
Observations from Isaiah

LESSON IX : THE SOVEREIGN RULER OF THIS WORLD — PART I (9:8-10:34)

General outline (from Young's *Isaiah*):

- A. Introduction to the Entire Prophecy (1:1-31)
- B. Early Messages of Isaiah (2:1-5:30)
- C. Judah's True Hope: The Messianic King (6:1-12:6)
 - 1. Isaiah's Vision of the Holy God (6:1-13)
 - 2. The Crisis and the Promise (7:1-25)
 - 3. The Assyrian Invader (8:1-9:7)
 - 4. The Threat of Assyria (9:8-10:34)
 - a. The approaching destruction (9:8-17)
 - b. The punishment (9:18-10:4)
 - c. The boasting of Assyria (10:5-19)
 - d. The deliverance by the Lord (10:20-34)

OVERVIEW — Beginning a new prophecy, Isaiah begins by pronouncing coming judgement in 9:8-10:4. *“Here the division of the chapter should have been made, and should not have been again interrupted until Isaiah 10:4, where the prophecy closes.... The prophecy is divided into four parts, and each part is designed to threaten a distinct judgment on some particular, prominent vice.* (1) *Crime:* — their pride and ostentation, Isa 9:8,9. *Punishment:* — the land would be invaded by the Syrians and the Philistines, Isa 9:11,12. (2) *Crime:* — they had apostatized from God, and the leaders had caused them to err, Isa 9:13,16. *Punishment:* — Yahweh would cut off the chief men of the nation, Isa 9:14,15,17. (3) *Crime:* — prevalent wickedness in the nation, Isa 9:18. *Punishment* — the anger of Yahweh, consternation, anarchy, discord, and want, Isa 9:19-21. (4) *Crime:* — prevalent injustice; Isa 10:1,2. *Punishment:* — foreign invasion, and captivity; Isa 10:3,4. The poem is remarkably regular in its structure, and happy in its illustrations.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] “To an audience accustomed to the poetic diction of the prophets, it must have sounded as the recurring thunderclap that heralds the fierce storm of judgment. ***Some time between 734 and 722 BC would be an appropriate date for this oracle.***” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] Please note I will deviate from Young's outline, separating the “sin/judgements” for the sake of clarity.

4. The Threat of Assyria (9:8-10:34)

a. The approaching destruction (9:8-17)

<i>The Lord has sent a message against Jacob; it will fall on Israel. All the people will know it — Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria — who say with pride and</i>	<i>The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of</i>	<i>A word hath the Lord sent into Jacob, And it hath fallen in Israel. And the people have known — all of it, Ephraim, and the inhabitant of Samaria, In pride and in greatness of</i>
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arrogance of heart, "The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone; the fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars." But the LORD has strengthened Rezin's foes against them and has spurred their enemies on. Arameans from the east and Philistines from the west have devoured Israel with open mouth. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. (NIV)

heart, The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars. Therefore the LORD shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him, and join his enemies together; The Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. (KJV)

heart, saying, 'Bricks have fallen, and hewn work we build, Sycamores have been cut down, and cedars we renew.' And Jehovah setteth the adversaries of Rezin on high above him, And his enemies he joineth together, Aram from before, and Philistia from behind, And they devour Israel with the whole mouth. With all this not turned back hath His anger, And still His hand is stretched out. (YLT)

TO THE NORTHERN KINGDOM ONLY? — The commentators differ as to who this prophecy is directed: the northern Israel only or is Judah included? It is without question Israel is emphasized throughout the following. Some of the names we'll encounter for the northern ten tribes throughout this prophecy are as follows: Jacob (v8), Israel (v8), Ephraim (v9). Samaria (v9) was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. *"Into Jacob:* Jacob was the ancestor of the nation. But the name came to be appropriated to the ten tribes, as constituting the majority of the people. It was at first used to denote all the Jews (Num 23:7,10,23; 24:17,19; Deut 32:9; 1 Chron 16:13; Ps 14:7; 20:1); but it came, after the revolt of the ten tribes under Jeroboam, to be used often to denote them alone; Amos 6:8; Micah 1:5; 3:1; 5:8." [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

