

The Hard Way



SABBATH—APRIL 17

GENTLE POWER. A building was on fire in New York City. A blind girl sat in the fourth-floor window. The firemen were very worried. They could not fit the ladder truck between the buildings. And they could not get her to jump into a net, because she could not see.

Finally her father arrived and shouted to her that she was to jump on his command. The girl jumped. She was so completely relaxed that she did not break a bone or even strain a muscle. Because she trusted her father, she jumped when he told her to.

In the same way, God has given powerful proof that He wants the best for His children. But they turned down the gentle messages He first gave them. So God had to speak to them with a roar and a flood. What lessons can we learn from their mistakes?

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: What terrible events¹ happened to the northern kingdom (Israel)? What was the result of Ahaz's² friendship with the Assyrians? But after all these bad things, what hope did God offer? What does it mean to love and to fear God? What does the Bible say to us about the dangers of spiritualism?³

MEMORY VERSE: "The Lord has hidden himself from his people, but I trust him and place my hope in him" (Isaiah 8:17, TEV).

¹events—things that happen.

²Ahaz—Judah's 12th king.

³spiritualism—the false belief that dead people can come back as spirits.

SUNDAY—APRIL 18

**PROPHECY FULFILLED
(Isaiah 7:14-16).**

In Isaiah 7:14-16, Immanuel⁴ is a sign connected with Ahaz's special problem: Before the Child Immanuel would be old enough to decide right from wrong, "the lands of those two kings who terrify [scare] you [Ahaz] will be deserted"⁵ (Isaiah 7:16, TEV). This points to the lands and kings of Syria and Israel (Isaiah 7:1, 2, 4-9). This also repeats God's promise that they would soon be powerless.

In Isaiah 7:15, why does Isaiah mention "curds and honey"?

The crops and fields of Judah would be destroyed by the Assyrians (Isaiah 7:23-25). So the people and the Old Testament Immanuel would be forced to return to the food of nomads⁶ (Isaiah 7:21, 22). They would be poor. But they would have just enough to survive (keep on living).

When was the prophecy about Syria and Israel fulfilled? 2 Kings 15:29, 30; 2 Kings 16:7-9; 1 Chronicles 5:6, 26.

This prophecy was given about 734 B.C. In accepting Ahaz's gift of money, Tiglath-pileser III⁷ did what he probably would have done anyway. He smashed Syria and Israel. He sent some of the people away, and turned the land into Assyrian provinces (734–733 B.C.). The remainder of Israel was saved when Hoshea, after murdering King Pekah, surrendered and paid tribute (tax). In 733 and 732 B.C., Tiglath-pileser III conquered Damascus, the capital of Syria. Then he made Syria into Assyrian provinces. So within about two years of Isaiah's prophecy, Syria and Israel had been defeated. It was all over for the two kings who had threatened Ahaz.

Soon after Shalmaneser V replaced Tiglath-pileser III in 727 B.C., King Hoshea of Israel rebelled against Assyria. The Assyrians took his capital city (Samaria) in 722 B.C. Then they sent thousands of Israelites to Mesopotamia and Media, where they married the local people. Because of their marriages, the Jewish people soon lost their identity.⁸ (Read Isaiah 7:8. Within 65 years Israel would no longer even be a people.) God had known what would happen to Israel, Judah's enemies. But His point to Ahaz was that Israel would disappear, without any help from Assyria.

⁴Immanuel—a promised Child expected to be born soon. The name *Immanuel* means "God with us." The Child turned out to be Jesus, who was born about 725 years later, fulfilling this prophecy.

⁵deserted—to have been left completely alone.

⁶nomads—people who move from place to place to find water and food for their cattle.

⁷Tiglath-pileser III—a strong king of Assyria.

⁸identity—being known as a certain group of people. For example, the Jewish people of Israel soon were not known as Jews.

If you were living in the northern kingdom of Israel while all of this was happening, how easy would it have been for you to lose faith? What can we do to keep our faith strong, so that when tomorrow's trouble comes, we will be faithful? 1 Peter 1:13-25; Ephesians 6:10-18.



MONDAY—APRIL 19

KNOWN RESULTS (Isaiah 7:17-25).

What will happen to Judah's land? Isaiah 7:17-25. Why should we not be surprised at what will happen to this land?

Ahaz was more afraid than he was faithful. For him the good news from

God was that Syria and Israel would be wiped out. The bad news was that Assyria, the "friend" he had chosen to help him, would turn out to be a far more dangerous enemy than Syria and Israel had been. By turning down God, Ahaz guaranteed defeat. Ahaz thought his world was falling apart now, but things really were going to get worse!

