

The Fall of Assyria and Preservation of a Remnant

Isaiah 10

Isaiah 10:1-4 – *“Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed² to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless.³ What will you do in the day of punishment, and in the desolation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory? ⁴ Without Me they shall bow down among the prisoners, and they shall fall among the slain. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.”*

Background Notes

In Isaiah 10:1-4 the social sins of the nation were denounced. The poor and needy were being deprived of justice, and the rich were taking advantage of widows and even orphans. For these sins the nation would be punished (v3) and would be taken into captivity (v4). Thus the first four verses of Isaiah 10 properly belong with chapter 9, where the subject was the predicted fall of the northern kingdom of Israel.

What a message for our own nation today! Where is the legal justice for the “unwanted” unborn, for example? And will the handicapped and elderly be the next to go? As God had to judge His people Israel for their social sins, so a holy and righteous God will have to judge our own nation (a so-called Christian nation) for our social sins.

Doctrinal Points

1. In His discipline, God employed the axe of Assyria.

Isaiah 10:5-11 - *Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. ⁶ I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath I will give him charge to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. ⁷ Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off not a few nations. ⁸ For he says, ‘Are not my princes altogether kings? ⁹ Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus?*

¹⁰ As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria, ¹¹ as I have done to Samaria and her idols, shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?’

God described Assyria as “the rod of My anger” (v5) and My “axe” and “saw” and “club” (v15). The point is that God was about to use the Assyrian Empire as a tool to discipline His people Israel - an “ungodly nation” and the “people of My wrath” (v6).

Assyria had no idea that God was using them as a tool to discipline His people. Assyria thought they were simply conquering and plundering another nation (v7). Carchemish and Damascus and even Samaria had already fallen at this point (v9-10), and Assyria thought Jerusalem would fall, just like all the other cities that they had conquered. Assyria thought that the gods of the kingdoms that they had conquered were greater than the God of Jerusalem (v10-11). Well, were they in for a surprise!

Just as God used the pagan Assyrian Empire as His rod and axe and club to discipline His people Israel, so God can use **any** tools He wants to discipline our nation. God can use events and circumstances and people, including unbelievers, to discipline us when we sin. Remember the lesson of Assyria. In His discipline, God employed the axe of Assyria.

2. In His judgment, God punished the pride of Sennacherib.

Isaiah 10:12-19 - *Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks." ¹³For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. Also I have removed the boundaries of the people, and have robbed their treasuries. So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. ¹⁴My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people, and as one gathers eggs that are left, I have gathered all the earth; and there was no one who moved his wing, nor opened his mouth with even a peep. ¹⁵Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!"*

¹⁶Therefore the Lord, the Lord of hosts, will send leanness among his fat ones; and under his glory He will kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. ¹⁷So the Light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame. It will burn and devour His thorns and his briars in one day. ¹⁸And it will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field, both soul and body; and they will be as when a sick man wastes away. ¹⁹Then the rest of the trees of his forest will be so few in number that a child may write them.

After using them as His disciplinary axe and rod, God would punish Assyria because of its pride and arrogance, and because Assyria claimed to have conquered all these territories and kingdoms through its own military might (v12). Assyria would be punished for not recognizing the supremacy of the one true God (v13-15). Verse 15 is very descriptive: *"Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!"*

Because of her pride, and her haughty and lofty opinion of herself, the Lord Himself would cut Assyria down.

Isaiah 10:28-32 - *He has come to Aiath; He has passed Migron; at Michmash he has attended to his equipment. ²⁹They have gone along the ridge; they have taken up lodging at Geba. Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul has fled. ³⁰Lift up your*

voice, O daughter of Gallim! Cause it to be heard as far as Laish— O poor Anathoth! ³¹ Madmenah has fled; the inhabitants of Gebim seek refuge. ³² As yet he will remain at Nob that day. He will shake his fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

³³ Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, will lop off the bough with terror; those of high stature will be hewn down, and the haughty will be humbled. ³⁴ He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One.

