

THREE REASONS TO TRUST IN THE LORD

8 Then Jehovah said to me, "Take a large tablet and write upon it in plain letters: Quick to the plunder, Swift to the spoil. ²I will call Uriah the priest and Zechariah, son of Jeberekiah, as reliable witnesses to record my testimony." ³So I had intercourse with the prophetess and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. Then Jehovah said to me, "Name him Maher-Shalal-hash-baz; ⁴for before the child knows how to say, My father, or, My mother, the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria." ⁵Jehovah spoke to me again, saying, ⁶"Because this people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah and are white [with fear] before Rezin and the son of Remaliah, ⁷the Lord will therefore bring upon them the mighty flood waters of the [Euphrates] River—the king of Assyria and all his glory." It will overflow all its channels and run over all its banks. ⁸It will sweep on into Judah, swirling over it, passing through it and reaching as high as the neck. Its outstretched wings will cover the breadth of your land, O Immanuel!

⁹Make an uproar, O you peoples, and be shattered! Listen, all you distant lands. Prepare for battle, and be shattered! Prepare for battle, and be shattered! ¹⁰Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted! Announce your plan, but it will not succeed!—for God is with us! ¹¹[I proclaim these things] because Jehovah spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, instructing me not to follow the way of these people. He said, ¹²"With regard to all that these people speak of as 'The alliance!' you must not say, 'Oh, the alliance!' Do not fear what they fear, nor be in dread of it. ¹³Jehovah of hosts, him you must sanctify; he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread—¹⁴and he will be a sanctuary [for you]. But for both the houses of Israel he will be a stone over which men stumble and a rock at which they take offense. He will be a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵Many of them will stumble—they will fall and be broken; they will be snared and captured."

¹⁶Bind up the Testimony, and seal the Law among my disciples! ¹⁷I will wait for Jehovah, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, I will look to him. ¹⁸Look! I and the children whom Jehovah has given me are [given as] signs and wonders to Israel from Jehovah of hosts, the One who dwells on Mount Zion. ¹⁹When men ask you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter; ask them, Should not a people consult their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰[Instruct them to ask you to look] to the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not make this request, there will be no light of dawn for them. ²¹They will wander through the land distressed and hungry—and when they are famished, they will become enraged, and looking upward, they will curse their King and their God. ²²Then they will look toward the earth, but they shall see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be driven into utter darkness. (Isa. 8:1-22)

Introduction

The date was February 2, 1980. The place was cellblock number four in the New Mexico State Penitentiary. Randy Pense, an inmate who had recently been converted to Christ, needed help. Indeed, all the inmates of E-1 dormitory unit needed help. A

riot had broken out in the prison and an armed band of rioting prisoners was coming down the corridor, headed for the E-1 dormitory unit.

The date was approximately 739 B.C. The place was Jerusalem. King Ahaz needed help. Indeed, all of Jerusalem needed help. The nations of Syria and Israel, aligned together, were attacking Judah, coming down against Jerusalem.

What would you do if you were in Randy Pense's situation? What would you do if you were in king Ahaz's situation? What do you do when you are in need of help?

The lesson of Isaiah 8 is the reminder that, even though we may bear the name of the LORD, we are at times tempted to ignore or even discount the LORD as our Source of help. That is what king Ahaz and the people of Jerusalem were guilty of doing.

Because we are so prone to discount Him as our Source of help, the LORD graciously supplies us with ample reasons to trust Him. Let us now consider those divine reasons.

I. Trust in the LORD, ...Because He is Reliable (Isa. 8:1-4)

The LORD commands Isaiah to take "*a large tablet*" and write upon it "*in plain letters*" (vs.1.) The prophet is to record the message he is about to receive from God and to make it very plain for all to see. It is to be highly visible (written on "*a large tablet*," like a modern day billboard,) and it is to be very intelligible (written "*in plain letters*," i.e.; written in common, ordinary language.)

Isaiah is instructed to inscribe upon the tablet the words, "*Quick to the plunder, Swift to the spoil*;" (in Hebrew: "*Maher Shalal Hash Baz.*") This is a prophecy of the impending doom of those two enemy nations (Syria and Israel) whom Judah feared.

The LORD Himself declares that He will call two men (Uriah and Zechariah) to serve as witnesses for Him (vs. 2.) These two men will bear witness that Isaiah has received this message from God at this time; so that when it is fulfilled they may bear witness that the LORD, indeed, foretold these events and was faithful to bring them to fruition.

Isaiah now testifies that he then proceeded to have intercourse with the prophetess, his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son (vs. 3.) The LORD instructs Isaiah to give this son the name "*Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.*" This infant son is to be a living word of prophecy, bearing the same message as the word inscribed upon the large tablet. The LORD testifies that before the child can speak his first words ("*My father, My mother*,") Syria and Israel shall be conquered.

