

ISAIAH – LESSON TEN

ISAIAH 10-11

CHAPTER TEN

The Use and Doom of Assyria

Vv. 1-4 – Visitation and Desolation

Isaiah has not been silent in speaking of the sins of Judah's unrighteous leaders. He now speaks directly against them because they have served their own personal desires and corrupted justice. The first thing he does is to describe their perversions (1). This has a twofold effect upon the people. First, it denies justice to the needy and second, it robs the people of their right at the court, depriving the poor of the little that they have. Widows are their spoil and the poor are their prey (2).

Isaiah then asks three questions (3). First, what are you going to do when the invasion comes with the desolation that accompanies it? "Day of visitation" may be a blessing, but its almost universal use in the Old Testament is that it is a day of judgment. There is no question here because Isaiah tells them that the desolation is coming from afar. That leads to the second question, "To whom will you flee for help?" They have rejected the Holy One of Israel, and Jehovah of hosts is now sending Assyria against them. Who is going to help you when the very one on whom you relied is coming against you and the only one who could have helped has been rejected? That leads to the third and final question, "Where will you leave your wealth (ESV, "glory," ASV)?" There is no one who can keep it safe and guard it for you. The glory of their land and the glory of their political position will all be destroyed. There is no escape.

As for the judges themselves, they will be made to bow down. They refused to bow down to Jehovah; now they will bow down to prisoners in cells or fall down before prisoners through weakness. As marching captives they may fall underneath those

killed in battle. Clearly God is using heathen nations to accomplish his purpose. However, no punishment that God has inflicted has led to repentance. Therefore, his anger is not turned away and his hand is still stretched out.

Vv. 5-11 – Assyria: Jehovah’s Rod

God’s people had run away from their Father and their home and, despite Jehovah’s best efforts, his children continued to rebel. Through Isaiah he now identifies the weapon that his still stretched-out hand was going to loosen on his people – Assyria. Isaiah makes clear that God was going to use a heathen nation to punish his people and accomplish his purpose. He used Assyria against Ephraim and Judah as he was to later use Babylon to destroy Assyria and to carry Judah into captivity (Habakkuk 1:5-11). After the Babylonians had served his purpose, God raised up the Medes to be his arrows against Babylon (Isa. 13:17; 44:28-45:7; Jer. 51:11,28). When the Medes has served his purpose, he unleashed Alexander of Macedonia against the Medo-Persian empire to destroy it. One by one the heathen nations served the purpose of God to establish his eternal kingdom.

Isaiah has not forgotten the coming Messiah. The judgments from 9:8 to 10:31 fit into the Messianic pattern of chapters 7-12. Israel and Judah must be made to realize that they are not ready for the Messiah to come. Wickedness must be judged and the heathen nations must be destroyed before the spiritual kingdom is brought in. Upon the fall of the world’s powers, epitomized by Assyria, the power of Immanuel would arise, the Son of God and Son of David. God would be with his people in the mighty shoot of Jesse (ch. 11).

Isaiah now turns his attention to Assyria. He has pronounced woes upon Judah (Ch. 5), upon himself (6:5), and against the unjust judges of the land. He addresses the nation generically; no one king is named. The Assyrian nation, including all of its people, is in view. Assyria is the rod in God’s hand that he will use against his people. His indignation is in the Assyrian’s hand to be used against Judah, a profane nation. God in his wrath will give the Assyrians charge to take spoil, to take the prey, and to tread Judah down like the mire of the street (5-6). Assyria doesn’t know what is going on. It does not mean to help fulfill God’s purpose and it does not think it is. Assyria

believes that it is conquering many nations on its own. And that is what it has set about to do (7).

