

## Isaiah 8:11-15

*Isaiah 8:11 For thus the LORD spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, <sup>12</sup> “You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ in regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, and you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it. <sup>13</sup> It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy. And He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread. <sup>14</sup> Then He shall become a sanctuary; but to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> Many will stumble over them, then they will fall and be broken; they will even be snared and caught.”*

The people of Judah were terrified because of the threat of invasion. Their northern neighbors, Israel and Aram, were threatening to depose Judah’s king and replace him with their own puppet ruler (see Isaiah 7:6). North of them was Assyria, the greatest super-power of their time, which like a mighty flooding river was ruthlessly sweeping away other nations (see Isaiah 8:7).

In the midst of such threats and instability, many conspiracy theories were circulating among Judah’s people. Conspiracy theories almost always thrive during times of social upheaval, in part because they give their adherents a false sense of security: “If I am ‘in the know,’ if I understand the *real* story of which others are ignorant, if I know who the *real* enemies are – then I feel like I have a better chance of navigating these turbulent waters.” Then too, conspiracy theories are appealing because they make other people the enemy, and help us to justify blaming them for our predicaments.



Like Judah in the eighth century BC, we are also living in a society in which conspiracy theories abound. Political polarization, racial unrest, a pandemic, mob violence – these and other factors have converged to create a sense of instability that is unprecedented in our lifetimes. A cultural consensus that there is no such thing as objective truth exacerbates the instability. And through the internet, we have unparalleled access to all kinds of information – some that is factual and helpful, but much that is harmful speculation. Conspiracy theories are one form of this speculation to which we have easy access. It is easier than ever to fall into one of these “rabbit holes” that promise us a false sense of security and moral superiority.

God acknowledges that there are real conspiracies (unlawful human alliances), and He condemns them. The Old Testament uses “conspiracy” in this way several times.<sup>1</sup> But in Isaiah 8, the issue is not whether or not a particular conspiracy exists (some do; some don’t), or how harmful it may be (some may be very harmful; others may be innocuous). This issue is that God does not want His people to **focus** on conspiracies. *“You are not to say, ‘It is a conspiracy!’ in regard to all that this people call a conspiracy, and you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it.”* When we find that we are obsessing on any conspiracy theory, then we are on a wrong and dangerous path. God gives us several reasons why we should heed this solemn warning:

- *“It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy.”* God is uniquely superior to all other objects of our trust. He is *“the LORD of hosts”* – the One who rules over the whole universe, including vast multitudes of angels. He is also *“the LORD of hosts”* – the God who has entered into a solemn covenant with His people,<sup>2</sup> and who promised to care for them, and who has proven Himself faithful to His promises. It is understandable

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<sup>1</sup> See 2 Samuel 15:12; 1 Kings 16:20; 2 Kings 12:20; 14:19; 15:15,30; 17:4; Jeremiah 11:9; Ezekiel 22:25.

<sup>2</sup> The Hebrew word for “LORD” is *Yahweh*, which is the name God used for Himself when promised Moses that He would deliver the Israelites from Egypt because He had chosen them to be His people (see Exodus 3). This use of the name for God emphasizes that He is a covenant-making and promise-keeping God.



that people who do not belong to God would turn to conspiracy theories during troublesome times. But how can His own people look to anything or anyone but Him for their ultimate security? Our focus should be on God, and on His unsurpassed power and faithfulness, not on human plans and plots.

- *“He shall be your fear, and He shall be your dread. Then He shall become a sanctuary”* (verse 13b, 14a). The right way for God’s people to deal with their fears (whatever they may be) is to deepen their fear of God. Put differently, the fear of God expels our other fears.<sup>3</sup> The “fear of God” does not refer to servile terror of a dangerous authority figure. Throughout the Old Testament, the fear of God is synonymous with trusting God because of His proven love and forgiveness and faithfulness. The more we focus on the earthly objects of our fears, they more threatening they grow, and the more tempted we become to resort to conspiracy-theory thinking to protect ourselves from them. Focus instead, God says, on who He is, and on what He promises, and on how He has proven Himself to His people. As we do this, He “grows bigger” in our field of vision, and human threats grow smaller, and God becomes our Sanctuary – the One who is with us, and who guards our hearts and minds with a peace that is beyond human comprehension (Philippians 4:7).
- *“. . . but to both the houses of Israel, (God will become) a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over, and a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>15</sup> Many will stumble over them, then they will fall and be broken; they will even be snared and caught.”* In context, God is warning the Israelites that if they persist in focusing on conspiracy theories, He will discipline them by giving them over to the object of their fears. How sad

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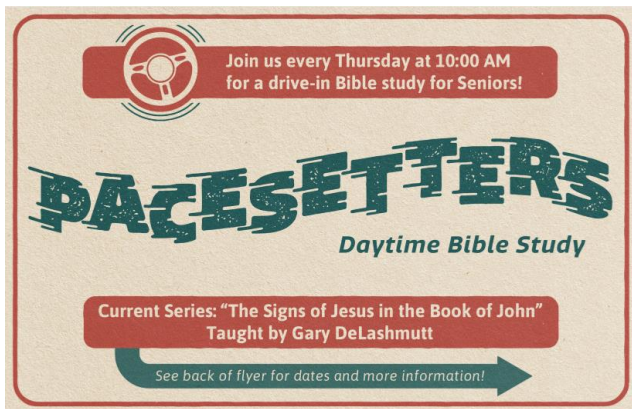
<sup>3</sup> See also Psalm 34:4,7 – “I sought the LORD, and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears . . . The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.”



for Christians to be needlessly dominated by fear when our lives and words can be a testimony of hope and security in our God!

*Lord Jesus, thank You that You have given us even greater promises than You gave the Israelites. Thank You that You promise us eternal life, and a meaningful life of service in Your plan until the day that You return. Help us to focus on You instead of on our fears. Help us to trust in You, so that You may become our Sanctuary in our daily lives.*

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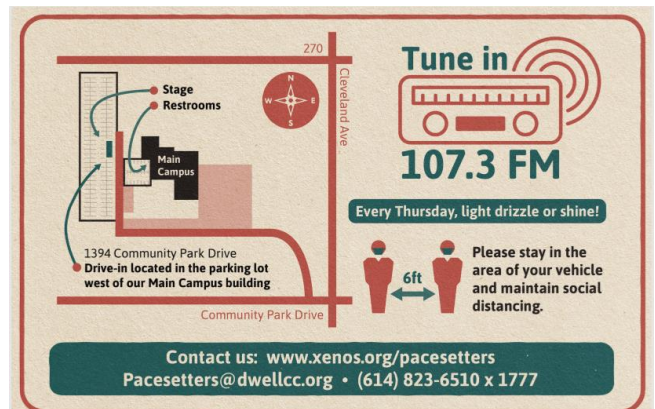


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