

Isaiah Part 8: “A remnant will return...”

Isaiah 10 v 5 to 34

Judgment on arrogant Assyria (Isaiah 10 v 5 to 19)

“Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger” (v 5) – in the previous section (Isaiah 7 v 1 to 10 v 4), God revealed that he would use Assyria as an instrument of judgment against Syria, Israel, and Judah. But what about the Assyrians themselves? Weren’t they even more wicked than Syria, Israel, or Judah? Yes, the Assyrians were wicked; yet the LORD could use them as “the rod of my anger”. At the same time, none of it excused Assyria, so the LORD “will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria” (v 12).

- How is the invasion seen in the mind of the Assyrian king (v 7 to 10, 13, 14)? By contrast, how is this same invasion seen in the purposes of God (v 5, 6, 12, 16 to 19)? How does this passage help us to see how God can use evil men and nations to fulfil his holy and righteous purposes?

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise you” (Psalm 76 v 10) – God can use the wickedness of man to further his will, without ever approving of the wickedness. In fact, God is totally justified in judging the very wickedness he uses! The pattern is repeated throughout the Scriptures: Joseph’s brothers sinned against Joseph, but God used this for his purpose, and disciplined Joseph’s brothers (see Genesis 50 v 20); Saul sinned against David, but God used it for his purpose, and then judged Saul. Judas sinned against Jesus, but God also used that for his purpose, and judged Judas. This should help with two common questions: (i) ‘How can God bring any good through an evil thing done to me?’ Often we do not know how God will bring the good, but we can trust that he will, as we continue to follow him; (ii) ‘Doesn’t God care about what they did to me?’ He does care, and will bring his correction or judgment according to his perfect will and timing...

“Are not my commanders all kings?” (v 8) – the Assyrians and their king had such an inflated view of themselves that they regarded their commanders as on the same level as the kings of other nations.

“Shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols as I have done to Samaria and her images?” (v 11) – God describes the arrogant heart of the Assyrian king. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, which was given over to gross idolatry. Jerusalem was the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah, which still maintained some worship of the true God. In their pride, the king of Assyria thought that Jehovah-God was nothing more than one of the idols they had conquered in Samaria. The Assyrians were in for a wake-up call! The cities mentioned in verses 9 and 10 came under Assyrian control between 740 and 721 BC, and none of the gods of these areas had provided the slightest help...

“Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it...?” (v 15) – God uses the pictures of an axe, a saw, a rod, and a staff to make the point that the instrument should never take credit for what the worker does with it. The scalpel cannot take credit for what the surgeon does; the strength and the skill are in the user, not in the instrument. If it is easy for an unwitting instrument of God (like Assyria) to become boastful, it is also easy for a willing instrument of God to become proud. But Jesus said: “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” (Luke 17 v 10) – as wonderful as it is to be an instrument in the hand of God, the instrument deserves no special glory.

“Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors” (v 16) – Assyria was confident and complacent at the time, but God would send ‘wasting sickness’ among them. His judgment would be like ‘the burning of fire’ among them, and it would devour “the glory of his forest” and his “fruitful land” (v 18). God would leave Assyria just a shadow of its former self.

The “light of Israel” and “his Holy One” (v 17) are names for God.

[MORE OVER...]

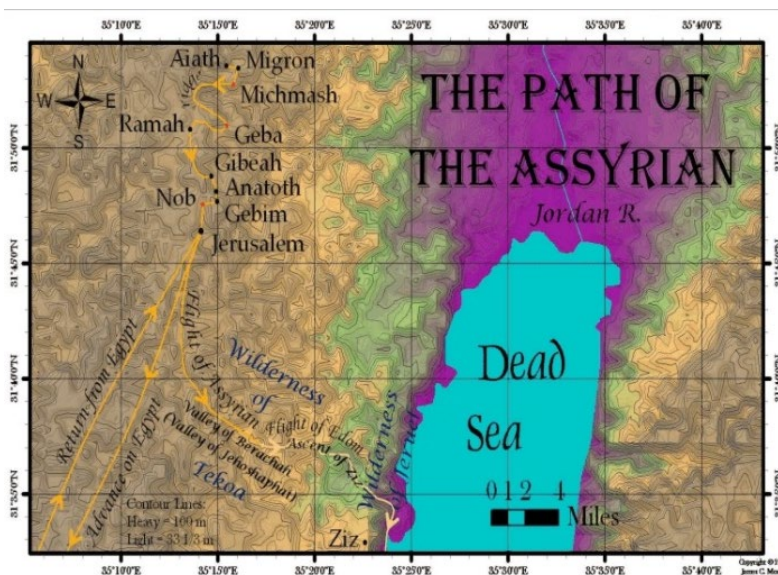
The remnant of Israel will return (Isaiah 10 v 20 to 34)

“In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth” (v 20) – ‘him who struck them’ is the king of Assyria. The ‘remnant’ will have learned the lesson king Ahaz had failed to learn. God promises his people, ‘You are going through this now because you will not trust me, but I am going to change you so that you trust me again, and you will once again depend upon the LORD.’ “A remnant will return” (v 21) – the suffering of God’s people at the hands of the Assyrians and others would make them feel that they will certainly be destroyed. God assures them that this is not the case: he will always preserve his ‘remnant’.

- During these terrible times of trial, it might have seemed that God had forsaken his people – but how do verses 20 to 23 show otherwise? See Romans 9 v 27 to 29. What was the purpose of God’s discipline?
- How does this chapter bring further light on the two predictions implied in the names of Isaiah’s two sons? Recall that *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* (Isaiah 8 v 3) means ‘quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil’, and *Shear-Jashub* (Isaiah 7 v 3) means ‘a remnant shall return’.

“And the LORD of hosts will wield against them a whip, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb. And his staff will be over the sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt” (v 26) – Judges 7 v 25 describes Gideon’s victory over the Midianites at the rock of Oreb. As miraculous and complete as this victory was, that is how complete God’s judgment on Assyria will be. 2 Kings 19 v 35 describes how God simply sent “the angel of the LORD”, and killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night. Exodus 14 v 16 describes how God used the rod of Moses to divide the Red Sea – in the same way, he will do something miraculous against Assyria. God even took care of the king of the Assyrians according to his justice: 2 Kings 19 v 36, 37 describes how when the king of the Assyrians returned home after attacking Judah, he was murdered by his own sons as he worshipped in the temple of Nisroch his god.

“He has come to Aiath; he has passed through Migron... this very day he will halt at Nob” (v 28 to 32) – these verses give us a vivid picture of the approach of the Assyrian army, moving ever southwards, and checked only at Nob (Mount Scopus), at the very gates of Jerusalem – see map below.



Prayer – O Lord, again we tremble as we read about your wrath and anger and judgment against sin, using Assyria as the instrument of your justice. Help us to learn the lesson that in that day of judgment the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no longer lean upon a king who struck them, and could not save them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. Help us, in times of trouble, not to lean upon ‘princes’ who fail us, but to trust always in your steadfast love and faithfulness. Amen.