The LORD provides these witnesses—the message inscribed on the large tablet and the child who bears the same message in his name—in order to verify the fact that He is absolutely reliable. When the prophesied conquest of Judah’s enemies came to pass, the LORD can say to Judah, “I gave you My Word, and now you see that I have kept My Word. I am reliable!” Indeed, within five years the two enemies of Judah, Syria and Israel, were both defeated by the Assyrian empire—just as the LORD had foretold.

Let us be sure to trust in the LORD our God, because the LORD is reliable. Whatever dilemma or trial we may face, let us heed the counsel of Proverbs 3:5-6, *“Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and do not depend upon your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.”* Let us take comfort from Deuteronomy 7:9 *“Know, therefore, that Jehovah your God is God; he is the faithful God who keeps his covenant and lovingkindness with a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.”* Let us find comfort and encouragement from the godly counsel of the hymn writers, knowing that their testimony, based upon Scripture, is also their own personal experience of the truth of Scripture:

Every joy or trial falls from above,
Traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love;
We may trust Him fully all for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly find him wholly true.
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blessed,
Finding as He promised, perfect peace and rest.
(Frances R. Havergal)

II. Trust in the LORD, ...Because It is Foolhardy to Do Anything Else (Isa. 8:5-8,19-22)

The LORD charges that the people of Judah have rejected *“the gently flowing waters of Shiloah”* (vs. 6.) *“The waters of Shiloah”* refer to the spring from which the city of Jerusalem received her water supply; a source that appeared as an unimpressive little brook. Just as *“the waters of Shloah”* appeared as a little brook instead of a mighty river; so, too, to the people of Judah the help of the LORD appeared to be inconsequential and inadequate to meet their present need.

Do you ever view God and His divine aid in the same way that Old Testament Judah did? Do you think to yourself, “Not even God can help me in my present situation”? (You view your problem as being beyond the reach and the ability of Almighty God.) Do you appreciate what a low view of God such thinking entertains? It is thinking that maintains the blasphemous notion that God is extremely limited in what He can do, He cannot even help me! Next time we are tempted to think in such terms about God, let us label it for what it is, blasphemy; and then join Jeremiah in declaring the truth: *“Oh Lord Jehovah! You have made*

the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for you!" (Jer. 32:17.)

The LORD goes on to declare that these people *"are white [with fear] before Rezin and the son of Remaliah"* (vs. 6b.) Note: The Hebrew word, שִׁיחַ, has the root meaning, "to be bright;" it can be rendered "to rejoice in," or, with a slight variation in the pointing, it may be rendered "to be white [with fright]." The people of Judah have looked upon the combined forces of Syria and Israel as an overwhelming threat, something that is too big for God to handle, and consequently, something that leaves them terror-stricken.

Whenever we foolishly minimize God (and what He can do) we inevitably magnify our problem or dilemma totally out of proportion. In a sense, we idolize our problem, viewing it as being bigger than God; consequently, we fear it and feel overwhelmed by it. The next time we find ourselves engaged in such thinking, let us call to mind the prayer of Jeremiah, *"Oh Lord Jehovah! Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for you"* (Jer. 32:17.)

The LORD declares that because His people have viewed His divine help as being nothing more than an insignificant little stream (inadequate to meet their present need,) He is going to bring against them the raging waters of *"the [Euphrates] River"*—the Euphrates was the river that formed the border of the land of Assyria (vs. 7-8.) The Assyrian army is compared to the Euphrates River, overflowing its banks, sweeping through the nations of Syria and Israel, and then continuing on with uncontrollable force to "flood" the land of Judah as well. If you reject the LORD as your Source of help and salvation, if you look elsewhere for "more adequate" resources, the LORD will cause those other "resources" to become a greater source of trouble to you than what you are now facing.

In the face of this "raging River," Isaiah desperately calls out to his countrymen, *"Look!"* (Pay attention!) *"I and the children whom Jehovah has given me are given as signs and wonders to Israel from Jehovah of hosts, the One who dwells on mount Zion"* (vs. 18.) The name Isaiah means "Salvation is from Jehovah;" and the names of his sons, *"Shear-Jashub"* and *"Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz,"* mean "A remnant shall return" and "Quick to the plunder, Swift to the spoil." Isaiah is exhorting Judah to turn to the LORD, assuring them that He is able and willing to provide for their salvation; but if they do not turn to Him, there is no hope. In the event they do not trust in the LORD their God, they shall experience the fact that the Assyrians will be "Quick to the plunder, Swift to the spoil"—there will be no stopping them. The LORD is near, ready to supply His divine assistance and administer His salvation, if we call upon Him: *"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me"* (Psl. 50:15.)

