

Lesson Four:

Predictions of Hope after Disgrace (9:1 – 10:34)

Isaiah again looks far ahead into the future and discloses the *other* “Child”—the One who will be born of a literal virgin [implied; recall 7:14]. This Child will be the source of great light in the land that is being overrun by Assyria even as the prophet speaks (9:1-7). We know that its fulfillment actually refers to the time of Christ, however, since Matthew cites this very passage (Matthew 4:12-17). “Zebulun” and “Naphtali”—two of the northernmost tribes of Israel—would later serve as the main stage for Jesus’ early ministry. The “yoke” being broken (9:4) seems to be Israel’s oppressors, but ultimately it is the yoke (or burden) of sin itself that will be lifted from the people (Luke 4:16-19). The new (spiritual) Israel would not be a nation of war; therefore, the things of war would no longer be needed (9:5). It was an ancient custom for a victorious army to strip the dead and captured soldiers of their clothes, boots, and weapons, and then to burn these. The better weapons and spoil were taken into the temples of the kings and their idols.

This Child, then, will usher in an entirely new kind of kingdom (9:6-7). He will be the fulfillment of divine promise, not just another son in a dynastic succession of men. He will have unprecedented power, wisdom, authority, and majesty (see Revelation 5:10-14). He will not need to be surrounded by counselors and advisors, for He will receive instruction directly from God Himself. His kingdom will be incalculable; His government will never cease; His reign will endure indefinitely—far beyond a human lifespan. “On the throne of David” alludes to the promise given to David concerning an eternal kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12-13; see Luke 1:31-33, Acts 2:33-36, and Romans 1:1-4). “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this”—i.e., this will not be the work of men but the supernatural work of God. On this passage, Dr. Lockhart writes:

Now this is one of the most notable Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, yet it cannot be separated from its historical occasion. The unfaithfulness of King Ahaz of Judah to Jehovah lies in the background in contrast with the principles of judgment and righteousness which are to be sustained by the future king. The distress and hunger and warfare are contrasted with the coming prosperity and peace; while the depopulation of Zebulun and Naphtali contrasts with the increase of the new government that shall be established. It is possible also that the name of the coming king is set in antithesis with the arrogant assumptions of the Assyrian king [Tiglath-pileser]. The Messianic king will be more wonderful, a wiser counselor, a mightier one, a more enduring leader, a prince of peace rather than of war. It thus appears that a prophecy may receive its form from the condition under which it is uttered without marring its sacred meaning. It must be evident that a scientific interpretation of

such predictions will require a careful study of the times in which the prophecy is proclaimed.¹

After such a profound and glorious picture, Isaiah is forced to return to the dismal picture at hand: the predicted ruin of Israel (Samaria) (9:8-21). These people will not listen to God; they refuse to repent, even though He has done everything possible to get their attention (9:13; see Amos 4:6-12). They rest on their own self-sufficiency: “The bricks have fallen down, but we will replace them with smooth stones...” (9:10). They are led astray by blind guides and false prophets (9:16; see Jeremiah 6:14 and Ezekiel 13:10). They fight amongst themselves, then fight amongst their common ancestors (9:21). “And His hand is still stretched out” is a recurring theme in this section. To “stretch out” one’s hand (in this context) means to bare the arm in order to use a sword, and to point that arm in the direction of the intended victim. In other words, God says, “Even though I have shown Israel My anger, I am not finished with them yet.” Isaiah asks Israel rhetorically, “What are you going to do to stop this from happening?” (10:1-4). The fact is, however, they can do nothing to stop what is coming; “Nothing remains but to crouch among the captives or fall among the slain” (10:4).

Now the prophet turns toward Assyria itself—an arrogant, aggressive, and impenitent nation (10:5-19). While God did indeed appoint Assyria to punish His people Israel, Assyria showed no regard for God’s authority over them, but assumed that they acted on their own power. “Are not my princes all kings?” (10:8)—i.e., the Assyrian king has made all the nations’ kings as vassals to him. The cities named (10:9) would, in due time, all be under Assyrian control. God speaks here what is in the heart of the king of Assyria—in essence, “None of those cities’ gods could save them; that means that I am more powerful than those gods. And I will conquer Jerusalem as well—which means I am more powerful than *its* God!” The Lord responds bluntly to this ill-fated boast: “I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria...” (10:12). He goes on to explain: “Is the axe to boast itself over the one who chops with it?” (10:15)—i.e., can Assyria claim credit for what God purposed them to do in the first place? If not for His sovereign decree, Assyria would have no power at all.

Assyrian Kings and Years of Reign	Their History
Tiglath-pileser III [a.k.a. Pul] (745-727 BC)	Orchestrated Assyria’s most aggressive expansionist campaign; began conquest of Israel and Samaria; carried the northernmost tribes (Zebulun and Naphtali) into captivity.
Shalmaneser V (727-721)	Besieged Samaria for three years, finally overpowering the city and all of Israel (721) (2 Kings 18:9-12).
Sargon II (721-705)	Deported over 200,000 of Israel’s upper class, leaving the poorest behind; repopulated Samaria and vicinity with foreigners (2 Kings

¹ Lockhart, 202-203; bracketed words are mine.