Is there a contradiction between v. 7 and 2 Kings 18:25? Rabshakeh, Sennacherab's field commander, there said, "Am I now come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it." Isaiah says that Assyria had no idea that it was doing God's work; Rabshakeh says that God told them to do it. Can both be correct? First, keep in mind the basic principle that inspiration does not guarantee that everything in scripture is true; it guarantees that everything is truthfully reported. A good example is Genesis 3:4. Where inspiration truthfully reports the Devil's lie, "Thou shalt not surely die." Second, Rabshakeh's statement in 2 Kings 18:25 is truthfully reported. Third, the issue then becomes, "Was Rabshakeh's truthfully reported statement true or false?" The answer to that question must begin with the basic truth that it is impossible for God to lie (Heb. 6:18). Both Isaiah and Rabshakeh claim that God spoke to them, yet the two messages claimed are contradictory. Since both claim that God was the source, and since God cannot lie, it follows that either Isaiah or Rabshakeh must be lying. Which is it? That decision is easy, especially in hindsight. Everything that Isaiah said came to pass; Rabshakeh's boasts did not. Rabshakeh failed the test of Deut. 18:15-22. Where, then did Rabshakeh get his information? Is it not likely that he had heard of the prophecies of Judean prophets that Assyria would come against the land and he was using that information to his advantage in his attempt to persuade Jerusalem to surrender without a battle? That makes a great deal more sense than to conclude that God spoke to Sennacherab. True, God sent dreams to Pharaoh and Belshazzar and wrote on Nebuchadnezzar's wall, but he sent Joseph and Daniel to interpret them. He sent Moses and Aaron to speak to Pharaoh. There is no record of God's speaking directly to a king of a heathen nation. Both God and the angel of the Lord (theophany?) spoke to Balaam¹ and then God caused an ass to speak to him (Numbers 22). In the New

1. Balaam, the son of Beor, was from Pethor in Mesopotamia (Dt 23:4). Balaam is the only instance where God spoke directly to a heathen. God also directly controlled the outcome of the event concerning which he spoke to Balaam.

Testament, Pilate's wife reported a dream (Matt. 27:19), but there is no indication if it was a dream sent by the Lord or the type dream that many have in this day and age. In either case it was a dream the contents of which we do not know and that required no interpretation.

The Assyrian's former conquests leads to great boasting. He has captured many kings and they and their military leaders are now in Assyria's army. He has a king for every captain. He has captured many cities, six of which he lists in strategic order beginning in the north and moving south toward Jerusalem (8-9).

In verses 10 and 11 the Assyrian brags that the reason he had won all these victories was because his gods were stronger than the gods of those whom he was fighting. He asserts that he will do the same to "Jerusalem and her idols." What he fails to realize is that Jerusalem's God begins with a capital "G." He is fixing to learn about Jerusalem's God.

Vv. 12 – 19 -- The Assyrian's Boast and Jehovah's Response

God has heard the boastful assertions of the Assyrian and the arrogant boast that Assyria's gods will defeat the God of Judah. God now sets the record straight. The Lord is concerned at the moment with purging Judah, but when he has finished that work he will handle the pride of Assyria (12). The Assyrian boasts that what he did he did by the power of his own hand and by his own wisdom and understanding. He removed the bounds of the peoples; he robbed their treasures; he brought down their kings; he gathered the riches of the peoples over all the earth and there was not one that lifted a hand against him or so much as cheeped (13-14). Jehovah attacks his wisdom head on with penetrating questions. Does an axe claim that it was that which brought down the forest and that he who held the axe had nothing to do with it? Does a saw claim that it alone cut the wood and that he who wielded it played no part in the cutting. Another metaphor follows: to answer either of the questions "yes" makes no more sense than saying that a rod holds up the one who holds it or that a staff can lift up him who is not wood, *i.e.*, the one who holds it (v. 15). This God who was "defeated" by Assyria has finished with them and will now demonstrate that he is the true and living God by sending leanness (disease) among the members of his army

and among his people. Fire speeds through his country as easily it ravages a forest (16). Israel and its God will be the fire and the flame and it will rapidly burn even the thorns and briars, the lowest members of the army. It will be accomplished in one day, perhaps a reference to the destruction of the Assyrian army in one night (37:36).

