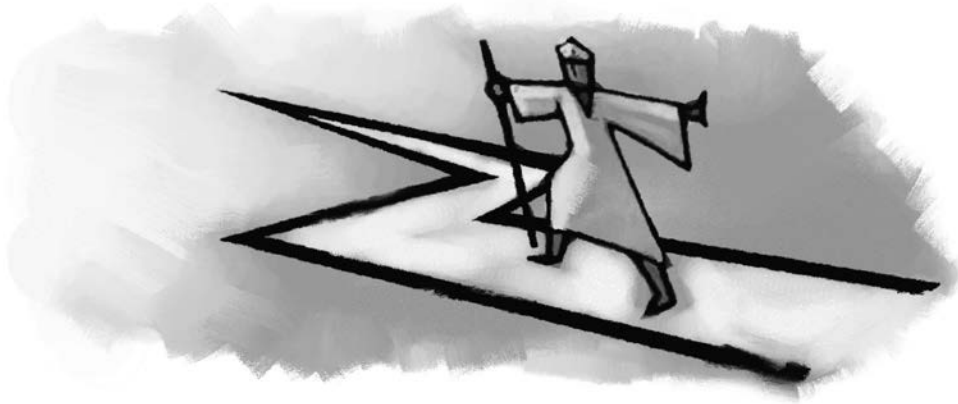


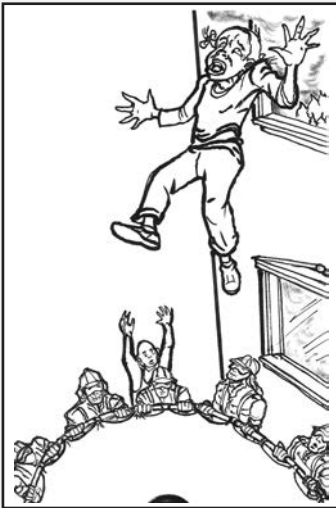
The Hard Way



SABBATH—JANUARY 16

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Isaiah 7:14–25; Isaiah 8:1–22; 2 Corinthians 4:18; Matthew 22:37; 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14.

MEMORY VERSE: “The LORD has turned away from the family of Jacob. But I will wait for him. I trust that he will come to save us” (Isaiah 8:17, ERV).



The girl jumps. She trusted her father with all her heart.

A BUILDING WAS ON FIRE in Harlem. Harlem is a neighborhood in New York City. A blind girl sits on the ledge of a 4th-floor window of the burning building. Firemen try to save her. But they soon lose all hope. The firemen cannot fit their ladder truck between the building she was in and the building across from it. The firemen cannot get her to jump into a net. Of course, the girl cannot see the net.

“Finally her father arrives. He shouts at his daughter that there is a net below her. She must jump into the net on his command. The girl jumps. She is so relaxed that she does not break a bone or hurt a muscle in the four-story fall. She trusts her father with all her heart. That is why she does what her father says is best when she hears his voice.”
—Michael P. Green, editor, *1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching* (Grands Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1989), page 135, adapted.

In the same way, God gives powerful proof that He wants the best for His children. But they refuse His gentle message. So, God has to shout at them to get their attention.

What lessons today can we learn from their mistakes?

THE WORDS OF ISAIAH COME TRUE (Isaiah 7:14–16)

Last week, we saw that Immanuel is a name for Jesus. At the same time, Immanuel may have been a real person who lived in the time of Isaiah too. In Isaiah 7:14–16, Immanuel is a sign connected to the problem of Ahaz: “ ‘before the boy [Immanuel] knows to turn away from what is bad and choose good, the land whose two kings you are afraid of will be left empty’ ” (Isaiah 7:16, NLV). The two kings are the kings of Syria and northern Israel (Isaiah 7:1, 2, 4–9).

Why does Isaiah say that Immanuel will eat “ ‘milk curds [thick, sour milk] and honey’ ” (Isaiah 7:15, ERV)?

The Assyrians will destroy the crops of Judah (Isaiah 7:23–25). So, the people and the Old Testament Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14, 15) will be forced to eat what poor people eat. But they will have enough to stay alive (Isaiah 7:21, 22).

When does the special message of Isaiah about Syria and Israel happen? For the answer, read 2 Kings 15:29, 30; 2 Kings 16:7–9; and 1 Chronicles 5:6, 26.