"It is better to trust in the Lord than to depend on human leaders" (Psalm 118:9, TEV). How could Ahaz trust that Tiglath-pileser III would be satisfied with not taking Judah, too? Assyrian writings show that their desire for power had no limit.

What was happening to Ahaz? 2 Kings 16:10-18; 2 Chronicles 28:20-25. What spiritual lesson do we see in these verses? Why should we not be surprised at Ahaz's actions?

Second Chronicles 28:20-23 tells what happened because Ahaz asked for help from Assyria instead of from God.

Our nature is to trust in what we can see, feel, taste, and touch. But what we can see, feel, taste, and touch will go away. What does 2 Corinthians 4:18 teach us? How can we make use of 2 Corinthians 4:18 in our own lives?

TUESDAY—APRIL 20

**WHAT'S IN A NAME?
(Isaiah 8:1-10).**

Can you imagine playing a ball game with Isaiah's second son? By the time you could say "Maher-shalal-hash-baz, throw me the ball!" it would be too late. His name is long. Its meaning is even longer. The name means "swift is booty,⁹ speedy is prey"¹⁰ or "speed the spoil,¹¹ hasten [hurry] the plunder."¹²

The message of the name clearly has to do with rapid defeat. But who defeats whom? Isaiah 8:4.

Isaiah 8:1-10 supports the message of Isaiah 7. Before a child could reach a certain age, Assyria would defeat the



God said the armies of Assyria would sweep through Juda like a flood.

capitals of Syria and Israel. Also, because Judah had refused God's message of hope, Judah would be overcome by Assyria. Judah is pictured as the "quiet waters of Shiloah Brook" (Isaiah 8:6, TEV). Assyria is pictured as the "flood waters of the Euphrates River" (Isaiah 8:7, TEV).

Ahaz turned to Assyria. For this reason, the names of Isaiah's sons represented Judah and Israel: "Swift is booty, speedy is prey"; but "a remnant¹³ shall return." Why was there still hope? Assyria might fill Immanuel's land (Isaiah 8:8). But the people still had the promise that "God is with us" (Isaiah 8:10). Here we see the idea of the entire book of Isaiah. The idea is that God would punish His enemies in Judah and other nations. But He would be with the faithful remnant of His people and return them to their land.

Why does Isaiah tell us that he legally recorded the child's name and had sex with his wife ("the prophetess")? Isaiah 8:1-3.

The timing of this son was very important as a sign. As with the sign of Immanuel, from the time that the boy was born until the time when Assyria defeated Syria and Israel, would be less time than it would take for the boy to reach a certain age. This would happen

⁹booty—things taken from an enemy in a war.

¹⁰prey—an animal that is being hunted.

¹¹spoil—things taken from an enemy in a war; to steal by force; to destroy.

¹²plunder—things taken from an enemy in a war; to take something by force.

¹³remnant—a small group of God's faithful people.

before the boy could call for his father or mother (Isaiah 8:4). Isaiah legally recorded the boy's name even before his son's conception.¹⁴ By doing so, Isaiah made the child and the child's name a public prophecy that could be tested by the events that would soon follow.

God's people often made mistakes, but He was still willing to save them. How should that make us feel when we make mistakes?

WEDNESDAY—APRIL 21

NOTHING TO FEAR WHEN WE FEAR GOD HIMSELF (Isaiah 8:11-15).

When he first became president of the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke to a nation that was made sad by



Franklin D. Roosevelt.

the Great Depression.¹⁵ He said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Isaiah's message to sad people is: "We have nothing to fear when we fear God Himself."

God warned Isaiah not to fear what the people feared, but to fear Him (Isaiah 8:12, 13). Fearing God is an important idea in the Bible. In Revelation 14:6-12, three angels announce a worldwide message: Fear God and give glory to Him rather than fearing and giving glory to the earthly beast power in Revelation 13.

How do you understand the idea of "fearing" God? How can we "fear" God and love Him too? (Matthew 22:37)?

Fearing God means that you recognize Him as the greatest power in the universe. Whether you love Him or not, this kind of fear overcomes any other fear. If God is for you, nobody else can touch you without His permission. If He is against you, because you have rebelled against Him, you can run but you cannot hide!

What kind of fear is 1 John 4:18 talking about?