SIN #1: PRIDE AND OSTENTATION (9:9,10) — (ostentation = *a prideful display to impress others*) The Northern Kingdom has already tasted the heavy hand of God's judgement but in their pride and rebellion they were shaking it off, promising themselves a better future. They "carried themselves haughtily" as Adam Clarke describes it. "National pride is usually most arrogant in a capital city. From the heart of the country, Samaria's citizens refused to take the fall of the northern provinces to the Assyrians (cf. 9:1) as more than a temporary setback in the building of a greater and a richer land. In city and garden, the merely adequate that had succumbed to judgment through foreign armies were to be replaced by the superior. Verse 10 could in fact be taken either literally or figuratively. *This mood of defiance might seem creditable; but in fact it is an expression of determination of thwart God's punitive will, rather like the construction of the Tower of Babel.*" [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *"This is a description of general and prevalent pride; and it is traced to the source of all pride — the heart. It was a desire of splendor, power, and magnificence, originating in the heart, and manifesting itself by the language of self-confidence and defiance at the judgments of God. Stoutness:* Hebrew 'Greatness.' It means *a self-confident purpose; and indicates the state of feeling in a man when he trusts to his own resources, and not to God.*" [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

THE BRICKS AND THE TREES — Whether the language is figurative or literal, the sentiment is plain. Samaria was confident that although their affairs were in ruins at the moment, they would repair them and bring the nation to an even greater state than before. "The poorest style of building in the land is contrasted with the best; for 'the sycamore is a tree which only flourishes in the plain, and there the most wretched houses are still built of bricks dried in the sun, and of knotty

beams of sycamore.’ These might have been destroyed by the war, but more durable and stately buildings would rise up in their place. Ephraim, however, would be made to feel this defiance of the judgments of God.” [K&D, *Commentary*] “These bricks are properly opposed to hewn stone, so greatly superior in beauty and durability. The sycamores, which, as Jerome on the place says, are timber of little worth, with equal propriety are opposed to the cedars. ‘As the grain and texture of the sycamore is remarkably coarse and spongy, it could therefore stand in no competition at all with the cedar, for beauty and ornament.’ We meet with the same opposition of cedars to sycamores, 1 Kings 10:27, where Solomon is said to have made silver as the stones, and cedars as the sycamores in the vale for abundance. *By this mashal, or figurative and sententious speech, they boast that they shall easily be able to repair their present losses, suffered perhaps by the first Assyrian invasion under Tiglath-pileser; and to bring their affairs to a more flourishing condition than ever.*” [Clarke, *Commentary*]

JUDGEMENT #1: INVASION FROM SYRIA AND PHILISTIA (9:11,12) — *Therefore:* This verse indicates the punishment that would come upon them for their pride. “Ephraim may well have discovered that *in a foreign alliance you share not only your ally’s resources but also his foes*. The word ‘Aramean’ (v.12) is applicable more widely than to the citizens of Aram proper, the country over which Rezin reigned; and it could here designate enemies on his borders. In any case, the specific events referred to in vv.11-12 cannot be fully identified.” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] “*And the Philistines:* The Philistines occupied the country southwest of Samaria, lying along on the shores of the Mediterranean. It is not particularly mentioned in the Scriptures that they invaded Samaria after this prediction of Isaiah, but such a thing is by no means improbable. They were long unsubdued; were full of hostility to the Jewish people; and were many times engaged with them in wars and several times subdued them; Judg 13; 14; 2 Chron 28:18. The name Palestine is derived from Philistine, although this people occupied but a small part of the country.... *Behind:* That is, from the west — the region where they dwelt. The sacred writers speak as if looking toward the east, the rising sun, and they speak of the west as the region behind them.... *And they shall devour:* Hebrew, ‘They shall eat.’ This figure is taken from a ravenous beast; and means that they should come up with raging desires, and fierce impetuosity, to destroy the nation.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty. So the LORD will cut off from Israel both head and tail, both palm branch and reed in a single day; the elders and prominent men are the head, the prophets who teach lies are the tail. Those who guide this people mislead them, and those who are guided are led astray. Therefore the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men, nor will he pity the fatherless and widows, for

For the people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the LORD of hosts. Therefore the LORD will cut off from Israel head and tail, branch and rush, in one day. The ancient and honorable, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed. Therefore the LORD shall have no joy in their young men, neither shall have mercy on their fatherless and widows: for every one is

