. Ahaz feared not only for his life, but for the health of his kingdom. In a society where the king is not just the ruler, but the protector and sustainer of his people, he had a lot to worry about. It wasn't enough that his army didn't have enough power in and of itself to repulse his northern neighbors, he probably even had people in his ranks that were going to try to assassinate him from below, if that's who this Ben-Tabel was. The people had their own lives and welfare to worry about and it seems that they were all going about life constantly looking over their shoulders to see what would come next. Ahaz figured that if he was able to get some help from the bigger boys up the Euphrates, then he would be able to not be afraid any more.

It would have been very easy for Isaiah and his little troop to feel the same way. After all, Assyria's conquering them would at best make their faith subordinate to the false Assyrian gods, and at worst the worship of the One God would be completely eradicated altogether. It was easy to look at the vista and tremble.

We're living in much of a similar situation here. In this land many of us tremble at various things: the possibility of terrorist attacks, the safety of our children's minds when they go to school, their physical well-being there, our own safety on the roads, the people who run our towns like their own personal businesses, the liberal-atheistic-humanist movements in this country that threaten to choke our religious freedom, the roller coaster of our economy and so forth and so on. These are all valid things to be worried about and it is easy to be overwhelmed by these enemies who seem so potent and powerful, but this is where the words of Yahweh are applied to us as well.

God's answer to all of this is simple:

<sup>13</sup> Yahweh, Lord of Hosts, you are to hallow:  
He, your mighty fear and He, your cause of trembling.

The first thing we should notice is the epithet "Lord of Hosts." The NIV will translate that as "Almighty" and it does capture one of the facets of this name. This is God's military name. Yahweh, Lord of Hosts, was the one who fought for Israel when Joshua swept into the Promised Land. He fought for Israel when the Judges governed His people. He was the mighty war-leader who went before David and threw his enemies at his feet. Time and again He arose and routed His people's enemies. He uses this term of the Warrior God in a time when a true Martial Deity is needed. The One God has not changed. The Celts often talked about Him as the Swift Sure Hand, the one who could protect His people, the one whose weapon would not fail to hit the mark *each and every time*. That God is our God, people. Jesus is not a meek and mild man with a refined, effeminate face and weak arms riding on a donkey. He is a mighty warrior who rides on a white stallion, with the army of heaven at His back. His robe is stained with the blood of His enemies. He has raised the sword for His people more often than we can count! What a God! We have our own personal Warrior God who will wipe out His enemies. Our God is Yahweh, Lord of Hosts!

When we truly realize this we will automatically want to hallow Him, or set Him apart from all the rest. He is already holy in every sense of the word: perfect, set apart, lofty, exalted, totally sinless. But in our lives He is either hallowed or not. Part of this hallowing is that we are to fear Him. Now, notice the term *fear*. We have often changed this to "reverence Him", to "respect Him", to "honor Him". And I might be inclined to agree at times, but not in this passage. When the Hebrew authors wanted to make a point they'd use two terms to describe it and in looking at these two words we realize what the meaning really is. God is to be our fear and our dread, or more accurately, our cause of trembling. Anyone who has come face to face with a roaring bear will no longer be afraid of a snarling dog. No

one who has fallen off of a ship into the ocean will be intimidated by a kiddie pool any more. When someone has looked death straight in the eye and has prevailed, he will not be afraid receiving of a few cuts and bruises. Anyone who has looked on the face of God and has felt the awesome power of His majesty and glory, has trembled at His feet, has *experienced* the amazing weight of His holiness, will ever be afraid of anything else on this earth again. We're not made for this earth, people, we're made for what's beyond it. There is *nothing* we should be afraid of here! *Nothing!*

Peter takes up this very thought in his first letter. Let's take a look at I Peter 3:14-15

But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;<sup>3</sup>

"Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." I struggle with this, as I do with fear, in a lot of things and I seek to be safe and comfortable. I hate calling people on the phone that I don't know. I still struggle with this. I am in essence the kind of person who would be content to sit in a little back room and push electronic papers from one side of the desk to another. Standing up here is scary, too, but I can do it, because I have a *big* God. I have a God who is my sanctuary. And that is what God will become to those who hallow Him and fear Him.

