

ISAIAH 10

[Vv 1-4 is the last wave of judgement on Israel that started in 9:8. We start at 10:5.]
(Primary reference: Arnold Fruchtenbaum's teaching series on Isaiah.)

10:5-19 God's anger against Assyria.

**5 Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
And the staff in whose hands is My indignation,
6 I send it against a godless nation
And commission it against the people of My fury
To capture booty and to seize plunder,
And to trample them down like mud in the streets.**

Timewise, this prophecy is located after the capture of Samaria in 722, but before the attack into Judah that culminated in the arrival at Jerusalem in 701. "Woe" here is an expression of righteous indignation. It is always used to introduce a proclamation of judgement. Assyria is "the rod of [God's] anger" - The point: it was not the decision of the King of Assyria as such that brought about the downfall of the Northern Kingdom; it was God's decision to chastise them.

The discipline was, "to capture booty and to seize plunder." This phrase recalls the name of Isaiah's second son, Mahar-shalal-hash-baz.¹

What Assyria intends however is to build an empire – and in doing this, they will become proud and overstep their mandate from God

**7 Yet it does not so intend,
Nor does it plan so in its heart,
But rather it is its purpose to destroy
And to cut off many nations.**

Assyria will overstep its commission. Now, a question arises: did the king know Assyria was commissioned to overthrow Israel? In 2Kings 18:25 Rabshakeh delivers a message from the king of Assyria which says – "The Lord said to me, 'Go up against this land and destroy it.'" In other words, Sennacherib did recognize that God had instructed him to invade Israel. Assyria however violated a principle found in Zechariah 1:15: when a Gentile nation oversteps their mandate to displace Israel, God will become displeased with them, and will visit his anger on them. There is, in God's eyes, such a thing as "going too far." This applies not only to Assyria's ambition, but to their methodology of making war, which was incredibly cruel. (See "Grisly Assyrian Record of Torture and Death" by Erika Belibtreu)

8 For it says, "Are not my princes all kings?"

Here Assyria's pride is detailed. He liked to call himself "King of kings." The princes he established were conquered kings.

¹ לְשַׁלַּל שָׁלַל וְלָבַז בָּזַז This line sounds like "I command you to 'lish'lol shalal v'labez baz.'"

**9 “Is not Calno [738] like Carchemish, [717]
Or Hamath [738] like Arpad,[740]
Or Samaria [722] like Damascus [732]?”**

All of these locations represented conquered kings (dates of conquest are added) who could put up little or no effective resistance to Assyria. He is assuming that Jerusalem will be no different.

**10 “As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols,
Whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
11 Shall I not do to Jerusalem and her images
Just as I have done to Samaria and her idols?”**

Here the king of Assyria makes a big mistake, not having “done his homework” and misunderstanding who the God of Israel actually is, and how Israel’s disobedience over time has played out. The king’s thinking was, since gods that were superior to the god of Samaria fell to Assyria, what hope has Jerusalem have – who worships the same god as Samaria? Here he is mistaken, since the worship of the golden calves into which Samaria fell – even though Samaria claimed to worship Jehovah - was not true worship of Jehovah, but a syncretistic kind of idolatry. This is a dangerous mistake, in that Judah really does serve Jehovah, in an uncorrupted form. So his judgement is spelled out.

12 So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will say, “I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.”

The timing will be, when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, in other words, once the Assyrian forces have achieved their allotted task, their king will be judged for his overweening pride.

**13 For he has said,
“By the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did this,
For I have understanding;
And I removed the boundaries of the peoples
And plundered their treasures,
And like a mighty man I brought down their inhabitants,
14 And my hand reached to the riches of the peoples like a nest,
And as one gathers abandoned eggs, I gathered all the earth;
And there was not one that flapped its wing or opened its beak or chirped.”**

So, the king of Assyria was proud in two areas: in the assessment of his strength, and in his failure to see where (or who) it ultimately comes from. And they have achieved quite a lot so far, according to verse 13. In verse 14, their boast is about the ease with which they achieved military success. But Isaiah gives God’s perspective:

**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,
Or like a rod lifting him who is not wood.**

The point is: Assyria is merely a tool in God's hand. (See 7:18.) It is God who *commissioned* Assyria in the first place. In principle, it is not the tool that deserves the credit for achieving a task, it is the one who made it and wields it. The strength is not in the tool itself, it is in the man wielding it, and without the man wielding it, the tool is absolutely useless, and has no cause for boasting. In his pride the king of Assyria fails to realise the false assumption that his wisdom is based on. [See John 19:11; Dan 2:21; 4:17]

Thus, a prophecy of judgement follows which details the demise of Assyria:

16 Therefore the Lord, the GOD of hosts, will send a wasting disease [lit. "leanness"] among his stout warriors [lit. "fat ones"];

And under his glory he will kindle a fire like the kindling of a fire.