But verse 19 tragically depicts the spiritual apostasy of the nation of Judah. The LORD informs Isaiah that the people will, indeed, approach him, but they will not come seeking the LORD their God. On the contrary, they will actually request the prophet of the LORD to contact mediums and spiritists on their behalf. In their hour of need they will abandon all faith and confidence in the LORD; either viewing Him as unable to help them, or spitefully rejecting Him because of what He has seen fit to bring into their lives to discipline them and chastise them, (namely, first the combined forces of Syria and Israel, and now the *"flood waters of the[Euphrates] River"* in the form of the invading Assyrian armies.)

Do you view the sovereign God as unable to come to your rescue? Do you view the faithful God who did not spare His own Son as being unwilling to come to your rescue? Are you angry with God because of what He has brought into your life, or because He has not done what you desired Him to do? Does this now cause you to stubbornly turn away from the LORD, intentionally spurning His aid in your time of need, and look to ungodly sources out of sheer spite? If this describes your spiritual attitude, you need to heed the counsel of Hosea 10:12b, *"it is time to seek the LORD."*

Now comes the warning of the fate of those who refuse to heed the call to seek the LORD and trust in Him: *"there will be no light of dawn for them ... they will be driven into utter darkness"*—they shall have no hope and no deliverance (vs. 20-22.)

Let us be sure to trust in the LORD our God, because it is foolhardy to do anything else.

III. Trust in the LORD,

...Because He Offers Himself as a Place of Refuge (Isa. 8:9-14)

As Isaiah envisions the fierce Assyrian armies advancing into Judah like the raging waters of the Euphrates when it overflows its banks, he meets them with confidence, even defiance (vs. 9.) *"Make an uproar!"*—let your war cry be as fierce as the roaring of many mighty waters!. *"O you peoples"*—Isaiah looks beyond the immediately impending invasion by the Assyrians and views it as a type of the hostility that all the world will express against Christ and His church—*and be shattered!" "Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted!"*—the nations are invited to act together in concert, to form a strong alliance against the people of the Messiah, but any such counsel and plan shall prove to be finally ineffective against Christ and His people and be brought to nothing. *"Announce your plan, but it shall not succeed!"*—the enemy nations are invited and challenged to make known their evil intentions, but no such things will be able to finally prevail against the LORD and His people.

Isaiah's source of confidence is the fact that the LORD has spoken. Isaiah has the LORD's sure promise of provision and divine protection (vs. 12-14,) and Isaiah

places his trust in the LORD's promise (vs. 11.) Isaiah informs us of the word the LORD has spoken to him. First, Isaiah is instructed, *"Do not fear what your countrymen fear"*—they were terror-stricken and filled with despair when they contemplated the fate of their nation and their own fate; they spoke of *"the alliance"* between Israel and Syria, whom they viewed as being an unconquerable foe that was sure to annihilate them and from whom there was no deliverance (vs.12.) (Note: The Hebrew term usually translated "conspiracy," is derived from the word קָשָׁר, which has the root meaning, "to bind, to tie, to be closely joined;" it is referring here to the alliance between the two enemies of Judah, the nations of Israel and Syria.) Second, Isaiah is exhorted, *"Sanctify the LORD"*—that is to say, regard the LORD as being high and exalted, and reverence Him with the godly fear due Him (vs. 13.) When Isaiah heeds this exhortation, he will find that the LORD shall be his sanctuary (vs. 14a)—the LORD shall be a Refuge for him, a sure and safe retreat.

But for both the houses of Israel the LORD will be *"a stone over which men stumble and a rock at which they take offense ... many of them will stumble—they will fall and be broken"* (vs. 14b-15.) The imagery here is of men stumbling over what they perceive to be a little stone in the middle of the pathway, which they had overlooked. Upon stumbling over this insignificant little stone they become offended by it and seek to kick it out of their way, only to find that their foot is broken against it, because this "little stone" is in fact a huge rock deeply imbedded in the ground. The point of the imagery is that the men of Israel and Judah have viewed the LORD, the mighty Rock of Israel, to be nothing more than "a little stone;" they despise Him and reject Him. But by so doing they incur His wrath and succumb to His divine judgment; rather than "kicking this little stone out of the way," they themselves *"will fall and be broken."*

Isaiah declares that the LORD has spoken to him *"with his strong hand upon me"* (vs. 11.) As the LORD spoke to him, He laid His strong hand upon Isaiah, enabling Isaiah to experience the LORD's strengthening presence in time of need. This is also the testimony of the Apostle Paul: *"the Lord stood by me, and strengthened me"* (2 Tim. 4:17.)