In 701 BC, the proud Assyrian king Sennacherib marched his armies against Jerusalem, intending to conquer King Hezekiah and the kingdom of Judah. In fact, the invasion route that Sennacherib would take was predicted in detail in verses 28-32! All of this took place in 701 BC, right down to the very last detail.

At first it appeared that the proud Assyrians would be successful in their march against Jerusalem. All the cities and towns in their path fell like dominoes. Even the fortified cities that surrounded Jerusalem were conquered. It looked like all hope was gone. The town of Nob (v32) was only a couple of miles from Jerusalem.

But Jerusalem did **not** fall to proud Sennacherib! Why? Because good King Hezekiah prayed, and asked the Lord for deliverance! And God intervened on behalf of King Hezekiah and the kingdom of Judah. Verse 17 predicted that the Holy One of Israel would burn and devour the “thorns and briers of Assyria” in a single day – and that’s exactly what happened! Verse 19 predicted that the Assyrians would be so badly defeated that the number of survivors would be like a forest that had been cut down to the ground, with so few trees left that even a child could easily count them.

Isaiah 10:33-34 - Behold, the Lord, the Lord of hosts, will lop off the bough with terror. Those of high stature will be hewn down, and the haughty will be humbled. He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One.

The very axe that God used to discipline Israel would be cut down as a forest with a greater axe, the Lord Himself. Even though the Assyrians thought they were as tall and strong and lofty as the cedars of Lebanon, they would be cut down. In His judgment, God punished the pride of Sennacherib.

3. In His grace, God preserved a “remnant of Jacob.”

Isaiah 10:20-27 - And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, will never again depend on him who defeated them, but will depend on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. ²¹ The remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God. ²² For though your people, O Israel, be as the sand of the sea, a remnant of them will return. The destruction decreed shall overflow with righteousness. ²³ For the Lord God of hosts will make a determined end in the midst of all the land.

²⁴ Therefore thus says the Lord God of hosts: “O My people, who dwell in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrian. He shall strike you with a rod and lift up his staff against you, in the manner of Egypt. ²⁵ For yet a very little while and the

indignation will cease, as will My anger in their destruction.”²⁶ And the Lord of hosts will stir up a scourge for him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; as His rod was on the sea, so will He lift it up in the manner of Egypt.²⁷ It shall come to pass in that day that his burden will be taken away from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil.

Verse 20-22 predicted that God would defeat the Assyrians as He had defeated the Midianites and the Egyptians. In addition, it predicted that, in His great grace, God would preserve a “remnant” in Israel. Proof of this prophecy is the fact that Jews today include remnants of all twelve tribes of Israel. The ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel were not completely wiped out by the Assyrians, and remnants of the other two tribes from the southern kingdom returned from the exile in Babylon. People from **all** the tribes of Israel were preserved - and they are preserved even to this day!

The phrase “*in that day*” that was used in verses 20 and 27 generally has an End Times prophetic aspect to it. This is especially true when Isaiah used the phrase, and we believe that is the case here as well. Just as God miraculously defeated the Assyrians and delivered Israel in Isaiah’s day, so God will defeat the Assyria of the End Times, and Israel will be delivered. In His grace, God preserved a remnant of Jacob.

Practical Application

You can’t take it with you!

That’s a good practical application - but where do we see it in this chapter? Go back to verses 3-4. As the ungodly people of Israel faced the coming defeat and captivity, God said: “*To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory?*” In other words – will all the money that you think is your security help you when disaster comes? And where will you leave the possessions in which you boast and glory – that are your pride and pleasure?

Just as He said then, God says today to people who trust in their wealth for security. Will your bank account save you in the day of disaster? And you will have to leave behind your accumulated wealth, your houses, furniture, wardrobes, jewelry, leisure “toys” – all your treasured possessions. All those things in which you boast and glory now will be left behind – because you can’t take them with you!

Unbelievers - get right with God now, because you can’t buy your way into Heaven. And believers – adjust your attitude to your earthly possessions – because you can’t take them with you! Use your finances for the furtherance of the kingdom of God and for **His** glory – not yours! And by doing that, you will “*lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven!*”

Remember - you can’t take it with you!