

Who was Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz?

Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz was a son of the prophet Isaiah. The son's name is a mouthful, but it's also full of meaning. Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz is mentioned in this passage: "The Lord said to me, 'Take a large scroll and write on it with an ordinary pen: Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz.' So I called in Uriah the priest and Zechariah son of Jeberechiah as reliable witnesses for me. Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the Lord said to me, 'Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. For before the boy knows how to say "My father" or "My mother," the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria'" (Isaiah 8:1-4).

Scripture records the names of two sons of the prophet Isaiah. Both names were symbolic, containing messages from God to Judah's king Ahaz and to us today (see Romans 15:4). Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz can be translated "Speed the spoil and hasten the booty."

Isaiah began his ministry in Judah in 740 BC, the end of the long, relatively prosperous reign of King Uzziah (Isaiah 6:1). The years that immediately followed were the most turbulent in the history of the divided kingdom of Judah and Israel. Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) was conquering much of the Middle East, including the nations surrounding Israel. The Assyrian Empire stretched well over 1,500 miles, from the Persian Gulf to deep into Egypt. Assyrian military strategy combined huge numbers of troops, advanced siege technology, shocking savagery, and mass deportation to terrify and subdue conquered peoples.

About 735 or 734 BC, the kings of Syria (Damascus) and Israel (Samaria) asked Judah's King Ahaz to ally with them against Assyria. When Ahaz refused, the two kings attacked Judah, launching the Syro-Ephraimite War (Ephraim was the dominant tribe of the northern

kingdom of Israel and therefore identified with that kingdom). The two kings quickly overran much of Judah, inflicting great slaughter (2 Chronicles 28:5-8), then besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:5).

Ahaz and all Judah were terrified (Isaiah 7:2). But rather than trusting in the Lord as Isaiah counseled, the apostate Ahaz sought protection through an alliance with Assyria. He sent the silver and gold from the temple and his own royal treasury, offering Judah as another vassal state of the growing empire (2 Kings 16:7-8).

It was during this national crisis that Isaiah's second son was born as prophesied as a sign to Ahaz and Judah. Before the boy was conceived God had Isaiah draw up a legal document with the four words of his future son's name, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (Isaiah 8:1-2). The name literally means "Speed-spoil-hasten-plunder" or "Swift to the spoil, quick to the plunder." God's message to Ahaz was that both of Judah's enemies would be defeated and plundered. Judah would be saved. The document containing the name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz symbolized a property deed transferring the wealth of Damascus and Israel to the king of Assyria.

Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, Isaiah's future son, named with the same four words of the document, revealed the time frame of Israel's and Syria's defeat: sometime between the conception of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz to "before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother'" (Isaiah 8:3-4). That is, Judah would be saved before Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz reached age 2, a total of less than three years, counting the child's time in the womb.

The prophecy was fulfilled in 732 BC when both Syria and Israel were conquered by Assyria. A decade later Assyria removed Israel's wealth and many of her people,

obliterating their national identity. Those Israelites who remained in the land intermarried with a variety of foreign occupiers sent by their conquerors (2 Kings 17:24), eventually giving rise to the despised race of Samaritans (see John 4:9; 8:48).

At first, it seemed that King Ahaz's plan to ally with Assyria was a great success for Judah. But the terrible unintended consequences of solving his problems his own way rather than God's soon followed, as Isaiah had prophesied (Isaiah 7:17-25). Judah became a vassal state from which Assyria demanded heavy annual tribute—completely unnecessary, because God had already intended to use Assyria to save Judah without Ahaz asking for their help (Isaiah 8:4). Within thirty years, this “ally” would lay waste to Judah and place its mighty siege engines before the walls of Jerusalem (Isaiah 36).

The message of Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz to stubborn King Ahaz also contains lessons for us today:

1) No matter how powerful and terrifying your enemies, do not fear them; rather, trust in God, who is in complete control (Romans 8:28; Psalm 33:10-11). God is our strength and defense (Exodus 15:2; Judges 7:2; Isaiah 12:2). When Assyria later attacked Jerusalem in 701 BC, godly King Hezekiah, terrified as he was, accepted Isaiah's prophecy and turned to God for help. Jerusalem was miraculously delivered (Isaiah 37).

2) Do not be surprised at the instruments God uses to execute His will. He may use the wicked to carry out His good plans (Genesis 50:20; 2 Chronicles 36:15-17).

3) Being used as an instrument of God is no guarantee of His future blessings for the wicked, whether for individuals (1 Kings 14:7-11) or empires (Isaiah 10:12; Jeremiah

50:18). Assyria's wickedness would be punished (Isaiah 10:15-17), a prophecy fulfilled in the death of 185,000 soldiers attacking Jerusalem (Isaiah 37:36) and the total destruction of the Assyrian Empire (Isaiah 13:1-14:27).

4) As Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz's name was written into a legal contract before he was even conceived, God wrote the plan for our entire lives before we were conceived (Psalm 139:16; Jeremiah 1:5), even before the beginning of time (Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Believing these powerful truths and acting on them in faith channels the power of God Almighty to make a difference not only in our own lives, but possibly in our communities, our nation, and the whole world (Matthew 17:20; John 14:12).