	17:24-41).
Sennacherib (705-681)	Very capable but arrogant warrior-king; besieged Jerusalem but never took the city; was assassinated in Nineveh by his own two sons.
Esarhaddon (681-669)	Led a successful campaign against Egypt and destroyed it; placed Assyrian governors in Memphis and Thebes (major cities in north and south Egypt, respectively).

Assyria fought against and destroyed Israel in 722/721 BC. Soon after this, Sennacherib laid siege against Jerusalem, thinking that the city would easily fall into his hands. King Hezekiah, however—with the help of Isaiah the prophet—turned to God for help, and God promised deliverance because of his appeal (2 Kings 18:13 – 19:37).² The “wasting disease” (10:16) likely refers to the sudden and mysterious death of 185,000 of Sennacherib’s warriors as they laid siege against Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:35-36). Simultaneously, God would provoke Sennacherib to return to Nineveh because of a “rumor”—namely, that Tirhakah, the king of Cush [Ethiopia], was coming north to wage war against the Assyrian army (2 Kings 19:8-9). Because of the crushing blow of these two events, Sennacherib abandoned his campaign against Jerusalem and fought against Lachish instead (about ten miles north of Jerusalem) on his return to Nineveh. Several years later, Sennacherib was assassinated by two of his own sons (Adrammelech and Sharezer) while he worshiped the god Nisroch in Nineveh (2 Kings 19:7, 37). Thus, all of what God promised would be fulfilled exactly as He said.

The judgment against Assyria went beyond that of Sennacherib’s own fate. In 626 BC, the king of Babylon (Nabopolassar) declared independence from Assyrian rule, commencing a 13-year struggle to overcome Assyria and its capital city, Nineveh. A coalition of armies led by Nabopolassar finally destroyed Nineveh in 613 BC, and Babylon became the dominant world power. (Nineveh was so devastated that its actual location was lost until archaeologists uncovered its sand-covered ruins in the 19th century.) Nabopolassar’s son, Nebuchadnezzar, continued what his father had begun and returned to Palestine and re-conquered that entire region in the name of Babylon (beginning in 605 BC). It was at that time that Judah also was finally and completely conquered, Jerusalem was burned and leveled to the ground (586 BC) and the Jews were exiled into Babylon for 70 years (2 Kings 25:1-21, 2 Chronicles 36:11-21).

“A remnant will return” (10:20-23)—i.e., a remnant of the people of Israel, after their nation is destroyed by Assyria. This is not the literal remnant of Judah (which would return from exile), from which Messiah will come, but refers to the re-gathering of Israel with Judah during the reign of Messiah. Thus, the remnant (and its reliance upon the Lord rather than upon a foreign king) will “return” in the form of the Israelites’ entrance into Christ’s church, according to the new

² This will also be recounted in Isaiah 36 – 39.

order (see Acts 3:19-21). Until then, “a destruction is determined” (10:22)—a necessary and righteous judgment upon the nation [Israel] that so stubbornly and blatantly refused to respond to God’s laws. While individual Israelites would continue to exist, the nation of Israel itself was ruined forever.³

Meanwhile, God re-encourages Judah not to fear Assyria, for its king will only be able to do so much (10:24-34). The cities mentioned here (10:28-31) are all relatively close to Jerusalem and have been devastated by the foreign army. Assyria will then shake its fist in defiance at Jerusalem but will not be able to overtake it. Once Assyria’s campaign against Jerusalem has run its course, then God would carry out His divine vengeance against that nation itself, resulting in its complete destruction.

Questions:

- 1.) Why does Isaiah initially introduce Israel’s coming King as a “Child”—what are some of the underlying implications of this choice of description?
- 2.) Why did Assyria’s arrogance make it an ideal nation to punish Israel? Nonetheless, why was Israel held more accountable to God than was Assyria?
- 3.) The nations of Israel and Assyria would be destroyed forever, as per divine prophecy, yet the Israelites themselves would be re-gathered into a new (spiritual) community in the future. Why was Israel thus invited but not Assyria?

³ The modern state of Israel (established in 1948) does not contradict this statement. The “nation of Israel” as described in the Old Testament referred to a theocracy established by God through Moses. It had a specific law, priesthood, temple, and sacrificial system; it was a socio-religious community governed explicitly by these institutions. The long, slow departure from this system resulted in Israel’s ultimate demise. After its deportation into foreign exile, the Israel that once existed disappeared forever; its people continued on as Israelites, but the nation itself ceased to exist. Modern Israel has no real connection to those institutions by which ancient Israel was governed; it is not a theocracy but is a different form of government (and social structure) altogether.