

LESSON 4 *April 17–23

The Hard Way



SABBATH AFTERNOON

At a burning building in New York City's Harlem, a blind girl was perched on the fourth-floor window. The firemen had become desperate. They couldn't fit the ladder truck between the buildings, and they couldn't get her to jump into a net, which she, of course, couldn't see.

"Finally her father arrived and shouted through the bull horn that there was a net and that she was to jump on his command. The girl jumped and was so completely relaxed that she did not break a bone or even strain a muscle in the four-story fall. Because she trusted her father completely, when she heard her father's voice she did what he said was best."—Edited by Michael P. Green, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching*, p. 135.

In the same way, God provided powerful evidence that He wanted the best for His children, but they rejected the gently flowing way He first presented His concern to them; thus, He had to speak to them with a roar and a flood instead.

What lessons can we, today, learn from their mistakes?

The Week at a Glance: What calamities befell the northern kingdom? What was the result of Ahaz's alliance with the Assyrians? Yet even amid all this calamity and suffering, what hope did the Lord offer? What does it mean to love and to fear God? What does the Word say to us about the dangers of spiritualism?

Memory Text: "I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him" (*Isaiah 8:17, NRSV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 24.*

SUNDAY April 18

Prophecy Fulfilled *(Isa. 7:14-16)*.

In Isaiah 7:14-16, Immanuel is a sign linked to the dilemma of Ahaz: Before the child Immanuel would be old enough to decide between different kinds of food, “the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted” (*vs. 16, NRSV*). This refers to the land and kings of Syria and northern Israel (*compare vs. 1, 2, 4-9*) and reiterates God’s promise that their power would soon be extinguished.

Why does Isaiah mention “‘curds and honey’ ” (*NRSV*) that the boy would have to eat? *Isa. 7:15*.

The crops and fields of Judah would be destroyed by the Assyrians (*vs. 23-25*). So the people, including the Old Testament Immanuel, whoever he was (*vs. 14, 15*), would be forced to return to the diet of nomads (*vs. 21, 22*). But while they would be poor, they would have enough on which to survive.

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

This prophecy of Isaiah was given about 734 B.C. In response to the bribe of Ahaz, Tiglath-pileser III did what he probably would have done anyway: He smashed the northern coalition, conquered the Galilee and Transjordanian regions of northern Israel, deported some of the population, and turned the territories into Assyrian provinces (734–733 B.C.). The remainder of Israel was saved when Hoshea, after murdering King Pekah, surrendered and paid tribute. In 733 and 732 B.C. Tiglath-pileser conquered Damascus, the capital of Syria. Then he carved Syria into Assyrian provinces. So, by 732, within about two years of Isaiah’s prediction, Syria and Israel had been conclusively defeated, and it was all over for the two kings who had threatened Ahaz.

Then, King Hoshea of Israel committed political suicide by rebelling against Assyria. The Assyrians took the capital city of Samaria in 722 B.C. and deported thousands of Israelites to Mesopotamia and Media, where they eventually were absorbed into the local populations and lost their identity. God had predicted what would happen to the enemies of Judah, but His point to Ahaz was that this would happen anyway, without any need to rely on Assyria.

Think, if you were living in the northern kingdom while all this was happening, how easy it would be to lose faith. What can we do to keep our faith intact, so that when tomorrow’s calamities come we can stay firm? See 1 Pet. 1:13-25.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Key Text: *Isaiah 8.*

Teachers Aim:

1. To link the consequences found in Isaiah 8 to the warning and actions taken in preceding chapters.
2. To convey proper understanding of the love and fear of God.

Lesson Outline:

I. A Quick Downfall.

- A. In a short time, we go from a prophecy of unbelief in Isaiah 6 to its fulfillment in Isaiah 7 and the consequences thereof in Isaiah 8.
- B. God showed Ahaz that His word is true. However, as Ahaz faces trouble, he continues down the slippery slope to pagan ways.

II. Love and Fear.

- A. Many people present love and wrath as complete opposites. They are, however, both characteristics of God that cannot be diminished without raising the topic of idolatry.
- B. Fear as respect, reverence, and recognition of boundaries is in perfect harmony with love.

Summary: In just a few short chapters, the book of Isaiah prophesies a warning to Ahaz against disbelief and shows the fulfillment of that prophecy when Ahaz disobeys. Even in the imagery of a flood rising to Judah's neck, God hopes. This time it is hope that Israel will not be completely consumed. We must turn to God alone if we hope to escape the same fate as Ahaz's.