<sup>14</sup> And Yahweh will be a sanctuary

What is a sanctuary? We have kind of lost the meaning of that term. We are in a sanctuary here in this building, that is what we call this large hall. When we look at what it was in Scripture, the Sanctuary was the Temple, where people came to worship. It was a city where a man who had killed another could flee to to be protected from the righteous wrath of the victim's relatives. It was at the



horns of the sacrificial altar where an accused criminal could cling to be protected, where a sinner could come to be cleansed. A sanctuary was a place that was two-fold.

1. A place where the divine and the mortal could meet.
2. A place of safety where none could intrude.

The best picture that comes to my mind of a sanctuary is the great cathedral of Freiburg, Germany. The outside towered over me, making me feel small and insignificant, the towers reaching towards the sky. It was awe-inspiring. Inside it was dimly lit, a high vault, and yet there was a feeling there of warmth, peace, a place where one might come to rest and contemplate. A place where God could be found. That is the picture I get.

And here Yahweh Himself is our sanctuary. Not only is He our Warrior God, He is our resting-place, where we can meet the Divine and be transformed.

**Beneath Freiburg Cathedral**

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<sup>3</sup> NASB

How might that play into our every-day lives? Well, in taking time to get away from it all and find refuge in Him every day as we pray and meditate on His Word. When we emerge from the solitude of God's sanctuary, we carry it with us the entire day and, clinging to these truths, we will be insulated from the fears and tremors of this timorous world.

### III. *Stumbling Stone (vv. 14b-15)*

**B**ut what happens when we reject the Sanctuary and cling to the fears and tremors of this world? Take a look in verses 14 and 15.

<sup>14</sup> And Yahweh will be a sanctuary and a stone of striking and a rock of stumbling to the two houses of Israel and a bird-trap and a lure in a fowler's net to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

<sup>15</sup> And many of them will stumble and they will fall and will be broken and they will be snared in a fowler's net and will be captured."

Where He is a safe haven for those who hallow Him, He is a stumbling stone to those who will not believe Him. When Truth is rejected, there is only a lie to cling to. When one turns from light, there is only darkness and God becomes a stumbling stone to those who will not hold to Him. A person who turns from God will stumble and then he will fall and in the end he will be broken by that stone that he's trying to escape. Jesus is just such a stumbling block to many. They'd love to embrace the simpler values of the church and lead a "sanctified" life for the benefits of it, but they don't want to accept that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. They don't want to accept that He is God or that He died. You can't do that, or else you will stumble over Him. Peter again put it very aptly in his first letter. Take a look at I Peter 2:4-8.



Inside Freiburg Cathedral

And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: "Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed." This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "the stone which the builders rejected, this became the very corner stone," and, "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.<sup>4</sup>

In the end effect God is not only a stumbling block but a snare in which they will be caught. There is no getting away from Him. In the end He will prevail and all humans will come before Him to be judged. In essence we judge ourselves by either choosing Christ or not choosing Him. Once we reject Him, that's it, we've judged ourselves and will be sentenced. When we do choose Him, we turn to a better life, both here on Earth and in the World to come.

### IV. *Signs and Portents (vv. 16-18)*

**S**o what is Isaiah's response to all of this? What is it that he calls out? Let's take a look at vv.16-18.

<sup>16</sup> Bind up the testimony! Seal up the law with those I taught!

<sup>4</sup> NASB

<sup>17</sup> But I will wait for Yahweh as He hides His face from the house of Israel, I will wait eagerly for Him.

<sup>18</sup> Behold here am I and the boy-children which Yahweh had given to me to be signs and portents in Israel from the hand of Yahweh, the dweller on Mount Zion.