God gives Isaiah this special message around 734 B.C. After Tiglath-pileser the Third takes the gift of money from Ahaz, Tiglath-pileser does what he wants to do anyway. He beats Israel and Syria. Then Tiglath-pileser sends away some of the people in northern Israel. After that, he makes the land a part of his kingdom (734–733 B.C.). The rest of Israel is saved when King Hoshea gives Tiglath-pileser money and agrees to serve him. Just before that, Hoshea murders King Pekah. In 733 and 732 B.C., Tiglath-pileser takes control of Damascus, the capital of Syria. Then he makes Syria part of his kingdom. So, by 732 B.C., nearly two years after the special message of Isaiah, Syria and Israel are beaten.

Soon after, in 727 B.C., Shalmaneser V takes the place of Tiglath-pileser. King Hoshea of Israel then does something very stupid that destroys his country. He fights against Assyria. The Assyrians take Samaria, the capital of Israel, in 722 B.C. They send thousands of Israelites away. The Israelites become part of the local people in Media and Mesopotamia. The Israelites no longer are a people (read Isaiah 7:8). God shows Isaiah what will happen to the enemies of Judah. That is why Ahaz should not have worried. He should not have asked Assyria for help.



The Assyrians take Samaria, the capital of Israel, in 722 B.C.

**KNOWING AHEAD OF TIME WHAT WILL HAPPEN
(Isaiah 7:17–25)**

Read Isaiah 7:17–25. As these verses show, what is the Lord saying will happen to the land? Why should we not be surprised at this news?

“God sent invitation after invitation to Israel to come back to Him. God’s special messengers, the prophets, asked Israel in a loving and tender way to be loyal to God. The prophets asked the people to turn away from sin and to change their lives. Their words touched hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 325, adapted.

So, for Ahaz, the good news from God is that Syria and Israel will be wiped out. But Ahaz is a man of fear, not faith. He chooses the wrong “friend” to help him. So, the bad news is that Judah will be in far more danger from Assyria than they were from Syria and Israel. When Ahaz turns down the offer of God to save Judah, Ahaz will lose the war. Ahaz may think his country is falling apart now. But things are going to get worse!

“It is better to go to the LORD for safety than to trust in human leaders” (Psalm 118:9, NIV). How can Ahaz trust that Tiglath-pileser will be happy with taking only the countries to the north and leaving Judah alone? Assyrian writings show that the Assyrian kings had a deep “thirst” for power. The power they had was never enough. They always wanted more.

Read 2 Kings 16:10–18 and 2 Chronicles 28:20–25. As these verses show, what is happening to Ahaz? What important spiritual rule do we see happening here? Why should we not be surprised at what he does?

2 Chronicles 28:20–23 shows us in a powerful way what happens because Ahaz asks for help from Assyria and does not trust the Lord.

It is natural for us to trust in what we can see, feel, taste, and touch: the things on this earth. But as we know, the things on this earth will disappear. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:18. What is this verse saying to us? How can we follow this message in our own lives? How will it make our lives different if we do?



“It is better to go to the LORD for safety than to trust in human leaders” (Psalm 118:9, NIV).

WHAT'S IN A NAME? (Isaiah 8:1–10)

Try to make a picture in your mind of playing a ball game with Isaiah's second boy. By the time you can say "Maher-shalal-hash-baz, throw me the ball!" it will be too late. But the meaning of his name is even longer: "work fast to take away riches, move fast to take the goods by force."

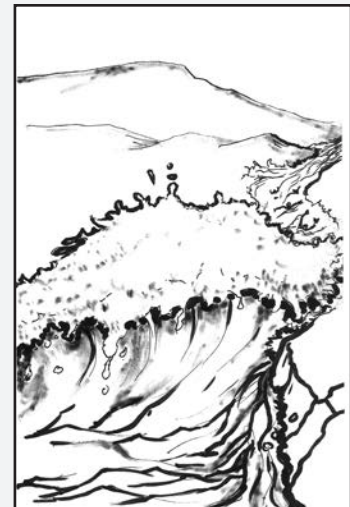
The message of Maher-shalal-hash-baz's name shows us that someone will beat someone else very fast. But who wins? Who is beaten? For the answer, read Isaiah 8:4.

Isaiah 8:1–10 makes the message in chapter 7 stronger. Before a child can grow up, Assyria will rob the capitals of Syria and northern Israel. As we saw, Ahaz refuses the offer of God to protect Judah. This offer of protection is shown by the word picture of flowing waters from the Shiloah stream in Jerusalem. So, Judah will be beaten by the mighty power of Assyria. The Euphrates River during a flood is the word picture that the Bible uses to show Assyria.

Because Ahaz turns to Assyria, the names of the sons of Isaiah help us to see what will happen to Judah and to northern Israel. The meaning of their names are: (1) "work fast to take away riches, move fast to take the goods by force" and (2) "a small group of people shall come back." The second name shows that there is hope for Judah. Yes, Assyria will fill the land of Immanuel (Isaiah 8:8), a word picture for Judah. But Judah has the promise that "God is with us!" (Isaiah 8:10, ERV). This same idea fills the book of Isaiah: God will be with His loyal people. God will judge the enemies of Judah. God will punish them with wars and suffering. He also will send His people to live far away. But then He will bring them back to their land.

