

Increasing Sin

After speaking of the association of the various peoples under the Assyrian yoke in this mighty attack against Judah, the prophet naturally turns his attention back to the confederacy the Jews have made with the Assyrian king for protection against Israel and Syria (verses 11-12), and reiterates the fact that the safety of God's people is not to be found in such alliances with wicked nations, but in obeying the Lord and seeking His protection. The people have gone on in this wicked way and it is inevitable that they become increasingly apostate. In view of this situation, Isaiah calls upon the true people of God (v. 16), to bind up the testimony and seal the law among the true disciples, and to wait for the salvation of the Lord.

Verse 18 reads: "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth in Mount Zion." In this context this seems at first sight to mean that the prophet and his two sons who have symbolic names -- "Shear-jashub" (a remnant shall return) and "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" (hasten the booty, hurry the spoil) -- are signs and indications in Israel of the future will of the Lord. Yet we find it quoted in Hebrews 2:13 with a different meaning, and in this passage this other meaning seems to fit the context even better. The book of Hebrews quotes the words "Behold I and the children whom God hath given me" as the words of Christ. This proves the correct interpretation of Isaiah 8:18 to be that the prophet is quoting the words of Immanuel, whose true children, the remnant of Israel, are preserving the true faith in the midst of an apostate age. Even though the mass of the people turn away from the Lord, the true believers are to guard His Word and show forth His righteousness in their lives, and thus be signs and wonders among the people, keeping alive the knowledge of the true God. Whenever God's people are a small group in a wicked nation they have to perform this function, whether in the days of the Old Testament or during the long history of the Christian church.

Verses 19 and 20 show the inevitable results when people fail to seek their guidance from God's Word. They turn to familiar spirits and "unto wizards that peep and mutter."