

Pentwater Bible Church

Isaiah Message 20

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Jerusalem Burning by David Roberts Cir 1850

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Pentwater Bible Church

The Book of Isaiah

Message Twenty

THE LORD CONTINUES JUDGMENT ON THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

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Isaiah 9:8–10:4

⁸The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel. ⁹And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in pride and in stoutness of heart, ¹⁰The bricks are fallen, but we will build with hewn stone; the sycomores are cut down, but we will put cedars in their place. ¹¹Therefore Jehovah will set up on high against him the adversaries of Rezin, and will stir up his enemies, ¹²the 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.

¹³Yet the people have not turned unto him that smote them, neither have they sought Jehovah of hosts. ¹⁴Therefore Jehovah will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm-branch and rush, in one day. ¹⁵The elder and the honorable man, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. ¹⁶For they that lead this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed. ¹⁷Therefore the Lord will not rejoice over their young men, neither will he have compassion on their fatherless and widows; for every one is profane and an evil-doer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

¹⁸For wickedness burneth as the fire; it devoureth the briers and thorns; yea, it kindleth in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke. ¹⁹Through the wrath of Jehovah of hosts is the land burnt up; and the people are as the fuel of fire: no man spareth his brother. ²⁰And one 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. ²¹Manasseh, 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.

10 *¹Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers that write perverseness; ²to turn aside the needy from justice, and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! ³And 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? ⁴They shall only bow down under the prisoners, and shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still (ASV, 1901)*

This section of Isaiah is a poem structured with four stanzas also called strophes or episodes. The first is depicted in Isaiah 9:8–12. The second is seen in Isaiah 9:13–17. The third starts at Isaiah 9:18 and goes to the end of chapter 9:21. The fourth and final stanza runs from chapter 10:1–4.

THE TRIBAL ALLOTMENTS OF ISRAEL¹



¹ Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (p. 2008). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers. From Logos Bible Software.

THE FIRST STANZA ANNOUNCES THE THEME

Isaiah 9:8–12

⁸*The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel.* ⁹*And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in pride and in stoutness of heart,* ¹⁰*The bricks are fallen, but we will build with hewn stone; the sycomores are cut down, but we will put cedars in their place.* ¹¹*Therefore Jehovah will set up on high against him the adversaries of Rezin, and will stir up his enemies,* ¹²*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* (ASV, 1901)

After having given them the promise of the Redeemer of the world entering time and space, Isaiah begins to relate God's warning to the Northern tribes. The Lord announces that He is giving a message to Jacob which is a personification of all of Israel but it will alight only on Israel meaning the Northern tribes. He further calls them by their names *Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria*. This is referencing the largest tribe Ephraim and the capital city Samaria. The message is directed to the king which was Pekah. He is not named here but this is another intentional omission due to the illegal and immoral manner in which he gained control of the Northern tribes and ran his kingdom. He has been called Remaliah's son to distinguish him from the previous king Pekahiah who in the appropriate order of transference of power would have been succeeded by his own son not Remaliah's son. Here he is not mentioned at all but the judgment is clearly directed at him who was a major factor influencing the massive sin in which they were engaged. The world is judged by God's moral standards. Following His moral absolutes, a nation does not depend for survival strictly upon superior might as in armed power, but rather upon correct moral behavior for survival and thriving. When Ephraim fell to her enemies, it was not because she was too weak militarily. It was because she was measured according to the Lord's moral standards and found lacking. The people will realize it is God who brought these judgments upon them. They will realize the truth of God's prophecies of their destruction and why it is happening.

The Northern kingdom mistakenly thought they were militarily superior to their neighbors. They compared their previous (Northern Kingdom) kings and leaders illustrated as buildings constructed of soft man-made bricks and wood of the common sycamore tree. Like these structures the previous leaders were weak and inferior. The people viewed Pekah as being strong illustrated by the use of stronger building materials as in stone and the desirable cedar wood. These characteristics of their king they thought, would ensure them to prevail against their enemies. But God is saying it is He who will *stir up his enemies, the Syrians before, and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with open mouth*. Syria which was called Aram in ancient times on the northeast of the Northern Kingdom and the Philistines an enemy on the southwest who will successfully attack Israel. Even so God is not done with the destruction at this stage of their downfall. He says that His anger is not finished and He will continue to enact greater punishment fitting the degree of sin in which they engaged.

THE SECOND STANZA: REASONS FOR THE CONTINUED CHASTENING

ISAIAH 9:13–17

¹³Yet the people have not turned unto him that smote them, neither have they sought Jehovah of hosts. ¹⁴Therefore Jehovah will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm-branch and rush, in one day. ¹⁵The elder and the honorable man, he is the head; and the prophet that teacheth lies, he is the tail. ¹⁶For they that lead this people cause them to err; and they that are led of them are destroyed. ¹⁷Therefore the Lord will not rejoice over their young men, neither will he have compassion on their fatherless and widows; for every one is profane and an evil-doer, and every mouth speaketh folly. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still (ASV, 1901).