Why does Isaiah write down the name of his son before he is born? For the answer, read Isaiah 8:1–3.

The time that the son of Isaiah is born is important. His birthday is a sign. The sign shows that Assyria will beat Syria and Israel before the boy will grow old enough to say "papa" or "mama" (Isaiah 8:4). So, Isaiah writes down the name of the boy even before he starts to grow inside the belly of his mother. By doing this, Isaiah shares a public message from God. People can test this message by what happens later on to see if the message is true.



The Euphrates River during a flood is the word picture that the Bible uses to show Assyria.

WE HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR WHEN WE TRUST GOD (Isaiah 8:11–15)

American President Franklin D. Roosevelt told his people during a hard time, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”—U.S. Capitol, Washington, D.C. (March 4, 1933). The message of Isaiah to his people during hard times is: “The LORD All-Powerful is the one you should fear. He is the one you should respect” (Isaiah 8:13, ERV). In other words, we do not need to fear anything when we “fear,” or respect, God.

God warns Isaiah not to be afraid of the things that Israel is afraid of. God tells Isaiah to fear, or respect, Him (Isaiah 8:12, 13). This is an important idea in the Bible. We see this same idea in Revelation 14:6–12. In these verses, three angels tell everyone on earth to fear God and give glory to Him, and not the wild land animal in Revelation 13.

What does the Bible mean when it tells us to “fear” God? Does that mean we should be afraid of Him? How can we “fear” God and, at the same time, love Him as the Bible commands us (Matthew 22:37)?

What does it mean to “fear” God? It means we believe that God is the most powerful Person alive. If God is for you, no one else can hurt you without His permission. If God is against you because you have turned against Him, then what? You can run from Him, yes. But you cannot hide.

Does the idea that we should “fear” God disagree with 1 John 4:18, ERV: “Where God’s love is, there is no fear, because God’s perfect love takes away fear. It is his punishment that makes a person fear. So his love is not made perfect in the one who has fear”? Explain your answer.

There are different types of fear. Here is one example. Let us say you are friends with a very powerful person. You love your friend. You are not afraid of your friend because you know he or she will not hurt you. But you respect this person and the power that he or she has.

Are there things that we as Christians should not fear that other people are afraid of? If so, what are they? And what things do we as Christians fear that other people do not fear? (Hint: Read Matthew 10:28 and Jeremiah 10:2, 3.)



Three angels tell everyone on earth to fear God and give glory to Him.

WHEN PEOPLE ARE ALIVE IN BODY BUT DEAD IN SPIRIT (Isaiah 8:16–22)

Read Isaiah 8:16–22. What are these verses talking about? What does this tell us about King Ahaz? Write down the most important ideas in these verses.

Ahaz worships false gods and follows false religion (2 Kings 16:3, 4, 10–15; 2 Chronicles 28:2–4, 23–25). This false religion includes the worship of demons. Deuteronomy 32:17, NLV, tells us: “They gave gifts to demons.” (Read also 1 Corinthians 10:20.) Today, modern witchcraft, or magic, and New Age beliefs are really just modern examples of the magic and witchcraft we read about in Bible times.

Isaiah tells us what happens to us when we turn away from God and trust in spirits. Our hearts fill with fear. We lose hope (Isaiah 8:21, 22). This shows us Ahaz (compare 2 Chronicles 28:22, 23). Isaiah says that the people who turn to spirits become very angry. They curse their king (Isaiah 8:21, NLV). What should this tell Ahaz? It should warn him about what the people will do. Ahaz caused his people to worship demons. So, his people will curse him. And look what happens when Ahaz dies. No one has any respect for Ahaz because he is an evil king. So, the people do “not bring him into the graves of the kings of Israel” (2 Chronicles 28:27, NLV).

Read Leviticus 20:27 and Deuteronomy 18:9–14. What do these verses say about magic and witchcraft?

We must separate ourselves from anything to do with magic or witchcraft. When we separate from these false beliefs, we show our loyalty to God. 1 Chronicles 10:13, 14 tells us what happened to King Saul because he did not follow this important rule: “So Saul died for his sin against the Lord, because he did not keep the Word [the commandments] of the Lord. He had asked a woman who spoke with spirits what he should do. He did not ask the Lord. So the Lord killed him, and gave the nation [kingdom] to David the son of Jesse” (1 Chronicles 10:13, 14, NLV).

