

Session 12

Isaiah 9:8-10:23 | Judgment on Israel and the Assyrian Rod

Isaiah Oracle by Oracle / Dr. Randy White

- Verses 1-7 gave the bright hope of Galilee's light and the promised child whose government and peace will never end.
- Verse 8 turns back to the present nation: before that kingdom hope is realized, Israel's pride and rebellion must be confronted by judgment.

The Lord's word and Israel's pride (vv.8-10)

- Verse 8 is a word from the Lord to Jacob, which also "hath lighted upon Israel."
 - The word "Lord" is *adonai* rather than *YHWH*, but, according to the Masoretic tradition, this is one of 134 places where *YHWH* was substituted with *adonai*. In either case, we know this is the God of Israel who has "sent a word."
 - The word was "sent" and "it has fallen," implying that it has, by this time, been fulfilled.
 - The exact "word" is not expressed in the text.
 - In light of the Syro-Ephraimite conflict, this likely refers to the earlier word against Pekah and Ephraim in Isaiah 7:7-9, 7:16, and 8:4, now beginning to fall upon Israel.
- Verses 9-10 belong together as one thought:
 - "All the people shall know" combines a singular *people* with a plural verb, emphasizing every person within the nation.
 - The people, identified as "Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria," have spoken "in the pride and stoutness of heart" (v. 9), with verse 10 giving their words of confidence.
 - What the people will "know" is not merely that these words were spoken, but that the words were false. Their confidence was misplaced, prideful, and rebellious.

Adversaries, corrupt leaders, and continued anger of the Lord (vv.11-16)

- These verses move toward the ultimate destruction of Israel, already anticipated in Isaiah 7:8: "within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people."
- The LORD will "set up the adversaries of Rezin" against "him, and join his enemies together" (v. 11).

- This may sound as though Rezin’s adversaries will attack Rezin, but that misunderstands “**him.**”
- Ephraim is the “**him.**”
- Thus, in effect, *just as Rezin was attacked and destroyed by his enemies, those same enemies will now come upon Ephraim (Israel). The LORD will do to Ephraim what He did to Syria.*
- The proof is in verse 12, where “the Syrians” are attacking Israel. Rezin represented Syria, but after Damascus fell to Assyria and Rezin was slain (2 Kings 16:9), Syria came under Assyrian control and could be turned against Israel, with “the Syrians before, and the Philistines behind.”
- Historically, Assyria first crushed Syria, then turned its pressure upon Israel. Tiglath-pileser took northern Israelite territory and carried many away captive (2 Kings 15:29), and Samaria later fell after Assyria’s siege (2 Kings 17:5-6).
- The LORD will continue to be angry because even in this judgment “the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them” (v. 13). In the end, Israel will be cut off, “head and tail, branch and rush, in one day” (v. 14).
 - The “one day” language emphasizes sudden, comprehensive judgment. Verse 15 explains the terms: the “head” is the “ancient and honorable” man, and the “tail” is the lying prophet. The point is that Israel’s leadership structure would be removed together, not slowly corrected.
 - Verse 16 shows how the leaders cause the error, but the people pay the consequences.

Widespread wickedness and self-consuming judgment (vv.17-21)

- The Lord’s anger will touch every realm of society (vv. 17-19).
 - The “young men,” in whom a society should find joy, will not be spared (v. 17).
 - The “fatherless and widows,” for whom a society should have mercy, will not be spared (v. 17).
 - The reason is moral: “every one is an hypocrite and an evildoer” (v. 17).
 - The “LORD of hosts” will darken the land and make the people “as the fuel of the fire” (v. 19).
- Verses 20-21 speak of the peril in which Israel will find itself, yet still not turn to the Lord.
 - The “he” in verse 20 is likely a collective Ephraim. The “they” is a larger reference to the country as a whole, but the same people.
 - The picture is gruesome: the northern kingdom will consume itself.
 - The words “Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh” are difficult Hebrew, resulting in two views:
 - Rashi: Manasseh and Ephraim will join together against Judah: “Manasseh with Ephraim, and Ephraim with Manasseh.”
 - ESV: Manasseh and Ephraim will devour each other and also be against Judah: “Manasseh devours Ephraim, and Ephraim devours Manasseh; together they are against Judah.”
 - The KJV simply leaves the ambiguity to the interpreter, rather than making interpretation part of the translation.
 - Rashi’s reading—that they join forces and together oppose Judah—may be closer to the plain wording of verse 21, while the “fighting each other” interpretation is largely inferred from verse 20.

The chapter 10 turn: Assyria, the rod of God's anger

- Chapter 10 begins by completing the judgment oracle that began in 9:8.
- The repeated refrain, “**For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still,**” appears again in 10:4, showing that 10:1-4 belongs with the same cycle of judgment.
- After that, the chapter turns to Assyria itself: the nation God uses as a rod against Israel will also be judged for its own pride.

Woe to unjust lawmakers (10:1-4)

- Verses 1-4 pronounce woe upon rulers who use law itself as an instrument of oppression.
 - They “decree unrighteous decrees” and “write grievousness” (v. 1).
 - Their sin is not merely private wickedness, but institutional injustice.
 - The victims are the poor, the needy, widows, and the fatherless (v. 2), the very people rulers should have protected.
- Verse 3 asks what these rulers will do “in the day of visitation.”
 - The phrase points to the moment when God inspects, judges, and holds the nation accountable.
 - Their wealth and power will not provide refuge when judgment comes from “far,” likely through Assyria as the historical instrument.
- Verse 4 is grim: without the Lord, the leaders will have nowhere to go except under prisoners or among the slain.
 - This completes the refrain-cycle from 9:8-21: “**For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.**” (See 9:12, 17, 21 as well as 10:4).
 - The problem is not that God has judged too little, but that the people still have not turned back to Him.