Let us be sure to trust in the LORD our God, because He offers Himself to us as a sure place of refuge, in our present times of trial and on the final day of divine judgment. As the hymn writer, Isaac Watts, phrases it:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood, from Your pierced side that flowed,
Be for sin the double cure; cleanse me from its guilt and power.

While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyelids close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown, see You on Your judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.

Conclusion

What did Randy Pense do on the morning of February 2, 1980, as that armed band of rioting prisoners poured down the corridor and threatened to overflow the E-1 dormitory unit? He relates his experience:

Get up and look out the door! It was 1:30 a.m. on February 2, 1980, when that thought came into my head. I was a prisoner in the penitentiary of New Mexico in the E-1 dormitory unit.

Get up and look out the door! The words came to me as I lay on my bed, less than ten feet from the door to our unit. I ignored the message. But seconds later the urging came to me again, and this time it didn't sound like a request. It sounded like a command—from God.

Having received Christ as my Savior some time earlier, I wanted to do what the Lord wished. So I went to the door. Looking out, I saw inmates coming downstairs with towels masking their faces. It was a takeover, a riot! I'd heard rumors five months before that a riot was going to take place in the prison. Some inmates, apparently due to longstanding rivalries and hatreds, wanted to kill those in our unit.

I started to rouse the other inmates of E-1 in the corridor. Unlike some other units, we could group together rather than being isolated in single cells. Together we rushed to barricade our door against the attackers, using anything we could find. The barricade rose, and not a moment too soon. Less than a minute after it was up, the rioters were at our door.

I was thankful God had warned me to look out the door. My prayers continued as the siege got underway ...

As I prayed for God to provide us with a way of escape, the rioters attacked our barricade, trying to cut through it with an acetylene torch. But an inmate from our unit doused the torch with water. The rioters tried several times to re-ignite the flame, but failed. Instead of going after another torch, they aborted the attempt. But they didn't give up their attack. Next the rioters shot tear gas into the unit, hoping we would tear down the barricade and evacuate. But the tear gas drifted back onto our attackers. Again they retreated from our door. I praised God.

The rebels set our barricade on fire and shut off our water supply in an attempt to keep us from protecting it. That way they could push their way through. But, even without water, we were able to get close enough to the fire to extinguish it before it became too hot and smoky. The attempts having failed, the rioters tried to talk us into coming out. Their promise: that they would not hurt us, but only wanted us to help them with the riot. To show their "good" intentions, they tossed a

heavy mechanic's wrench in to us. "If we wanted to hurt you, we wouldn't have given you our weapon," one of them said. None of us was foolish enough to believe the wrench was the only weapon they possessed. Several of us had seen dozens of inmates with various weapons ...

I knew throughout these attempts that it was God, and God only, who was preventing the rioters from getting into our unit and doing their damage. Nothing else could explain their failures so far. Humanly speaking, any one of the attempts should have been enough.

But what of the way of escape I'd prayed for? Surely we couldn't hold out forever. Several of the bigger inmates in our unit were trying to knock out a window, using a heavy bed. Our plan was to escape to the safety of a guard tower. But the window would not budge. Then we remembered the wrench—the one thrown to us by the rioters as a "friendly" gesture. Abandoning the bed, our inmates picked up the wrench and went to work on the window. Very slowly the little steel frames started to give way.

Around dawn the rioters began to make more savage and frequent attempts to get into E-1. Finally, about five and one-half hours after the riot's start, we had to set the barricade on fire ourselves to discourage any more attempts. But the smoke and heat also pushed us back. Soon the unit became so hot and thick with smoke that some of the exhausted inmates grew dizzy. If something didn't happen soon, we would be finished. Just as the fire and smoke became completely unbearable, the wrench tore a hole through the window. Here was our escape route!

Still, the danger wasn't over. As soon as two of our men had gone out the window, guards shouted for us to stay away from the window or be shot. No one else attempted to climb out. But I believed God would not allow us to be harmed now, since it was He who had provided our escape route. "I'll go out," I told the others. I did. The guards fired twice in response. But God prevented me from being hit, and allowed me to plead for the rest of the inmates. For close to a minute the guards and I shouted back and forth. Finally they allowed the rest of the inmates to come through the window. We were safe!

The ways in which God had protected us that night were many. His warning me to "Get up and look out the door" saved lives in our unit that night. He had provided the wrench, our tool of escape. Had the bed knocked out the window, we probably would have been shot as we tried to escape—because it was still dark. God had not protected us from 900 rioters only to be shot by guards.

This is what Randy Pense has to say to us about the LORD's faithfulness:

Since the riot I have been drawn closer to God and His will for my life. Not a day goes by that I don't thank Him for His love as well as His grace and mercy. He has

shown me beyond any doubt that He can and does help us in our times of need.
(*POWER*, 2/5/84, pp.2-7)