In what ways do you see the ideas and beliefs from magic and witchcraft in your community? What can you do to protect yourself and your family from the danger?



Ahaz worships false gods and follows false religion (2 Kings 16:3, 4, 10–15; 2 Chronicles 28:2–4, 23–25).

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: Read in *The Great Controversy*, “Can Our Dead Speak to Us?” pages 551–562.

“In Bible times, there are people who say they can talk with the spirits of dead people. Today, there are people who say the same thing. They say these ‘spirits’ are visitors from other planets. But the Bible tells us that these visitors are really demons. (Compare Numbers 25:1–3; Psalm 106:28; 1 Corinthians 10:20; and Revelation 16:14.) God says that He hates it when anyone communicates with demons or spirits. The law of God says that anyone who talks with spirits must be killed. Read Leviticus 19:31 and Leviticus 20:27. Today, people make fun of witchcraft. They do not think that anyone can really talk with evil spirits. But these same people think it is possible to talk to the spirits of our dead loved ones. This belief is very popular. Many lawmakers and kings believe it too. Even some scientists think we can speak to the dead. There are thousands, yes, millions of people who believe that we can communicate with our dead loved ones. But this ‘new’ belief is a lie. It is really the same old witchcraft, or magic, that the Bible warns us about. The Bible forbids us to have anything to do with it.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 556, adapted.



“God says that He hates it when anyone communicates with demons or spirits.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 Talk with your class about the belief that some people have today that we can communicate with the dead. How popular is this belief? How does it show up in the movies, books, on TV, and in the life around you? What can we do to stop it? How can we help other people understand the dangers in trying to communicate with the dead? Why is the Bible teaching about what happens when we die so important? How does it protect us against the lie that the dead can talk to us?
- 2 Read Isaiah 8:20. Write the verse in your own words. Let different people in class share their verse. What is the Lord telling us here?

Summary: Isaiah’s words, actions, and even his family showed God’s message of warning and hope. As God’s people, we must trust that God knows what He is doing. He will keep us safe when we trust in Him. God has both the love and the power to guide, protect, and take care of us if we let Him. For the people who turn away from God, there is only a sad end.

AN IMPORTANT LESSON ABOUT TIME

I am a pastor who lives in Tanzania. I decide to lead Bible meetings there for three weeks to win souls to Jesus.

I hold the meetings in the city of Moshi. Moshi is located next to Mount Kilimanjaro. The church leaders in Moshi get things ready. They choose the dry time of the year for the meetings when there is no rain. But heavy rain starts after the first week. I am worried that no one will come. So, I tell the leaders that we should hold the meetings at a later time.

The leader of the group in Moshi surprises me. He refuses to cancel the meetings. "No, Pastor. We are not going to hold the meetings at a later date," he says. "We prayed about these meetings for a long time. Our Lord heard our prayers. He knew the rain will come."

"So, what shall we do?" I ask. "The rain is falling hard."

He says, "We must believe that our God cares about the time of our meetings. Let us pray this way: 'Our good Lord, You can allow the rains to fall as much as You wish. But please let no rain fall from 3:30 P.M. to 6:30 P.M. This way people will have 30 minutes to travel to the 4:00 P.M. meetings and 30 minutes to go back home after the meetings end at 6:00 P.M.'"

I do not know what to think about this prayer. But I join praying with the church leader and his group anyway.

The next morning the rain pours. The heavy rain continues into the afternoon. But exactly at 3:30 P.M., it stops. Our meetings start at 4:00 P.M. I preach until 6:00 P.M. The rain starts again at 6:30 P.M.

It rains this way for two weeks. Rain pours down until 3:30 P.M. Then it stops. Then it starts again at 6:30 P.M.

One day, a visitor arrives at the meeting site at 3:00 P.M. He comes early to get a good seat. He waits for a little bit in the heavy rain. Then he decides that the meeting will be canceled. So he leaves. The next day he asks if we met.

"Of course," I say. "We did not ask God to stop the rain at 3:00 P.M. We asked for 3:30 P.M. So you should have remembered that and not doubted God."

"I will never make that mistake again," the man says.

On the last Sabbath, I baptize 12 people in a river. When I bring the last person out of the water, the rain starts to fall.

This experience teaches me that God cares about time. Sure, God is not limited by time as we are. But God expects us to care about time too. He wants us to be good managers of our time. Paul tells us, "So be very careful how you live. Do not live like [the same as] people who aren't wise. Live like [the same as] people who are wise. Make the most of every opportunity [time]. The days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15, 16, NIV).

INSIDE *Story*

by GODWIN K. LEKUNDAYO



The heavy rain continues into the afternoon. But exactly at 3:30 P.M., it stops.

