

**Isa 9:8-21 NKJV 8 The Lord sent a word against Jacob, And it has fallen on Israel. 9 All the people will know--Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria--Who say in pride and arrogance of heart: 10 "The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with hewn stones; The sycamores are cut down, But we will replace [them] with cedars." 11 Therefore the LORD shall set up The adversaries of Rezin against him, And spur his enemies on, 12 The Syrians before and the Philistines behind; And they shall devour Israel with an open mouth. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still. 13 For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, Nor do they seek the LORD of hosts. 14 Therefore the LORD will cut off head and tail from Israel, Palm branch and bulrush in one day. 15 The elder and honorable, he [is] the head; The prophet who teaches lies, he [is] the tail. 16 For the leaders of this people cause [them] to err, And [those who are] led by them are destroyed. 17 Therefore the Lord will have no joy in their young men, Nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows; For everyone [is] a hypocrite and an evildoer, And every mouth speaks folly. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still. 18 For wickedness burns as the fire; It shall devour the briers and thorns, And kindle in the thickets of the forest; They shall mount up [like] rising smoke. 19 Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts The land is burned up, And the people shall be as fuel for the fire; No man shall spare his brother. 20 And he shall snatch on the right hand And be hungry; He shall devour on the left hand And not be satisfied; Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm. 21 Manasseh [shall devour] Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh; Together they [shall be] against Judah. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still.**

**Isaiah 10:1-4**

**<sup>1</sup> "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, Who write misfortune, *Which* they have prescribed <sup>2</sup> To rob the needy of justice, And to take what is right from the poor of My people, That widows may be their prey, And *that* they may rob the fatherless. <sup>3</sup> What will you do in the day of punishment, And in the desolation *which* will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory? <sup>4</sup> Without Me they shall bow down among the prisoners, And they shall fall among the slain." For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand is stretched out still.**

The danger of uninformed optimism

This is from Wikipedia:

Harry Truman lived near Mt St Helens. He became a minor celebrity during the two months of volcanic activity preceding the eruption, giving interviews to

reporters and expressing his opinion that the danger from the volcano was exaggerated, saying, "I don't have any idea whether it will blow[...] But I don't believe it to the point that I'm going to pack up." Truman discarded all of his concerns about the volcano and his situation, stating " This area is heavily timbered, Spirit Lake is in between me and the mountain, and the mountain is a mile away, the mountain ain't gonna hurt me." He responded to being knocked from his bed by precursor earthquakes by moving his mattress to his basement. At one point, Truman "scoffed" at the public's concern for his safety. He became something of a "folk hero" and from March until May, was the subject of many songs and poems by children.

Then the volcano blew and all of Harry Truman's optimism did nothing to keep him alive.

Our world is full of uninformed optimism. But it is nothing new. Israel was full of optimism, even in the face of difficult circumstances. The prophet has shifted his focus and is now addressing **Israel, the Northern Kingdom**. The prophet Isaiah was communicating exactly what God thought of their thoughts and actions. He conveyed to them that they were inviting and would receive God's judgment.

God fortunately creates a theme in this passage that is impossible to miss since it is stated four times the exact same way. Four times the prophet says "**For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still**"

This passage is a display of God's wrath. God's wrath is not a popular attribute of God in our society of toleration and niceness. But to understand who God is and what God does, a person must come to grips with the anger and wrath of God.

Here is a quote from a commentary.

**What is the wrath of God? His wrath is his active, resolute opposition to all evil.**

*Preaching the Word - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.*

What we as humans tend to want is a God for whom **our sin** is **no big deal**. We want a God who forgives like we do, which means he just sluffs stuff off as if it was no big deal. We do mental gymnastics and go on with life.

But that is not who God is. One day, when we stand before God, we will understand **God's hatred of sin**. We will understand **what harm** evil has done to everything God loves. We will see with clarity what harm **our sin has done to others** and what **other's sin has done to us**. We will gain an appreciation for just how patient God has been in allowing the human race to continue. We will understand just how important this project of his **to fill up His kingdom with people to fellowship with Him** really was to Him.

Our world has it all backwards. Our world asks, if there is a God, how can he allow such evil to exist? What they are talking about are the Hitlers and Stalins and Osama Bin Ladens. The real question should be, if God is good, how could he allow **us** to continue to exist? How could he allow every single human being to exist? That is the real question if we are going to talk about God ending suffering.

We are all the sources of the evil. Our sin nature's is where sin displays itself. Many humans sit in judgment of God as if **their desire for righteousness and justice** exceeds God's concern. They really don't get it. If they really did care that much about justice, they would kill themselves for the evil that they carry in their souls. As Christians we often try to defend God against these accusations people bring against Him. What we should do is change the focus. The question really is, would you kill yourself if you knew you were going to commit an evil to another human being? Do you love righteousness so much you would defend it with your life? Do you love justice so much that you would carry out wrath upon yourself to protect another from your own wickedness? And then ask about romantic encounters where they have broken another person's heart. When we begin to understand that we are all the problem, suddenly we are not so quick to want God to annihilate suffering because we understand he would have to annihilate the human race.

God is burning with wrath toward those who are not His. This is what David said. **Psalm 7:9-14**

**<sup>9</sup> Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, But establish the just; For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds. <sup>10</sup> My defense is of God, Who saves the upright in heart. <sup>11</sup> God is a just judge, And God is angry with the wicked every day. <sup>12</sup> If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. <sup>13</sup> He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts. <sup>14</sup> Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood.**

So how can such evil exist if there is a God? Such evil exists because God is restraining His wrath. Such evil exists due to the fact that **God is good and God is love**. And He will not allow his hatred of evil to stand between Him and the rescue of all of His people. That is why He allows so much suffering.