And the people hath not turned back unto Him who is smiting it, And Jehovah of Hosts they have not sought. And Jehovah cutteth off from Israel head and tail, Branch and reed — the same day, Elder, and accepted of face, he [is] the head, Prophet, teacher of falsehood, he [is] the tail. And the eulogists of this people are causing to err, And its eulogised ones are consumed. Therefore, over its young men the Lord rejoiceth not, And its orphans, and its widows He pitieth not, For every one [is]

everyone is ungodly and an hypocrite and an evildoer, profane, and an evil doer, And wicked, every mouth speaks and every mouth speaketh every mouth is speaking folly. vileness. Yet for all this, his folly. For all this his anger is With all this not turned back anger is not turned away, his not turned away, but his hand hath His anger, And still His hand is still upraised. (NIV) is stretched out still. (KJV) hand is stretched out. (YLT)

SIN #2: APOSTASY (9:13) — Rather than confessing their sin in broken humility, Israel further hardened their hearts to the ways of the Lord. Several lessons might be gleaned from this short statement. *“His judgment was both retributive and restorative in purpose when directed against these his people (cf. Hos 2:15; 3:4-5).”* [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *“Turneth not:* It is implied here that it was the design of the chastisement to turn them to God. In this case, as in many others, such a design had not been accomplished.... *Neither do they seek:* They do not seek his protection and favor; they do not worship and honor him.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] A second lesson is that Christ demands nothing less than our entire being: *“[The Hebrew word here ‘returned’] (to turn unto) denotes a thorough conversion, not stopping half-way.”* [K&D, *Commentary*]

JUDGEMENT #2: THE REMOVAL OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP (9:14-17) — *“Will cut off head and tail:* This is a proverbial expression, which is explained in the following verse; see also Deut 28:13,14. *The head is often used to denote those in honor and authority. The tail is an expression applicable to the lower ranks, and would commonly indicate more than simply the common people. It would imply contempt; a state of great abjectness and meanness.... Branch and rush:* This is also a proverbial expression, meaning the highest and lowest. The word here translated branch means properly the bough or top of the palm tree. The palm grew to a great height before it gave out any branches, and hence, the image is a beautiful one to denote those high in office and authority. The word rush means the coarse, long-jointed reed, that grows in marshes — an apt emblem of the base and worthless classes of society. [Barnes, *Notes on OT*] “His two illustrations here embrace the whole nation, both the honored and the insignificant. Young (*Book of Isaiah*, in loc.) says, ‘The leaders were in the government, but the false prophets were not at the head of the people. No leaders were they but, following where the leaders led they simply flattered and fawned, a wagging tail on a dog.’ ” [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

THE JUDGEMENT WAS UNIVERSAL — *“The prophet made it clear that although the nation was being led astray by its leaders and its false prophets, and the guilt of these was therefore great, nobody was without blame.* Even the fatherless and widows, the socially disadvantaged, must share in the judgment; for the contagion of godlessness had spread through the whole nation. Note the order of the two adjectives ‘ungodly’ and ‘wicked,’ suggesting perhaps that the first was the cause of the second (cf. Rom 1:18).” [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *This is a much-needed lesson for those of us living in the time when no one accepts responsibility for his actions. It is easy to blame others or even circumstances, but ultimately we are who we want to be!*

THE JUDGEMENT WAS WITHOUT MERCY — *“Shall have no joy:* He shall not delight in them so as to preserve them. The parallel part of the verse shows that *the phrase is used in the sense of having mercy.... In their young men:* The hope and strength of the nation. The word used here commonly denotes those who are chosen, particularly for purposes of war. *The sense is, that the hope and strength of the nation, that on which the chief reliance would be placed, would be cut off.... Neither shall have mercy:* ... Judgment would sweep through the nation, even over those who were the usual objects of the divine protection — widows and orphans; compare Ps 10:14,18; 48:5; Deut 10:18; Jer 49:11; Hos 14:3. These passages show that the fatherless and the widow are

the special objects of the divine favor; and when, therefore, it is said that the Lord would not have mercy been on these, it shows the extent and severity of the divine judgments that were coming on the nation.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

b. The punishment (9:18-10:4)

Surely wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briers and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke. By the wrath of the LORD Almighty the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire; no one will spare his brother. On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of his own offspring: Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. (NIV)

For wickedness burneth as the fire: it shall devour the briers and thorns, and shall kindle in the thickets of the forest, and they shall mount up like the lifting up of smoke. Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts is the land darkened, and the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother. And he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and they shall not be satisfied: they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm: Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh: and they together shall be against Judah. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. (KJV)