COMMENTARY

Introduction: The Hard Way.

Ahaz and the kingdom of Judah over which he ruled want deliverance and protection from their advancing enemies. Ahaz and his subjects would have accepted God's help, but they believed the cost of doing so was too high. They choose ruin rather than submission to His authority and calling. This testifies to the deceitfulness of sin and its effect on human character (*see Rom. 2:2-11; Heb. 3:12, 13*).

I. The Fruits of Distrusting God.

In graphic, poetical language, Isaiah prophesies that Judah would be reduced to a wasteland through conquest and captivity. Rather than glorifying God as His fruitful vineyard, they were content to let their spiritual lives degenerate into a wilderness. Soon their land would be blighted to reflect their spiritual destitution (*see Isa. 7:17-24; compare Matt. 21:33-44; Heb. 6:7, 8*). If only God's people had heeded His warnings, the calamity would have been averted.



April 19

Foreseen Consequences *(Isa. 7:17-25)*

Read the above verses. What is the Lord saying that will happen to the land? Why should we not be surprised at this outcome?

For Ahaz, the man of fear rather than faith, the good news from God was that Syria and Israel would be wiped out. The bad news was that Assyria, the ally and “friend” he had chosen to help him, would turn out to be a far more dangerous foe than Syria and Israel had been. By turning down deliverance offered freely by God, Ahaz was guaranteed defeat. If Ahaz thought his world was falling apart before, things were going to get far worse!

“It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in princes” (*Ps. 118:9, NRSV*). How could Ahaz trust that Tiglath-pileser III would be satisfied with taking the countries to the north and respect Judah? Assyrian writings, such as annals of the Assyrian kings themselves, testify to the fact that their desire for power was insatiable.

Read 2 Kings 16:10-18 and 2 Chronicles 28:20-25. What was happening to Ahaz? What spiritual principle do we see unfolding here? Why should we not be surprised at his actions?

2 Chronicles 28:20-23 powerfully sums up what happened when Ahaz asked for help from Assyria rather than relying on the Lord.

Our natural tendency is to trust in what we can see, feel, taste, touch—the things of the world. Yet, as we know, the things of the world vanish. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:18. What is the text saying to us? How can we apply what it is saying to our own lives? And what difference will it make for us if we do?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

II. Amid the Darkness Shines the Everlasting Light.

To establish that His prophetic revelations of the fate of Israel and Syria were genuine, the Lord stated that before Isaiah's new baby was born, he should put the baby's name on a large sign for everyone to see. The baby was to be named Mahershalalhashbaz, which means "the spoiler hastens, the plunderer comes quickly." God explained that before the infant could say "Father" or "Mother," Assyria would carry away the wealth of Judah's two enemies and break their power. This was to encourage Judah to believe God and return to Him. God declared again, "Immanuel is on your side, prepared to save, protect, and revive you. Won't you please turn to Him from whom you have revolted?" (see *Isa. 1:5; 8:8; 31:5, 6, author's paraphrase*).

Christ (Immanuel) and His kingdom of righteousness are the primary themes of all prophecy (see *1 Pet. 1:19-21, Rev. 1:1*). When the incarnate Source and Aim of prophecy is rejected, then life itself is rejected (see *Prov. 8:36; John 6:53, 54, 63; 14:6; 1 John 5:12*).

III. The Dark Alternative.

Jesus stated that condemnation comes to those upon whom the light of truth and grace shines when they "[love] darkness rather than light, because their deeds [are] evil" (*John 3:19*). People may join alliances of every sort that bypass the counsel of the Lord, but eventually these alliances are shattered (see *Prov. 16:5; Isa. 8:9, 10; Rev. 17:12-16*). Without God, life is crowded with pain and perplexity, leading people to grope desperately for answers. The yearning for supernatural guidance is a deeply rooted element of our nature. When we reject God, Satan is more than willing to fill the void with experiences that borrow some principles and sentiments from heaven to make his lies appear to be true. Chief among his deceptions is spiritualism—the notion that it is possible to communicate with the dead, who are enjoying a more advanced state of being in an invisible realm. God's Word, however, exposes this deception. (Read *Ps. 6:5; 115:17; 146:3, 4; Eccles. 9:5, 6, 10.*)