First of all he calls for his testimony and the law of the Lord to be bound and sealed, both images of preserving and verifying documents. The testimony is true, it does not need to be added to! The law is complete, it is all that is needed to please God. It is for those who will fear God and not man. It is for those to whom Yahweh is the sanctuary.

Those of us who have accepted Christ will understand the Law of God and the Testimony of the Believers in a way that none outside of our ranks can. We have the special insight into its truths through the Holy Spirit that only a child of God can. So it is sealed up before the eyes of the world.

And so Isaiah chooses to wait for Yahweh, even though it seems He's gone away. Isaiah uses two terms here. One is simply waiting, like one who is waiting to get the next day's paper. It is a knowledge that this will happen and we take it for granted. The second term builds on the first. It is an eager, expectant waiting, like the affianced bride for her wedding day, like the father for his prodigal son's return, like the church ought to be waiting for the return of her Lord. Isaiah has *chosen* to wait like this! Instead of trembling and looking at the darkness, he has turned to look at the light and to wait for it to break over this world.

This is to be our attitude. We must wait expectantly and not let our eyes stray from the goal. We can do this by constantly reminding ourselves of who our God really is, the One who is faithful, the One who will fight for us. He is the Good Gifting Giver, the Swift Sure Hand, the Redeeming Lamb, the Mighty Warrior, the Wonder of Counsel, the God of Might, the Father of Eternity, and the Prince of Peace.

What do these terms mean to you? Are they mere words, mere pictures? Or are you're your life-blood, bread and butter, air you breath? What images do they conjure up of this One who has chosen us? How *real* is God to us? How real is He to me?

He was real to Isaiah, so real in fact that he makes this statement:

<sup>18</sup> Behold here am I and the boy-children which Yahweh had given to me to be signs and portents in Israel from the hand of Yahweh, the dweller on Mount Zion.

Names are important in Scripture and four are mentioned in the passages prior to this one. These are Isaiah himself, whose name Yeshahu<sup>5</sup> means "salvation is in Yahweh". His first-born was Shear-Jashub<sup>6</sup>, "a remnant will return" whose name underscored the promise of restoration. His second son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, was a reminder of the impending judgment as his name literally meant, "swift is the booty, speedy to the prey." And then there was the fourth child, Immanuel<sup>7</sup> who would be born to a young woman, presumably one of the women in the court, whose name meant "With us God!" a triumphant shout that the One had not left them alone.

Also, following this passage is one boy-child who has not yet been born, yet who has already been given, the one who bears four names of importance: Wonder of Counsel, God of Might, Father of Eternity, and Prince of Peace. These first four point to the last with four names. Indeed they are signs and portents to a godless nation as their names held forth the truth of God to those around them.

<sup>5</sup> Hebrew: יֵשָׁהוּא : *yāša'c-yāhû*

<sup>6</sup> Hebrew: שְׁעַר־יֵשׁוּב : *šə'ar-yašub*

<sup>7</sup> Hebrew: אִמָּנוּאֵל : *immānū'ēl*

What about us? Are we signs and portents to the people of our world? We had better be. When the name “Christian” – little Christ – raises the hackles of others, it means they are reminded of the Truth behind that name. When the name Jesus – “Yahweh saves” – causes people to get angry, it means they have been confronted by what that Name signifies. When they see how we live, how we interact, how we fearlessly move in life, afraid of the Only One who is truly worth fearing, then we are signs and portents of a time to come, when all fear will be replaced by the fear of the One, when the True King will reign and the Swift Sure Hand will guide all.

#### ***V. The Fear-Killer***

**T**here truly is a Fear-Killer, one who can make us not fear anything on this earth and that is Yahweh, the One God.

When we choose to make Him the most important one in our lives and we fear Him sufficiently, He will be our sanctuary and we will not fear anything else.

If we choose to not do that He will become a stumbling stone to us and in the end, if we don't turn and embrace Him, we will be crushed by Him.

Our response to this should be to wait eagerly for Him and to actively be signs and portents to the community around us, shining out the truth of the One God who is coming to reign over this whole earth in truth and justice.

## Sources

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