By bringing their enemy's armies against Ephraim He desired to bring them to repentance. The call to repentance had been proclaimed continually (e.g., Amos 5:4, 6) throughout Israel's history. Unfortunately, Ephraim would not seek the LORD either through a prophet or through a priest as occurred in so many instances in their past (cf. Genesis 25:22; Exodus 18:15; 1 Samuel 9:9). The Northern tribes simply continued to refuse to worship the LORD (cf. Deuteronomy 4:29; 1 Chronicles 16:11; Psalm 10:4; 119:10). God says that He *will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm-branch and rush, in one day*. This is a reference to the removal and punishment to the higher-ranking citizens as well as the average people at the lower echelons of society. All will equally suffer in the judgment. When Israel was under judgment the innocent babies and defenseless widows would necessarily suffer along with the leadership who were responsible for setting the nation's policy and leading them into immoral behavior. As a consequence, there will be a nationwide punishment from the LORD: "*head and tail, palm branch and reed.*" The leaders and the authorities, the people and the false prophets will one and all be cut off together in one day. The execution of judgment is radical and will occur all of a sudden (e.g. Revelation 18:8). The *palm branch and reed* are proverbial expressions for total extermination at the highest level (palm) and the lowest (reed) level of society. This judgment and resulting pain He must inflict upon Israel is not a joy for Him to carry out. But, He will because His moral absolutes are going to be met or harsh punishment will follow. Still angered, the Lord will continue to inflict additional punishments upon Israel.

STANZA THREE: THEIR WICKEDNESS IS LIKE A RAGING FIRE

Isaiah 9:18–21

¹⁸For wickedness burneth as the fire; it devoureth the briers and thorns; yea, it kindleth in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke. ¹⁹Through the wrath of Jehovah of hosts is the land burnt up; and the people are as the fuel of fire: no man spareth his brother. ²⁰And one 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: ²¹Manasseh, 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.

The third stated transgression is characterized like a burning fire which seizes upon and destroys everything, both high and low, in the nation. Since no class of society is free from the infection of sin and anarchy, so also none can escape its natural and enveloping like fire as well as divinely-willed punishment. The lawlessness of the one punishes the lawlessness of the other. In other

words, people begin to fight each other. Just as a burning log ignites one next to it people's harsh cruelty experienced will be directed toward one another in panic and starvation. Famine will cause people to steal from each other to survive and they will still not have enough to survive. This will be a civil war caused by the people's response to their punishment brought on by their own sinful behavior. No sense of brotherly love and family relationships can survive. Such is the nature of human degeneration and social disorder. The famine and chaos will be seen everywhere and all ethical norms are abandoned. It will be every man for himself to survive.

There is fighting, snatching, and stealing, just to get something to eat. *And be hungry.* They will not be satisfied. The situation is that they would be insatiable. The murder of those on one side would not appease anyone's insatiable wrath. The desire of carnage would be so great that it would be like unappeased hunger. *And he shall eat.* The idea here is that of contending factions incensed by fury, rage, envy, hatred, contending in mingled strife, will be spreading death with insatiable desire everywhere around them.

The statement "*they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm* is an expression should be taken literally. It describes a situation of complete anarchy where families will eat their own to survive. Jeremiah describes this as happening to the people of Jerusalem after the Babylonian invasion.

Lamentations 4:10

¹⁰The hands of the pitiful women have boiled their own children; They were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people (ASV, 1901)

This chaos is also evident in the relationship between the tribes of Israel. Manasseh and Ephraim are two brotherly tribes, both descendants of Joseph will fight each other. After the death of Jeroboam II there was chaotic strife for the throne. Pekahiah was murdered by Pekah, a man from Gilead in the geographical area of Manasseh. But like Ephraim the Manassites were hostile against Judah, and together the two tribes attacked Judah during the Syro-Ephraimite War. In all these continuing confrontations between the tribes, therefore, we see the hand of God outstretched still.

STANZA FOUR: PUNISHMENT DIRECTED TOWARD THE INIQUITOUS LEADERS

ISAIAH 10:1-4

¹ Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers that write perverseness; ²to turn aside the needy from justice, and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey! ³And 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? ⁴They shall only bow down under the prisoners, and shall fall under the slain. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still (ASV, 1901)

God now directs His anger and calamity against the leaders who enabled the population to engage in wickedness. They enacted wicked statutes and had judges who registered unjust decisions setting legal precedents for additional wicked unfair judges to follow. They turned aside the needy and deprived the poor of the Lord's people of adequate justice. They left the helpless widows, orphans and children without any recourse to the persecution they were experiencing. The judges

accepted bribes, used threats and intimidations, employed false witnesses, and exerted illegal pressure. So, the poor were deprived of all justice and right. Their legal decisions contradicted the Mosaic law, which defends the poor and the weak. *And what will ye do?* The prophet now denounces them and declares 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 there be?’ Implying that the calamity would be so great that there would be no refuge, or escape. *In the day of visitation.* The word *visitation* is here used in the sense of God’s coming to punish them for their sins; (c.f. Job 31:14; 35:15; Isaiah 26:14; Ezekiel 9:1). This idea illustration is a promise as of a master of a family who comes to take account, or to investigate the conduct of his servants, and where the visitation, therefore, is one of reckoning and justice. So, as the idea is applied to God it is seen as *visiting* the wicked; that is, to punish them for their offences. This concept of justice for those that are not faithful to do the Lord’s will was related to us by our Lord Jesus in a parable.

Matthew 25:14–30

¹⁴For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. ¹⁵And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey. ¹⁶Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made other five talents. ¹⁷In like manner he also that received the two gained other two. ¹⁸But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. ¹⁹Now after a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and maketh a reckoning with them. ²⁰And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: lo, I have gained other five talents. ²¹His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. ²²And he also that received the two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: lo, I have gained other two talents. ²³His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy lord. ²⁴And he also that had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art a hard man, reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter; ²⁵and I was afraid, and went away and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, thou hast thine own. ²⁶But his lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter; ²⁷thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest. ²⁸Take ye away therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him that hath the ten talents. ²⁹For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away. ³⁰And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth (ASV, 1901).

Next message: GOD JUDGES ASSYRIA FOR HER SINS

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