Through Isaiah, God warned Israel not to turn to spiritualism or consult with mystics and mediums. Such are powerless to comprehend or overrule divine revelation (see *Isa. 47:12-15; Dan. 2:1-11, 26-28*). At first, spiritualism may seem to bring great comfort and reassurance that all is well with departed loved ones and that the future will be glorious for all. However, the more deeply enmeshed one becomes in spiritualist guidance, the more frightening it becomes, because demons cannot restrain their malice or renounce their desire for evil control over those who commune with them. Spiritualism is a refuge of lies that quickly turns into a dungeon of despair. How many cared to listen to Isaiah's warning in his day? How many care to listen today? (Read *Isa. 8:19, 20; Rev. 13:11-14.*)

TUESDAY April 20

What's in a Name? *(Isa. 8:1-10).*

Can you imagine playing a ball game with Isaiah's second boy? By the time you could say "Maher-shalal-hash-baz, throw me the ball!" it would be too late. But even longer than his name is its meaning: "swift is booty, speedy is prey" or "speed the spoil, hasten the plunder."

The message of the name clearly relates to rapid conquest, but who conquers whom? *Isa. 8:4.*

Isaiah 8:1-10 reinforces the message of chapter 7. Before a child could reach a certain stage, spoils of war from the capitals of Syria and northern Israel would be taken by Assyria. Furthermore, because Judah had refused God's message of assurance, represented by the gently flowing waters of the Shiloah stream in Jerusalem, it would be overwhelmed by the mighty power of Assyria, represented by flooding from the great Euphrates River.

Because Ahaz turned to Assyria, the names of Isaiah's sons referred to Judah, as well as to northern Israel: "swift is booty, speedy is prey," but also "a remnant shall return." Why was there still hope? Because although Assyria would fill Immanuel's land (*Isa. 8:8*), they still had the promise that "God is with us" (*vs. 10*). Indeed, what we see here is a theme that permeates the entire book of Isaiah, which is that though there would be judgments on God's enemies in Judah and on other nations, delivered in the form of military disasters, suffering, and exile, the Lord would be with the faithful survivors of His people and restore them to their land.

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

The timing of this son served as a significant sign. As with the sign of Immanuel, from the time the son was conceived and born until the time Assyria defeated Syria and Israel would be less time than it would take for the boy to reach an early developmental stage, in this case learning to call for his father or mother (*vs. 4*). When Isaiah legally recorded the boy's name before his conception, he made the child and his name a public prophecy that could be tested by subsequent events.

Despite repeated mistakes on the part of His professed people, the Lord still was willing to save them. How can we take this principle and apply it to ourselves, personally, especially when we fail and fall in our own spiritual life?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

IV. The Inextinguishable Light.

Striving to break through their crust of defiance, God told His people that they need neither flounder nor grope in darkness. They

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Exodus 20:19-21, Deuteronomy 6:1-3, Lamentations 3:33, 1 Chronicles 16:25, 2 Corinthians 7:1, Hebrews 12:10.*

❶ Why did Ahaz suffer hardship after refusing to trust God? Was this hardship direct punishment from God or simply the will of mortal humans carried out under the influence of false gods? *Lam. 3:33, Heb. 12:10.*

❷ Read Proverbs 9:10. As the lesson pointed out, there are different kinds of fear. What can we learn about the importance of having a correct fear of God? *Exod. 20:19-21, Deut. 6:1-3, 1 Chron. 16:25, 2 Cor. 7:1.*

❸ When we do not exercise, our bodies become weak. Then we suffer disease and broken bones that could have been prevented if we had kept ourselves fit. It is the same with our minds. If we do not condition ourselves to be spiritually fit, we will have little or no defense against the attacks of the devil. How can we develop a healthy mind? *Prov. 4:5-7; 9:10, 11; 16:3; Phil. 2:5, 15; 2 Tim. 2:15.*

❹ Monday's study points out that by turning down deliverance offered freely by God, Ahaz was guaranteed defeat. What have you experienced that proves this point? What brought you back to God? Or if you have not fully returned yet, what is keeping you from doing so?

❺ Spiritualism comes in many forms. It is evident in movies, commercials and programs, children's entertainment, etc. It has even crept its way into Christianity. In an article entitled "Reincarnation Goes to Church," by Betsy Mayer (*Last Generation*, vol. 13, no. 1), she cites a survey that reports that approximately one-fifth of Christians "who declared 'Jesus is risen' expect to overcome death through reincarnation, not through resurrection."

List and discuss other spiritualistic concepts that are confusing Christians today. How can we protect ourselves from such influences, while sharing God's love and truth with others? (See Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 290-292; *Prov. 2:11, 2 Tim. 4:2-4, 1 John 4:1-3.*)

WEDNESDAY *April 21*

Nothing to Fear When We Fear God Himself (*Isa. 8:11-15*).

