

Review

God has been using Isaiah to warn the people of Israel and Judah of the impending judgment which will come upon them if they do not repent.

9:8-12 The People's Pride

"Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria" refer to the people living in the northern kingdom of Israel. God had seen their response to earlier judgments: not humble repentance, but prideful obstinacy. Every time God allowed attackers to bring destruction, He had desired Israel to pray and turn to Him. But instead, they just kept saying, "We'll make things stronger and continue in our sin."

And so God is going to bring more destruction upon them. King Rezin of the Arameans, who had allied with Israel against Judah, brought with him not only his help, but also his problems. When Israel allied with Aram, Aram's active enemies became Israel's active enemies.

And so Israel's destruction was coming not only from the expected foes, like the Philistines, but also from their alliance with Aram.

In Spite Of All This

These verses end with a statement which is repeated several times in the passage we're covering tonight:

Is. 9:12 ...In spite of all this, His anger does not turn away and His hand is still stretched out.

It appears at the end of each of four statements (9:12; 9:17; 9:21; 10:4). It signifies that He continues to judge. Literally, it says, "**all this**" (**kole aw-SAW**). And so God is saying, "**All this judgment, but still there is more to come.**"

9:13-17 The Head And Tail Cut Off

Even with the extra difficulties from God's judgment, Israel still refuses to turn to God. And so more judgment takes place. The Lord says that He "cuts off the head and tail from Israel." This means that from the highest position to the lowest one, God is bringing death.

The highest position was that of the elders, those perceived as honorable men. The lowest position is that of the false prophet. But both of them - and everyone in between - were totally corrupt. The most "honorable" man in Israel was ripe for judgment, as was the young men, and even the orphans and widows.

Why? He says, "Because..."

Is. 9:17 "...every one of them is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth is speaking foolishness..."

And once again, God says, "All this judgment, but still there is more to come."

9:18-21 Fire And Famine

Wickedness had spread like a wildfire throughout the people of Israel, which it tends to do when unchecked. As Paul the apostle said,

1Cor. 15:33 ..."Bad company corrupts good morals."

The column of smoke spoken of here figuratively makes me think of how this must have smelled to God. It is the direct opposite of the smoke which was pleasing to Him as it ascended from the altar of burnt offering (Lev. 1:9). Dozens of times in Scripture, this smell is described as a "**soothing aroma**" (**nee-KHO-akh RAY-akh**) to the Lord. Literally, that means "a restful, quieting, tranquilizing smell."

But as the smoke of their wickedness ascended to God, it brought Him to fury. And His fury burned like a fire far hotter than their wickedness.

What exactly was this wickedness of theirs? They didn't care about one another. There was no compassion for others. They devoured one another, which is just devouring yourself. They fought with each other, and they fought against their brothers in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Centuries later, Paul saw this trend starting to rear its ugly head in the Christian church, and warned,

Gal. 5:13-16 ...you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is

fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

This behavior caused God's fury to incinerate them.

And once again, God says, "All this judgment, but still there is more to come."

10:1-4 Punishment For Injustice

More wicked behavior of the people is described. Those in positions of authority, who were supposed to administer justice, were completely corrupt.

When we went through our study of Ezekiel, we saw that this was one of God's major complaints against the southern kingdom as well.

Ezek. 22:29 "The people of the land have practiced oppression and committed robbery, and they have wronged the poor and needy and have oppressed the sojourner without justice."

They thought that they were above the law, and that their positions of authority kept them safe. But God asks them what they are going to do in the day of punishment, when devastation comes upon them. All of the riches that they'd gathered through bribes - where was it going? All they will have left is to fall down dead, or be carried off into slavery.

And for the fourth time, God says, "All this judgment, but still there is more to come."

10:5-19 Punishment For Assyria's Pride

The Lord was going to use the Assyrian Empire to bring this final judgment down upon the northern kingdom. He describes them as "the rod of My anger," much the same way He later said that He had placed His sword in the hand of the king of Babylon (Ezek. 30:25).

Some people envy that position. They say,

Rom. 12:19 ...it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL RE-

PAY," says the Lord.

"Well, I just want to be about the Lord's business!" Some people like thinking of themselves as God's instrument of wrath upon His disobedient people. But never forget that every instrument of God's wrath always subsequently experiences God's wrath themselves. The prophets' writings are full of these warnings.

In this lengthy passage, God pronounces woe to Assyria. Yes, God acknowledges that He will use them against wicked Israel. But they viewed themselves with pride and believed that they had arisen to power by their own strength.

Plus, they decided to go further than Israel. They attacked the land of Judah, which had not yet reached the full measure of their sin, and were not scheduled to be judged for some time. They came to Jerusalem, shouting terrible blasphemies to the people of the city.

2Kings 18:32-35 "...do not listen to Hezekiah when he misleads you, saying, "The LORD will deliver us." Has any one of the gods of the nations delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Kham-AWTH and Ar-PAWD? Where are the gods of Sef-ar-VAH-yim, Hay-NAH and Iv-VAW? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand? Who among all the gods of the lands have delivered their land from my hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

What they were doing was boasting above the hand that had moved them. God asks,

Is. 10:15 Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it? Is the saw to exalt itself over the one who wields it?

That would be like a club wielding those who lift it...

Because of their behavior, God promises to devastate the Assyrian Empire. Ultimately, He would use the Babylonians to do it.

In their pride, the Assyrians destroyed the city of Babylon and began to oppressively rule over Babylonia. But the Babylonian people rebelled against them and declared their independence. Nabopolassar was crowned as Babylonia's king, and he organized the resistance against

the Assyrians. Together, the Babylonians, Medes, and Persians captured Nineveh and defeated Assyria. Their empire was divided up between the victors.

10:20-34 A Remnant Will Return

This is not a new message from Isaiah. Remember that back in chapter seven, we heard that Isaiah's son was named **Sheh-AWR Yaw-SHOOB** (Isa. 7:3). Of course, the names of Isaiah and his children were all prophetic, as he had hinted in chapter eight:

Is. 8:18 Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.

As it turns out, Sheh-AWR Yaw-SHOOB is Hebrew for "**a remnant shall return.**"

Although the Jews were numerous in Isaiah's day, the judgments coming upon them were going to drastically reduce the population. But God never allows the genocide of His people. He always preserves for Himself a remnant.

When Elijah thought he was the only faithful person left, God told him that he had preserved a remnant of 7,000 men who had not bowed down to Baal (1Kings 19:18).

Paul told the Romans,

Rom. 11:5 In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice.

God has always known throughout history who and where the faithful people are. He doesn't lose track of them. Right up until the end of the age, He reassures us that He knows where they are. In Revelation seven, we are told of a terrible judgment which will come upon the earth. But this judgment is not allowed to begin until God's remnant is sealed. Twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes are named, totaling a remnant of 144,000 (Rev. 7:2-8), and God has not lost track of a single one of them.

Here in Isaiah, we see that God speaks of a future day when His

people will rely not on Assyria, not on their nuclear arsenal, and not on the antichrist. They will rely only upon Him. Even when the nations again turn against them, they will know the true safety of trusting in God. We read in Revelation that at the end of the Millennium,

Rev. 20:7-9 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

This is how easy victories are won when you put your trust in God rather than man.