**17 And the light of Israel will become a fire and his Holy One a flame,
And it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in a single day.**

Here is God's judgement on the king of Assyria, as Isaiah unfolds it:

- God will send "leanness" or "wasting" among the seemingly healthy fighting forces of Assyria.² The word "leanness" suggests a gradual wasting that follows a single initial assault or wound.³
- Just as a single small fire is kindled, which grows to engulf the whole forest, God will inflict a single wound to the glory of the King of Assyria which will signal the coming devastation of all of his glory.
- In this wounding Jehovah, the *guiding* light of Israel, will become a *defending* light, in that "His Holy One" will light the flame that kindles the coming devastation.⁴
- In this glory-destroying event, the Assyrian forces, described as "thorns and briars," will be destroyed in a single day.

This event happened in Isaiah's lifetime exactly as prophesied, and is described in Isaiah 37:36, in a single astounding verse: "Then the angel of the Lord went out and struck 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, all of these were dead." Note that the Angel of the Lord" – i.e. the second person of the trinity, and the Holy One of Israel, was responsible for the attack. This was indeed a humiliating blow to the King of Assyria, especially after his proud boasting. The combined might of 185,000 trained soldiers was, to the God of Israel, of no more account than a collection of thorns and briars gathered to start a fire. 2Chron 32:21 points out the result for Sennacherib: "So he returned

² Soldiers are not mentioned, but the context is undoubtedly martial.

³ See vs. 18. Heb. רָזָן (*razon*), as a judgement upon people, occurs only here and in Ps 106:15: ". . . and He sent leanness into their soul" - "leanness" here describes the severe plague (מַכָּה, Num 11:33, "wound, blow, injury") with which God struck the Israelites who complained against Him.

⁴ The use of the title "His Holy One" (וְקֹדֶשׁוֹ cf. Isaiah 37:23) underscores the blasphemy of the Assyrian king in that he categorised Jehovah with all other false gods. "They spoke of the God of Jerusalem as of the gods of the peoples of the earth, the work of men's hands" (2 Chron 32:19).

with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth from his own bowels slew him there with the sword.” So, not only was the king of Assyria’s god unable to bring about a victory over the God of Israel, he was not even able to protect him from his own children while he was in the act of worshipping him.

18 And He will destroy the glory of his forest and of his fruitful garden, both soul and body, [lit. “And the glory of his forest, and his fruitful field, from soul even to flesh, He will consume]

And it will be as when a sick man wastes away.

**19 And the rest of the trees of his forest will be so small in number
That a child could write them down.**

• The initial blow to the king of Assyria’s glory will spread to the entirety of his kingdom, affecting both his military (“forest”) and economic (“garden”) spheres. God’s injury, though initially directed towards Assyria’s “soul”, i.e. their prideful inner being, will spread to their “flesh”, i.e. the visible “body” of the empire itself. The picture used to describe this is that of an apparently strong man who becomes sick gradually wastes away. Assyria’s decline will continue to the point that their armed forces will be essentially insignificant.

Again, this prophecy was fulfilled, this time after Isaiah’s death. The incident of the death of the 185,000 occurred in 701, following Samaria’s fall in 722 BC. After Sennacherib’s murder in Nineveh in 681, he was succeeded by Esar-haddon, who would try but fail to establish Assyrian control over Egypt. His successor, Ashurbanipal, did capture Thebes, but Assyria’s rule over Egypt was short lived. Suffering under the insurrection of the Medes and more especially increasing attacks from Babylon, the Assyrian empire quickly declined. Nineveh fell in 612, Harran in 610, and Carchemish was the last Assyrian city to fall in 605. Within 100 years of the failed attack on Jerusalem (701), the great Assyrian empire would disappear from history.

10:20-27 A remnant will return - and what this implies

Verses 20-23 are concerned with a group known as “the remnant.” The word (רְשִׁיׁת sh’ar) refers to what is left over, or remains, and comes from the verb meaning to spare, or leave behind. It can refer to people or money; in scripture it has a specific reference (hence the definite article) to what remains, or is left behind, of Israel.

20 Now in that day the remnant of Israel, and those of the house of Jacob who have escaped, will never again rely on the one who struck them, but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

21 A remnant will return [Shear Yashuv (7:3)], the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

**22 For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea,
Only a remnant within them will return;**

A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness.

23 For a complete destruction, one that is decreed, the Lord GOD of hosts will execute in the midst of the whole land [earth].