There are different kinds of fear. If someone with great power is your friend, you do not fear that person in the sense that you think he or she will hurt you. But you have a kind of fear when you recog-

¹⁴conception—when a baby is first started in the mother from an egg and a sperm.

¹⁵the Great Depression—the time of great financial trouble in the U.S. during the 1930s.

nize the power of that person and the limits of your relationship with him or her.

As Christians, we are not to love the things of the world the way people of the world love these things (1 John 2:15). What things do people of the world fear that Christians should not fear? Why should we not fear these things? What things do people of the world not fear that Christians should fear? Matthew 10:28; Jeremiah 10:2, 3.



Fear God and give glory to Him!

THURSDAY—APRIL 22

**THE GLOOM (SADNESS) OF THE
UNGRATEFUL (UNTHANKFUL)
LIVING DEAD (Isaiah 8:16-22).**

What is Isaiah 8:16-22 talking about? What has this to do with King Ahaz?

Ahaz was deeply involved in pagan¹⁶ religion (2 Kings 16:3-4, 10-15; 2 Chronicles 28:2-4, 23-25). This religion was heavily connected with the occult¹⁷ (Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Corinthians 10:20). Different parts of modern witchcraft have strong connections with ancient¹⁸ Near Eastern practices, as seen in ancient writings outside the Bible. Even many of today's New Age practices are modern examples of these practices.

Isaiah describes the hopelessness that comes from depending on spirits (Isaiah 8:21-22). This description fits Ahaz well (2 Chronicles 28:22, 23). Isaiah talks about people becoming angry and cursing their king (Isaiah 8:21). This would warn Ahaz that because he led the people into the occult, they would curse him. When Ahaz died, his burial was different from other kings because the people did not respect him (2 Chronicles 28:27).

What do these verses say about the occult? Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:9-14.

First Chronicles 10:13, 14 says that separation from the occult means loyalty to God. "Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord. He [Saul] disobeyed the Lord's commands; he tried to find guidance by consulting [talking with] the spirits of the dead [people] instead of consulting the Lord. So the

¹⁶pagan—having to do with worshiping idols.

¹⁷occult—practices involving witchcraft or spiritualism.

¹⁸ancient—very old.

Lord killed him and gave control of the kingdom to David son of Jesse” (TEV).

In what hidden ways might you be exposed to the occult and other examples of spiritualism? Even if you cannot totally avoid these examples, what can you do to lessen their influences upon you and your family?

FRIDAY—APRIL 23

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read *The Great Controversy [War]*, “Can Our Dead [People] Speak to Us?” pp. 551–562.

“In the days of the Hebrews, there was a group of people who said they talked with dead people. Spiritualists¹⁹ today also say they talk with dead people. But the Bible says the ‘familiar spirits’ are the ‘spirits of devils.’ (Compare²⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:20; Revelation 16:14.) Working with these ‘familiar spirits’ does not please God. People who spoke with dead people were to be put to death (Leviticus 19:31; Leviticus 20:27). The very name of witchcraft is now laughed at. The claim of people talking with evil spirits is considered as a fairy tale of the Dark Ages.²¹ But spiritualism boasts of millions of believers who have made their way into science, churches, and political and government groups, and even in the courts of kings.

¹⁹spiritualists—people who believe in spiritualism.

²⁰compare—show how things are the same.

²¹the Dark Ages—the time of history in Europe from A.D. 500 to A.D. 1450. The word *dark* is used because only a small amount of learning was taking place. The Dark Ages are also called the Middle Ages.

²²the state of the dead—the correct belief that death is like a sleep. Read Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10; Psalm 146:4; Psalm 115:17; John 11:11–14; Matthew 9:24.

This great deception (false teaching) is a new disguise (false cover) of the witchcraft God did not permit in the Bible.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 556.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss spiritualism as it appears in movies, books, TV, and popular culture. If we can do nothing to stop spiritualism, how can we warn other people of its dangers? To so many people, spiritualism seems harmless. Why is a right understanding of the state of the dead²² so important in protecting ourselves against these false teachings?
2. In your own words, write what God is trying to teach us in Isaiah 8:20.
3. Think more about the idea of loving and fearing God at the same time. In what ways does our love for God come from our fear of Him? In what ways does our fear come from our love for Him? Discuss.

SUMMARY: Isaiah’s actions, family, and words repeat God’s message of warning and hope: The only safe way is to trust that God knows what He is doing. God has both the love and the power to guide, protect, and care for people who let Him. For people who turn to false gods, there is only gloom (sadness).