In his first inaugural address, American President Franklin D. Roosevelt told a nation disheartened by the Great Depression: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”—U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C., (March 4, 1933). Isaiah’s message to depressed people is similar: “We have nothing to fear when we fear God Himself.”

God warned Isaiah not to fear what his people feared, but to fear Him (*Isa. 8:12, 13*). This is an important theme in Scripture. For example, in Revelation 14:6-12, three angels proclaim a worldwide message: Fear God and give glory to Him, rather than fearing and giving glory to the earthly beast power described in chapter 13.

How do you understand the idea of “fearing” God? What does that mean, especially in light of the command that we love God, as well (*Matt. 22:37*)?

True fear of God means that you recognize Him as the ultimate Power in the universe. Such fear overcomes any other fear. If He 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 can’t hide!

Doesn’t the idea that we should fear God contradict 1 John 4:18: “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love” (*NRSV*)?

There are different kinds of fear. If someone with awesome power is your friend, with whom you share mutual love, you do not fear that person in the sense you think he or she will hurt you. But you have a kind of fear in the sense that you know and respect the power of that person and the boundaries of your relationship.

As Christians we aren’t to love the things of the world, the things that people of the world love (*1 John 2:15*). Thinking, then, along parallel lines, as Christians, are there things the world fears that we as Christians shouldn’t fear? If so, what are they, and why shouldn’t we fear them? At the same time, what things does the world not fear that we, as Christians, should? See, for instance, *Matt. 10:28; Jer. 10:2, 3*.

TEACHERS COMMENTS

need only turn to the law and the testimony and listen to the prophets who speak in harmony with His revealed Word (*see Isa. 8:20; compare Deut. 4:1-10, 1 Cor. 14:32, 1 John 4:1*). Those who despise God's law, on whatever theological pretext, are setting up camp on spiritual quicksand. A careful reading of Psalm 119, Luke 16:17, John 14:15, 15:10, Romans 8:1-4, and other similar passages, would be highly therapeutic to such a mind-set. While the law has no saving merit in itself, it does define righteousness and systemize the practical operations of love (*see Matt. 22:23-40; Rom. 13:10, 11*). Unsaved sinners cannot keep the law, and many take refuge in the false doctrine that faith in Christ releases us from obedience to the law instead of from subjection to the power of sin (*see Rom. 8:7, Heb. 8:10-12, 1 John 2:2-6, 5:1-3*).

Witnessing

If you live in farming country, you know the importance of predicting the weather. Weather conditions can either make or break a crop.

You learn the importance of planting only during certain times of the year according to your weather zone. You also appreciate that weather conditions determine whether the infant crop will grow well.

Those of us who benefit by the hard work of the farmers also understand what happens if they experience a hard year. Food prices skyrocket, and some products become scarce.

Our lesson this week opens up to us the subject of predictions. We learn that the child Immanuel, who is spoken of throughout the book of Isaiah, refers to the coming of Christ Himself. However, not only is Christ's birth predicted but also we learn that His second coming is referred to as well!

Because it is our human desire to know the future, Satan has found ways to mislead us through false methods of prediction. We lose a beloved family member or friend in death, and he provides someone who can help us communicate with him or her from the grave. He is the mastermind behind clever and creative ways to lure our children to believe it is OK to dabble in spiritualism.

Take time this week to share with your children, grandchildren, or other little ones with whom you come in contact the blessings that come from focusing on Jesus. Let them know that only He can save the world, predict our future, and prepare for us a place to live that is far beyond our imagination.

THURSDAY April 22

Gloom of the Ungrateful Living Dead

(Isa. 8:16-22).

Read the above passage. What is it talking about? What has this to do with King Ahaz? Summarize the ideas.

Ahaz was deeply involved in pagan religion (2 Kings 16:3, 4, 10-15; 2 Chron. 28:2-4, 23-25), which was heavily interconnected with the occult (compare Deut. 32:17, NRSV—“ ‘They sacrificed to demons . . . ’ ”; 1 Cor. 10:20). Various aspects of modern witchcraft have striking parallels in ancient Near Eastern rituals, as witnessed by ancient writings outside the Bible. Indeed, even many of today’s New Age practices are simply contemporary manifestations of these ancient occult practices.