How thorough will the destruction be? It will destroy the glory of his forest (the valiant army), his fruitful field (the nation), both body and soul (completely). It will be like a standard-bearer fainting (margin: “as when a sick man pineth away”). Like one who has become ill and weak, the nation will be reduced to nothing. The military and the population will become so few that a mere child can count them (18-19).

Vv. 20-23 – A Remnant Shall Return

Judah, that which Assyria vowed to destroy, will survive while Assyria will turn victory into defeat and destruction and a remnant of the house of Israel will return. This remnant will not lean upon Assyria that smote it; it will lean upon the Holy One of Israel, in truth, as it returns to the Mighty God (20-21; recall 9:6). The promise expressed in Shear-jashub’s name will be fulfilled. They will no longer be as the sand of the sea. Paul quoted this passage and applied it to the Jews who were saved (Rom. 9:27). Both Assyria and Judah, but it is a destruction overflowing with righteousness, *i.e.*, it will be a righteous judgment. Just as the Assyrian judgment against Judah came like an overflowing river (8:7-8), so the ultimate destruction of the nation, based on righteous judgment, will come as an overwhelming flood (vv. 20-22).

God will make an end of it all (v. 23). This does not refer to the final judgment, but to the end of the process by which God is working to fulfill his promise. It will happen in time – “in the midst of all the earth.” This prepares us for chapters 13-23 in which the judgment of the heathen nations is announced, and chapters 24-27 in which this general world judgment is described.

Vv. 24-34 – Be Not Afraid! Though on His Way, the Assyrian Shall Be Brought Low

Based on the foregoing the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, pleads with those that dwell in Zion not to be afraid of Assyria even though Assyria would smite them with rod and staff in

the manner of Egypt. There will be a short time and the punishment will be over and the wrath that led to their punishment will be directed at Assyria. Assyria will be defeated as fully as Gideon destroyed the Midianites (Judges 7). It will be a destruction as great as that of the Egyptians when Moses lowered his staff. In that day the yoke that Assyria placed upon Judah will be removed and destroyed. Judah will be so blessed that it will outgrow the yoke and burst it (vv. 24-27).

Assyria is on its way. Step by step Isaiah describes Assyria's sweep across the land toward Jerusalem. He is not describing the actual approach that came from the southwest, but an approach that would strike terror in the hearts of his hearers, especially the inhabitants of the cities mentioned. As Isaiah identifies the cities he describes their reactions. They are terrified, they flee, they cry out, they hear the shrieks of their sister cities. It is at Nob, a Levitical city only two miles from Jerusalem, that Assyria stops and shakes its fist at Zion. He is making the mistake of claiming victory before the battle begins (28-32; see, 1 Kings 20:11).

Jehovah sees the scene differently. Returning to the figure of a forest (v. 19), Isaiah describes how Jehovah will inflict his own terror on Assyria; he will lop the boughs with terror and bring the haughty low. We might say he will bring them down to size. The mountain of Lebanon, symbolizing all that is powerful in the world, stands over against Mount Zion and all that it represents – the city of God and the symbol of his presence and power. It's a one-sided battle; Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one, the one who inhabits Mount Zion. There is no reason to fear. Better things lie ahead for God's faithful remnant (33-34).

“Religion is the opiate of the people,” or so said Karl Marx. It's too bad that Karl Marx, who died in 1883, was not around to see the Berlin Wall come down 106 years later, followed by the collapse of the Russian empire. Of course, by that date Marc had probably changed his mind about God. Perhaps Karl dines with Adolph Hitler, a much later example of one who set about to destroy anything that was religious. He is also a much later example of one who denounced the God of the Bible. Assyria and Babylon were great nations, but their own skills had little to do with their success. God's hand was in it all. God's hand was in their rising and in their setting. He controlled them

just as he does the sun and moon. It is certainly true that Germany, England, France, and the United States did not become more religious after Hitler's defeat. In fact, religion in the United States is perhaps at its lowest point in the history of the nation even as we meet. Is there perhaps some connection between that fact and the financial and moral struggles that our country is presently experiencing?