Assyria as the rod of God's anger (10:5-11)

- Verse 5 identifies Assyria as “**the rod of mine anger.**”
 - The KJV uses “**Assyrian**” because the Lord says He will “send him,” using a masculine singular reference.
 - The nation is also in view, since “**the staff in their hand**” (v. 5) speaks corporately.
 - If “**the Assyrian**” is taken as a single person, the reference would be to the king of Assyria, likely Sargon, the father of Sennacherib.
 - Neither the Assyrian king nor Assyria as a nation is independent of God. Both are tools in God's hand.
 - This does not make Assyria righteous; it means God can use even a wicked empire as an instrument of judgment.
- God sends the Assyrian against “**an hypocritical nation**” and “**the people of my wrath**” (v. 6).
 - In the immediate context this refers to Israel/Ephraim, though Assyria's pressure will also reach Judah.
 - The purpose from God's side is chastening and judgment.
- The Assyrian's intention is different from God's intention.
 - Verse 7 says, “**Howbeit he meaneth not so.**”
 - The Assyrian does not think of himself as God's servant; he thinks only of conquest, destruction,

and imperial pride.

- Verses 8-11 reveal the Assyrian's arrogance.
 - His princes are like kings (v. 8), meaning the Assyrian sees his officials as greater than the kings of other nations.
 - He lists conquered cities: Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, Samaria, and Damascus.
 - The logic is: if those kingdoms fell, Jerusalem should fall also.
 - The Assyrian's error is assuming that the God of Jerusalem is like the idols of the nations (v. 11).

The Lord will punish the Assyrian's pride (10:12-19)

- Verse 12 marks the turn: when the Lord has finished His work on Mount Zion and Jerusalem, He will punish the Assyrian.
 - The Assyrian is useful for judgment, but he is not exempt from judgment.
 - God judges both the nation being chastened and the empire that arrogantly overreaches its assignment.
 - After the Lord has "performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem," the Assyrian will be destroyed.
 - This raises the question: *what is His whole work?*
 - The clearest immediate meaning is God's disciplinary work upon Zion and Jerusalem.
 - **[Theological note:]** Another possibility is that the prophecy telescopes near and far events together, extending ultimately into God's end-times program.
 - In the larger context, the remnant returns (10:20-22), the Assyrian is destroyed (10:24-34), the Branch from Jesse appears (11:1), the kingdom is established (11:6-16), and redeemed Israel praises the Lord (12:1).
 - Could "his whole work" (v. 12) refer not only to the immediate Assyrian crisis, but to the larger sweep of God's work with Zion?
 - If so, then "the Assyrian" may point beyond Sargon or Sennacherib to an eschatological figure such as the Beast, the false prophet, or the King of the North.
 - The king of Assyria boasts in his own strength, wisdom, and conquest (vv. 13-14).
 - He claims to have moved boundaries, robbed treasures, and gathered kingdoms like eggs from a nest.
 - This is imperial pride stated in almost blasphemous terms.
 - Verse 15 gives the Lord's response to the Assyrian:
 - Does the axe boast against the one who chops with it?
 - Does the saw magnify itself against the one using it?
 - The Assyrian is the instrument, not the sovereign.
 - Verses 16-19 announce the Assyrian's humiliation.
 - The Lord will send leanness among the Assyrian's "fat ones" and kindle a burning under his glory (v. 16).
 - **"The light of Israel"** and **"his Holy One"** will become a fire and flame (v. 17).
 - The imagery of forest and fruitful field being consumed points to the collapse of the Assyrian's strength and splendor.
 - Historically, this fits the humbling of Assyria after its campaign against Judah, especially the

destruction of Sennacherib's army in 2 Kings 19:35, and ultimately the later fall of Assyria as an empire.

The remnant shall return (10:20-23)

- Verse 20 shifts from the Assyrian's pride to Israel's future remnant.
 - The remnant will no longer stay upon the one who smote them.
 - Instead, they will stay upon **“the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.”**
- Verse 21 echoes the name of Isaiah's son, **Shear-jashub**, meaning “a remnant shall return” (Isa. 7:3). The Hebrew is exactly the same in both verses.
 - The return is not merely geographical. It is a return **“unto the mighty God.”**
 - This phrase connects naturally with Isaiah 9:6, where the promised child is called **“The mighty God.”**
- Verses 22-23 make clear that judgment will not be avoided by Israel's large numbers.
 - Even if Israel is as numerous as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will return.
 - Paul quotes this passage in Romans 9:27-28 to show that God's work with Israel has always included the principle of a remnant.
 - The phrase **“the consumption decreed”** (v. 22) means the judgment is determined, not accidental.
- Yet again, a question arises: *Is this a short-term or long-term prophecy?*
 - In the short term, the Assyrian does his work, Israel is destroyed, and a remnant, not the whole, returns both to the land and to her God. One could argue that this is exactly what happened, especially in light of the New Testament, where Galilee was filled with a returned remnant living in the territory of the northern kingdom and serving “the mighty God.”
 - In the long term, this context will soon move into the Branch from Jesse (11:1), the wolf and the lamb (11:6-9), and a worldwide regathering (11:11-16). In light of Paul's use of these verses in Romans 9:27-28, it seems unlikely that they are *only* meant to reflect the current crisis or even just a general “remnant principle.”