For burned as a fire hath wickedness, Brier and thorn it devoureth, And it kindleth in thickets of the forest, And they lift themselves up, an exaltation of smoke! In the wrath of Jehovah of Hosts Hath the land been consumed, And the people is as fuel of fire; A man on his brother hath no pity, And cutteth down on the right, and hath been hungry, And he devoureth on the left, And they have not been satisfied, Each the flesh of his own arm they devour. Manasseh — Ephraim, and Ephraim — Manasseh, Together they [are] against Judah, With all this not turned back hath His anger. And still His hand is stretched out! (YLT)

SIN #3: PREVALENT WICKEDNESS IN THE NATION (9:18) — “Wickedness, i.e., the constant thirst of evil, is a fire which a man kindles in himself. And when the grace of God, which damps and restrains this fire, is all over, it is sure to burst forth: the wickedness bursts forth like fire (the verb is used here, as in Isa 30:27, with reference to the wrath of God). And this is the case with the wickedness of Israel, which now consumes first of all thorns and thistles, i.e., individual sinners who are the most ripe for judgment, upon whom the judgment commences, and then the thicket of the wood, that is to say, the great mass of the people, which is woven together by bands of iniquity. The contrast intended in the two figures is consequently not the high and low, nor the useless and useful, but individuals and the whole. The fire, into which the wickedness bursts out, seizes individuals first of all; and then, like a forest fire, it seizes upon the nation at large in all its ranks and members, who ‘whirl up (roll up) ascending of smoke,’ i.e., who roll up in the form of ascending smoke. *This fire of wickedness was no other than the wrath of God: it is God’s own wrath, for all sin carries this within itself as its own self-punishment. By this fire of wrath the soil of the land is gradually but thoroughly burnt out, and the people of the land utterly consumed.*” [K&D, *Commentary*] “Both the Bible and experience teach that wickedness unchecked spreads like wildfire, and this is precisely what Isaiah indicated here. The reference to a column of smoke (v.18) may simply serve the purposes of the imaginative grasp of the figure the

prophet used; on the other hand, it may suggest that the acrid stench of wickedness reaches the nostrils of God, in which case it provides a transition to the different use of the same analogy in v.19. Here it is not wickedness but divine wrath that causes the blaze. In both cases the undergrowth and the forest trees represent the people. The spreading flame of sin is followed in its turn by the fire of God's judgment, with perhaps just a suggestion of the punishment fitting the crime." [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

JUDGEMENT #3: ANARCHY, DISCORD, AND WANT (9:19-21) — "In vv.11-12 the prophet described the attacks made on Israel by her external enemies. From the end of v.19, the more terrible picture of civil war takes over. A study of OT history from the time of the judges reveals many examples of strife within the nation. The tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim should have been particularly close to each other, for they were both descendants of the sons of Joseph (Gen 48). The first civil war in Israel, however, was fought between the Gileadites of Manasseh and the men of Ephraim in the days of Jephthah (Judg 12:1-6). Men who would not unite through a common sympathy were sometimes joined together to pour out their hatred and jealousy against Judah." [Grogan, *Isaiah*] *"And the people shall be as fuel of the fire: This is an image of widespread ruin. The idea is, that they shall destroy one another as pieces of wood, when on fire, help to consume each other.... No man shall spare his brother: There shall be such a state of wickedness, that it shall lead to anarchy, and strife, and mutual destruction. The common ties of life shall be dissolved, and a man shall have no compassion on his own brother.... They shall eat:* Not literally; but 'shall destroy.' To eat the flesh of anyone, denotes to seek one's life, and is descriptive of blood-thirsty enemies; Ps 27:2: *'When the wicked, even mine enemies and foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell;'* Job 19:22: *'Why do ye persecute me as God, And are not satisfied with my flesh?'* compare Deut 7:16; Jer 10:25; 30:15; 50:17; Hos 7:7. *The flesh of his own arm:* The Chaldee renders this, 'Each one shall devour the substance of his neighbor'.... *The expression denotes a state of dreadful faction — where the ties of most intimate relationship would be disregarded, represented, here by the appalling figure of a man's appetite being so rabid that he would seize upon and devour his own flesh. So, in this state of faction and discord, the rage would be so great that people would destroy those who were, as it were, their own flesh, that is, their nearest kindred and friends.*" [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? Nothing will remain but to cringe among the captives or fall

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory? Without me they shall bow down under the prisoners, and