“In that day” puts this passage beyond the time of the Assyrian empire, into the prophetic future. What is the thing that connects the events in the time of Isaiah to the future tribulation? They demonstrate: 1. an identical external context, i.e. Israel facing what seems like certain destruction; 2. a similar outcome, in that in both situations God will miraculously intervene, but only a remnant will survive.

V20. The remnant are specifically *those that escape* of the house of Jacob. No figures are given, but Zech 13:7-9 indicates that it will be one third of the population of Israel that will comprise the remnant, or what remains, to inherit the Messianic kingdom. This portion of Israel “will never again rely on the one who struck them.” Who is it that struck them? This is antichrist, as we know from Daniel 9:27, the one who “makes desolate” after putting a stop to temple offerings mid-way through the tribulation period. Instead, they “will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel” – which describes Israel’s national regeneration.

So, in verse 21, Isaiah says “a remnant will return the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.” This fulfils the prophetic naming of Isaiah’s son, in 7:3. Note that they return to “El Gibbor”, “mighty God” – this is none other than the Child who was born, and the Son who was given to Israel, Jesus himself, as we know from 9:5. The term “gibbor” very commonly refers to a mighty warrior; it also can refer especially to God acting in his capacity as fighting for his people.

In what sense will Israel become just a remnant? This is given in the remainder of this section – in the sense that God, in his righteousness, will execute a full destruction on the whole earth.⁵ In this destruction, much of the world’s population will be destroyed. In the case of Israel, the remnant is those who survive the final tribulation judgements.

The following verses (24-27) offer comfort in light of the judgements to come.

24 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, “O My people who dwell in Zion, do not fear the Assyrian who strikes you with the rod and lifts up his staff against you, the way Egypt did.

25 “For in a very little while My indignation against you will be spent and My anger will be directed to their destruction.”

26 The LORD of hosts will arouse a scourge against him like the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and His staff will be over the sea and He will lift it up the way He did in Egypt.

27 So it will be in that day, that his burden will be removed from your shoulders and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be broken because of fatness.

Therefore – i.e. because of the fact that there will be a surviving remnant of Israel, which is actually a promise that Israel cannot be destroyed as a nation, no matter who comes against it – because of this, Israel need not fear the Assyrian. (As Arnold puts it – while individual Jews are not indestructible, the nation itself is indestructible.) Once Assyria has fulfilled its task of satisfying the anger of God against Israel, God’s anger will be directed against them. The coming destruction of Assyria is likened to that of Midian in Judges 7. In that instance,

⁵ The term אֶרֶץ may be translated “land” or “earth”, according to context. That the judgements of the day of wrath extend beyond the land to encompass the entire earth is clear from the inclusion of other nations in the scope of the term “all the earth” (עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ) in parallel passages, e.g. Isaiah 14:26; Jer 1:18; Zech 14:9; Ps 47:3; 57:11; 83:18; 97:9.

Midian (“and Amalek and all the sons of the east” v. 12) far outnumbered Israel, yet with God’s intervention they were completely destroyed. Similarly, just as Moses stretched his hand over the sea (Exod 14:26), and it closed in upon the Egyptians, so will God bring an end to the Assyrian threat against Israel, lifting their yoke off Israel’s shoulders.

28-34 = the arrival of the Assyrian army just prior to their destruction.

At this point Isaiah begins to describe the invasion itself, which took place in 701, the 14th year of Hezekiah:

**28 He has come against Aiath [“Ai”, 30 miles],
He has passed through Migron [15];
At Michmash [7.5] he deposited his baggage.
29 They have gone through the pass [7], saying,
“Geba [6] will be our lodging place.”
Ramah [5] is terrified, and Gibeah of Saul [3] has fled away.
30 Cry aloud with your voice, O daughter of Gallim! [2 ¾]
Pay attention, Laishah [2 ½] and wretched Anathoth! [2]
31 Madmenah [1] has fled.
The inhabitants of Gebim [1/2] have sought refuge.
32 Yet today he will halt at Nob; [location of Mt Scopus]
He shakes his fist at the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.**

Each one of these cities depicts progress towards Jerusalem. (Distances in miles added above). Although Assyria did indeed destroy these cities, and get right to the edge of Jerusalem itself, Jerusalem will stand. The final two verses predict the destruction God will bring against Assyria

**33 Behold, the Lord, the GOD of hosts, will lop off the boughs with a terrible crash;
Those also who are tall in stature will be cut down
And those who are lofty will be abased.
34 He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an iron axe,
And Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One.**

The destruction of the Assyrian army is likened to the destruction of a forest. Though its trees are tall and impressive, they are cut down. This will be the ignominious end of the Assyrian invasion of Israel.