Isaiah’s description of despair resulting from reliance on spirits other than the Lord (Isa. 8:21, 22) fits Ahaz well (compare 2 Chron. 28:22, 23). Isaiah foretells of people becoming enraged and cursing their king (Isa. 8:21). This would warn Ahaz that his people would curse him for leading them into the occult. In fact, when Ahaz died, an exception was made regarding his burial due to lack of respect for him: “They did not bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel” (2 Chron. 28:27, NRSV).

What do these texts say about the occult? Lev. 20:27, Deut. 18:9-14.

Separation from the occult is a matter of loyalty to God. First Chronicles 10:13, 14 applies this principle to the case of King Saul: “So Saul died for his unfaithfulness; he was unfaithful to the Lord in that he did not keep the command of the Lord; moreover, he had consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord. Therefore the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse” (NRSV).

Look around at your own life, at the influences around you. In what subtle ways are you exposed to the principles behind the occult and various manifestations of spiritualism? And even if you can’t totally avoid them, what can you do to minimize their influence upon you, or your family?

TEACHERS COMMENTS

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Read or have your class sing Hymn 115 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, “O Come, O Come, Immanuel.”

The cry of God’s people throughout the ages has been the same: “Come, Lord Jesus. Save us from fear, suffering, false teachings, and beliefs.”

Why does it seem so hard for us to *accept* what He *offers*, to *rejoice* when He *performs*, and to *believe* when He *delivers*?

Thought Questions:

❶ Christ plans to redeem His earthly children. Satan wants to destroy them. Are we concentrating too hard on Satan’s obvious traps so that we are making it easier to become ensnared in his subtler ones? Explain. What is our most effective weapon against this danger?

❷ How might we be like King Ahaz and the children of Judah? How might we let seemingly innocent activities engulf our lives at the expense of our relationship with God? How can such activities lead to more destructive behaviors?

Application Questions:

❶ Our world has seemingly become smaller in recent years. Positive outcomes will result from this new cohesiveness. However, this close blending of cultures and religions also will present certain challenges to Christians. Discuss areas in which we must exercise caution in order to remain true to Christ. Also discuss how can we embrace this smaller world and, at the same time, avoid the practices Scripture tells us to avoid.

❷ “A friend once asked Dr. E. J. Pace whether he believed in a personal devil. The doctor replied with emphasis, ‘No.’ . . . Then Dr. Pace proceeded to clear himself, saying, ‘I most certainly believe that there is a personal devil, but far be it from me to believe in him, for he is a liar and the father of lies, as Jesus said.’ ”
—H.M.S. Richards, *What Jesus Said* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1957), p. 117. “The father of lies” is an appropriate title for Satan. Why is it impossible to dabble in his world just a bit without becoming his slave?

FRIDAY April 23

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Can Our Dead Speak to Us?”, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 551–562.

“In the days of the Hebrews there was a class of people who claimed, as do the spiritualists of today, to hold communication with the dead. But the “familiar spirits,” as these visitants from other worlds were called, are declared by the Bible to be ‘the spirits of devils.’ (Compare Numbers 25:1-3; Psalm 106:28; 1 Corinthians 10:20; Revelation 16:14.) The work of dealing with familiar spirits was pronounced an abomination to the Lord, and was solemnly forbidden under penalty of death. Leviticus 19:31; 20:27. The very name of witchcraft is now held in contempt. The claim that men can hold intercourse with evil spirits is regarded as a fable of the Dark Ages. But spiritualism, which numbers its converts by hundreds of thousands, yea, by millions, which has made its way into scientific circles, which has invaded churches, and has found favor in legislative bodies, and even in the courts of kings—this mammoth deception is but a revival, in a new disguise, of the witchcraft condemned and prohibited of old.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 556.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the issue of spiritualism as it appears in movies, books, TV, and popular culture. If nothing can be done to stop it, how can we alert others to the dangers of what, for so many people, seem like harmless distractions, nothing more? Why is a proper understanding of the state of the dead so important in being protected against these deceptions?**
- 2 Read Isaiah 8:20. Prayerfully, rephrase it in your own words. Let different people in the class read their versions aloud. What is the Lord telling us here?**
- 3 Dwell more on this idea of loving and fearing God at the same time. In what ways does our love stem from that fear? Or does our fear stem from our love? Discuss.**

Summary: Through Isaiah’s actions and family, as well as his words, God reinforced the message of warning and hope: The only safe course is to trust that God knows what He is doing. He has both the love and the power to guide, protect, and provide for those who let Him. For those who turn to other powers, there is only gloom.