Wo [to] those decreeing decrees of iniquity, And writers who have prescribed perverseness. To turn aside from judgment the poor, And to take violently away the judgment Of the afflicted of My people, That widows may be their prey, That the fatherless they may spoil. And what do ye at a day of inspection? And at desolation? — from afar it cometh. Near whom do ye flee for help? And where do ye leave your honour? Without Me it hath bowed down In the place of a bound one,

among the slain. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised. (NIV) *they shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* (KJV) *And in the place of the slain they fall. With all this not turned back hath His anger, And still His hand is stretched out.* (YLT)

SIN #4: PREVALENT INJUSTICE (10:1,2) — This last strophe is directed against the unjust authorities and judges. “*Wo unto them that decree unrighteous decrees:* To those who frame statutes that are oppressive and iniquitous. The prophet here refers, doubtless, to the rulers and judges of the land of Judea. A similar description he had before given; Isa 1:10,23, ... *And that write:* ... Hebrew, ‘And to the writers who write violence.’ The word translated ‘grievousness,’ denotes properly ‘*wearisome labor, trouble, oppression, injustice.*’ Here, it evidently refers to the judges who declared oppressive and unjust sentences, and caused them to be recorded.... *To turn aside:* Their sentences have the effect, and are designed to have, to pervert justice, and to oppress the poor, or to deprive them of their rights and just claims; compare Isa 29:21; Prov 27:5.... *That widows may be their prey:* That they may rob widows, or obtain their property. ***This crime has always been one particularly offensive in the sight of God. The widow and the orphan are without protectors. Judges, by their office, are particularly bound to preserve their rights; and it, therefore, evinces special iniquity when they who should be their protectors become, in fact, their oppressors, and do injustice to them without the possibility of redress. Yet this was the character of the Jewish judges; and for this the vengeance of heaven was about to come upon the land.***” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

JUDGEMENT #4: FOREIGN INVASION, CAPTIVITY AND DEATH (10:3,4) — “Poor persons who wanted to commence legal proceedings were not even allowed to do so, and possessions to which widows and orphans had a well-founded claim were a welcome booty to them. For all this they could not escape the judgment of God. This is announced to them in v. 3, in the form of three distinct questions.” [K&D, Commentary] “*And what will ye do:* The prophet here proceeds to denounce the judgment, or punishment, that would follow the crimes specified in the previous verses. That punishment was the invasion of the land by a foreign force. ‘What will ye do? To whom will you fly? What refuge will them be?’ Implying that the calamity would be so great that there would be no refuge, or escape.... *Where will ye leave your glory:* By the word ‘glory’ here, some have understood the prophet as referring to their aged men, their princes and nobles, and as asking where they would find a safe place for them. But he probably means their ‘riches, wealth, magnificence.’ Thus Ps 49:17: ‘*For when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away; His glory shall not descend after him.*’ See also Hos 9:2; Isa 66:12. The word ‘leave’ here, is used in the sense ‘of deposit,’ or commit for safe keeping; compare Job 39:14. ‘In the time of the invasion that shall come up like a tempest on the land, where will you deposit your property so that it shall be safe?’ ... *They shall fall under the slain:* ... The simple idea is, that many of them should be taken captive, and many of them slain. This prediction was fulfilled in the invasion of Tiglath-pileser; 2 Kings 15; 16.” [Barnes, *Notes on OT*]

WHEN IS THE WRATH OF GOD SATISFIED? — Note the progressive judgements of God: *foreign invasion, the leaders of the nation cut off, anarchy, famine, and finally captivity and widespread death* ... yet at the end of each of these four sections is this phrase: ***“With all this not turned back hath His anger, and still His hand is stretched out.”*** (9:12b; 17b; 21b; 10:4b). “The refrain that has occurred at various points in this oracle is truly terrifying in its climactic position.

If even physical death does not satisfy the fierce anger of this holy God, what dread punishment lies beyond the grave? It is at this point most of all that we need to recall that no such device as this refrain is ever merely formal when it occurs in the Word of God.... Rather, it presents the fearful thought that *the judgment already described does not exhaust the manifestation of God's wrath against his sinful people.*" [Grogan, *Isaiah*]

"In that day the remnant of Israel,
the survivors of the house of Jacob,
will no longer rely on him
who struck them down
but will truly rely on the LORD,
the Holy One of Israel.

A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob
will return to the Mighty God."

— Isaiah 10:20,21 NIV