

Tom's Pen

Mahershalalhashbaz

by Tom Wacaster

Don't let the name scare you. Punctuation marks help us get the right pronunciation: "Ma-her-shal-al-hash-baz." But the name meant something: "Hastens to the prey." Here is the setting. When Tiglath-pileser III took control of Assyria, he immediately made his bid for world domination. His westward movement struck fear in Syria and Israel [keep in mind that this was during the time of the divided kingdom, hence Israel, the Northern Kingdom]. With a common enemy in mind, Israel and Syria sought alliance, and then sought to bring Judah into that alliance. Ahaz is on the throne in Judah and Pekah in Israel. Ahaz feigns piety and loyalty to God, but despite the warning from the prophet Isaiah, this weak and wavering king sets his sight, not on God, but on worldly alliance with the apostate Israel and the heathen nation of Syria.

Apparently the people love Ahaz's intentions, and so Isaiah gives the people a sign in two parts. Before his son is ever born, the prophet posts the words in a public location, leaving the people to read and study for themselves. When Isaiah's son is born, he is instructed to give him this most significant name: "Mahershalalhashbaz," the very words publicly posted months before the child was ever born. Syria and Israel would be destroyed, and Assyria would turn toward Judah, and the people of God would suffer utter defeat. Assyria was "hastening to the prey." This brings us to Isaiah 8:11, where God speaks to the prophet with a "strong hand," and warns the prophet not to walk in the way of the people. Don't make a confederacy (8:12), don't be afraid of their fear, sanctify God, and let Him be your fear and dread (8:13). Herein lay the fault of the people and their king. They would not listen to the prophets. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Elijah, faithful proclaimers of God's word, were treated as traitors and trouble makers. Some of these faithful prophets of old paid dearly for their faithful proclamation of God's word.

But alas, their message fell on deaf ears. Rather than fear God, they feared the nation of Assyria. Rather than trust God, they placed their trust in a heathen nation, and followed in the footsteps of their apostate brethren in the Northern Kingdom.

Is there a lesson for us here? Oh, indeed there is. The Lord's kingdom is splintered and divided. Rather than trust in God and His Word, some have abandoned the old paths for an alliance with the denominations. Hand in hand with spiritual heathens, they march forward toward a presumed victory that shall only end in utter defeat. Those who still preach the old Jerusalem gospel are pressured on every side to join them in their unholy alliance with other religious groups to defeat the onslaught of Satan. Sadly some, under the leadership of weak and wavering elders, capitulate. Thanks be to our God, there are still faithful preachers and proclaimers of God's word. But as in the days of old, the divine instructions have not been heeded, and God's people once again find themselves in the throws of a major apostasy. Rather than listen to the word, too many capitulate.

Those who call for the old paths, are despised and labeled as traitors and trouble makers. Edward Young has noted, "Throughout the history of the church, those who have sought to call the church back to her God-given mission and away from her man-made 'programs' have been treated as troublemakers."

But the message is still, "Mahershalalhashbaz"!! There is a judgment coming, and God's wrath is "hastening to the prey."