The question is whether we will ever learn the lesson that nation after nation and government after government have learned over the centuries. Those who either ignore God or rebel against him do not well. Our nation is not God. Our treasure, our military, our knowledge, is not God. The Lord God is one God. Beside him there is none other. As soon as we place ourselves on his throne we will meet our Waterloo. That is one battle we cannot win. Romans 1:21 was written about the heathen, but is there a possibility that it speaks to us: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened." If "pride goes before destruction (Prov. 16:18) applies to nations as well as people, the United States of America, which appears to be arrayed in full battle armor against God, is surely at the top of the list. True, there are more ungodly nations, but not one that at the same time is always asking for his blessing in every way from presidential proclamations to minting pennies.

Since we have elevated the created to the place of the Creator, we now worship the creation, a form of self-worship. We should not be surprised that secularism is the mode of the day. It keeps us from having to go outside of ourselves to find a god to worship. Perhaps that is why we give ourselves credit for any success, giving no thanks to God, while we blame God, taking no blame upon ourselves, for our failures. The God of Isaiah who controls nations and who created all that is, calls upon us to change, and then to serve him in his efforts to change the world.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The King, His Subjects, and the Remnant

Vv. 1-5 – The Shoot of Jesse

Turmoil is not new to the world. The prophecy of Isaiah is filled with turmoil. Assyria is on the move and will invade Samaria and Israel. Israel will be carried into captivity. Jerusalem and Judah will suffer from the invasion, but will be saved by an act of God. Assyria will be destroyed and its military power will end. In spite of avoiding Assyrian captivity, Judah is still suffering. In the midst of this darkness, Isaiah has a message of hope. Whatever befalls Judah, a remnant will survive. In addition, Isaiah provides Judah with an enlarged picture of David's descendant who would sit on David's throne. In these opening verses Isaiah sets forth his nature and his character. There will be great differences between the earthly kingdom and the spiritual kingdom. That which is human is subject to decay. The new spiritual kingdom and its King will not be subject to decay. That which is physical will pass away; the spiritual kingdom will never be destroyed.

The house of David has so decayed (see Amos 9:11) that Isaiah does not refer to it by its name but by the name of David's father. Although it has decayed and has been brought low, unlike Assyria that is dead and has no life in it, in Judah there will be a stump that retains life and from its roots a Branch will grow and produce fruit. Out of the Branch will come God's King and God's mighty Kingdom.

The spirit of Jehovah will rest upon the Branch. This was fulfilled at Jesus' baptism when the Spirit descended upon him (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32). Isaiah lists six characteristics of the Spirit with which the Spirit will endow the Branch. 1) He is the Spirit of wisdom. 2) He is the Spirit of understanding. 3) He is the Spirit of counsel. 4) He is the Spirit of might. 5) He is the Spirit of knowledge. 6) He is the Spirit of the fear of Jehovah. Wisdom is the ability to see the causes and consequences of statements and actions; understanding enables one to use wisdom's insight to make

a correct decision. Counsel is right direction in preparing a plan or solving a problem; might is the ability to execute the plan to a successful conclusion. Knowledge includes and is based on a comprehension of both God and man; the fear of Jehovah is reverence and proper regard for God, his will, and his glory. All of these characteristics will characterize the service of the Branch. The fear of Jehovah will be the delight of the Branch. The Branch will do nothing under compulsion except as he is compelled by the fear of Jehovah. He will not render judgment based on human standards or outward appearance (what he can see and hear), but by wisdom, understanding, true knowledge and the inner spirit of those being judged. The poor will not be deprived of righteous judgment or the meek of equity or fairness. Those who have oppressed the poor and meek will be judged accordingly. The Branch will smite the earth (the ungodly) with the rod of his mouth, and he shall slay the wicked (parallel to the ungodly) with the breath of his lips (judicial decisions).

Returning to the Branch, He shall be robed in righteousness and faithfulness. The girdle firmly secures the rest of the garments; righteousness is his breastplate and faithfulness to the truth (see, Eph. 6:14). He is well prepared to defeat the wicked and ungodly.

Vv. 6-10 – The Character of the Citizens

What shall be the conditions of the kingdom of the Branch? Isaiah describes it by naming natural enemies and declaring that there shall be peace, a peace that is only found for those dwelling on Mt. Zion. The illustrations that Isaiah uses to describe the peace can no more be taken literally than the rod in the mouth of Jesus. Isaiah is describing the conditions that shall exist for those who dwell in the kingdom of God and who have been transformed by undergoing a spiritual and moral “creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). That transformation overcomes the “flesh” (carnal nature of man) so that those so transformed do not hurt or destroy one another. Their life has been brought under the spirit and will of Christ; old things have passed away and all things have become new. They have been crucified with Christ, yet they live (Gal. 2:20), for they have been raised from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4).

The next verse (v. 10) confirms that Isaiah has not been speaking of some millennial reign of Christ. To the contrary, it will come to pass “in that day” (the Messianic age). It is the same day described in chapter 2 when all nations will flow unto Mt. Zion and the word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem. It is the same day that the shoot of Jesse will bear fruit. It is the same day that the Shoot of Jesse will be an ensign serving as a rallying place to which the nations come. He will be the rallying point for both Gentiles and Jews (Rom. 15:12). Under these conditions his resting place will be glorious. This promise is fulfilled in Christ now; the Gentiles have hope. That being the case, the Messiah (Shoot of Jesse) is reigning now. He has restored the Davidic line and he receives the throne of his father, David (Luke 1:32). His Kingdom is not yet to be established. It has already been established and the saved are subjects therein, having been translated into it from the kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13).²

Vv. 11-16 – The Remnant

The Lord now sets his hand a second time to restore his remnant. The first restoration was from Babylon captivity under Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest.³ The second restoration comes in the day of the Shoot of Jesse, the Messianic age (Rom. 15:12). His remnant would be recovered from all the earth (v. 11), which has been an ongoing restoration since the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

The ensign established will assemble the outcasts of Israel and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The hostility between Judah and Ephraim will cease and they will dwell together as one (vv. 12-13).

2. Much more could be said concerning the establishment and present existence of the Kingdom. However, the fact of its establishment and present existence is demonstrated by the cited verses and that is what is relevant for the present purpose. Those who desire more information on that subject are referred to “Classes; The Church; Lesson 2” on this website.

3. In the first restoration only Judah was restored. In the second restoration both Judah and Ephraim are expressly specified (Ezek. 37:16-19; Jer. 3:18).

Judah and Ephraim will “fly down upon the shoulder”⁴ of the Philistines to the west and despoil the children of the east. They will also “put forth their hand” upon their two ancient enemies, Edom and Moab. God, whose hand is in it all, will destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, a probable reference to the waters crossed in the deliverance from Egypt, and, as then, let the exodus cross on dry ground (vv. 14-15). All shall live together in peace (vv. 6-9). Zechariah 9:10 describes it well: “And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off; and he shall speak peace unto the nations: and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

For the returning remnant there shall be a way prepared for those freed from Assyria – a highway.⁵ It will be as great as the deliverance when the people of God came up from Egypt (Isa. 51:10-11). As then, it will not be a human highway, but a way provided by Jehovah (Rom. 11:5; Isa. 19:23; 35:8).

It is unfortunate that that many commentators cannot see over the wall of millennialism when they come to this passage. What they fail to realize is that this restoration speaks of the inclusion of the Gentiles. Gentiles were certainly not involved in the first restoration except to the extent Cyrus participated as God’s “anointed” in freeing God’s people. This puts the commentators in rather precarious position since they are Gentiles and if this passage is not now being fulfilled the Gentiles still have no hope (Eph. 2:11-12).

4. Some suggest that this refers to a descent from the hills to the plain. Others suggest that it is an attack from behind.

5. The mountains will be leveled, the rough places shall be smoothed, and there will be neither obstructions nor obstacles.