That is **for now**. It will not always be this way. If unrepentant, all the critics of God will have their self righteous questions, questions that are really just accusations leveled at God, answered on the day of their destruction. God will display how He planned to end evil because He is a good God. It is to remove **all the carriers of evil**. Our world has it all backwards, because humans tend to believe they are the centers of the universe. We don't understand that we exist because God is good. Suffering exists because God is long suffering. But when the day comes that evil serves no purpose, evil will be absolutely and totally eradicated forever. Praise God.

Now what about His people? How do we avoid God's wrath? If God hates sin so much, how in the world can we avoid God's wrath? How can we miss out on being part of the destruction when God eradicates evil? Have we not done evil? Have we not sinned against God and done evil to other humans?

The answer to that question is what the Gospel is all about. That is the good news of all good news. God has **already** punished our sin. God has **already** eradicated the evil of all believers. That truly is the point of Christ's death. We can live because Christ died. That is part of what it means to have faith in Christ. We have faith that His sacrifice completely paid the price for our sin. He was our propitiation. He **won God's favor toward us** by what He did. That is the foundation of our Christianity, our walk with Christ.

Rest assured, God's love will never make peace with evil. God's love will never overlook sin. No sin will enter His eternal kingdom. People **who have sinned** will enter His kingdom. But there will be **no sin** allowed to flourish in eternity. Christ took care of the **penalty for sin** in this life and He will take care of **the presence of sin** in the next. We need to really get this. God hates sin. And sin is awful, no matter how it might seem at the time.

CS Lewis also had something interesting to say about wrath.

God's wrath works in two ways, with opposite results. On the one hand, his anger condemns those who finally reject him. They prefer Hell, and they get what they prefer. Still worse, as C. S. Lewis warns us, "It's not a question of God 'sending' us to Hell. In each of us there is something growing up which will of itself *be Hell* unless it is nipped in the bud. The matter is serious: let us put ourselves in His hands at once—this very day, this very hour." On the other hand, God's anger purifies all who love him. His fatherly discipline enriches us in everything we long for in our own deepest intentions. This remedial anger does not afflict us as we deserve, but only as we need ([Hebrews 12:5-13](#)).

Now we have the understanding of what this text is about. We have three statements of **For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still**"

This is a passage about God's wrath. Now on to our text.

**Isa 9:8 The Lord sent a word against Jacob, And it has fallen on Israel. 9 All the people will know--Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria--Who say in pride and arrogance of heart: 10 "The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with hewn stones; The sycamores are cut down, But we will replace [them] with cedars."**

These are people who look at **the calamity** they have faced, but with a prideful optimism **they state their plans for themselves**. They are going to build for themselves a wonderful reality. They are going to make things even better than they were when they were destroyed. They are trusting themselves and their false gods to create a blissful existence.

Carla often hears her college students, some of whom can barely read or add, talk about their plans to be doctors and lawyers and professional athletes. This is an optimism bred in humanism that is nothing but a pipedream. That too is an example of man's plans to improve our world. It is amazing to me that people think that the solution to the world calamities is the world's organizations. The

same creatures that **create** the problem are **trusted and expected** to solve the problem. It has never worked. But humanity shows its insanity by doing the same thing over and over again in the hopes for a different outcome. I think we see the same seeds in liberal politics. There is a hope that if government is big enough and strong enough and well funded enough that it can solve the human dilemma. The fact that this has had very limited success in the past means nothing to this blind idealism. So, what we see in our text is still what we see in our world... unfounded optimism.

Notice too what the text says about what the source of these pipedreams is. In verse 9 it says "In their pride and arrogance of heart". That is where hope in mankind always comes from, an overly lofty view of mankind, an elevated view of man's potential. Pride and Arrogance.

Now, what effect does this have on what God plans?

**11 Therefore the LORD shall set up The adversaries of Rezin against him, And spur his enemies on, 12 The Syrians before and the Philistines behind; And they shall devour Israel with an open mouth. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still.**

God is angry. God has offered Himself to these people. He has pledged to be their husband, to be their provider and protector. He has offered true love. But what do the people do? They follow their hearts. They are in love with something else. They think to protect themselves with their own hands. God could have sat back and let them taste the devastating consequences of their decisions. That would have worked in time. But He does more than that. God sets up the adversaries. God spurs the enemies on. God **intends** for them to destroy Israel. He **wants** them to. He will not stand to be rejected by the wife that He loved. Why? He is carrying out His wrath on their sin. . **For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still.**

Let's look at the next section.

**13 For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, Nor do they seek the LORD of hosts. 14 Therefore the LORD will cut off head and tail from Israel, Palm branch and bulrush in one day. 15 The elder and honorable, he [is] the head; The prophet who teaches lies, he [is] the tail. 16 For the leaders of this people cause [them] to err, And [those who are] led by them are destroyed. 17 Therefore the Lord will have no joy in their young men, Nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows; For everyone [is] a hypocrite and an evildoer, And every mouth speaks folly. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still.**

Have you ever gone knowingly against God's will and things started to go very badly for you? Then you came to your senses and you turned back to God, knowing that it was Him who was making sure that you could not get comfortable with a life of sin? Well, good for you. It is best not to swerve into sin. But it is

**next to best** to quickly repent and run back to God. That is what Israel **could have done**, but they didn't. They were resolute in their path of sin.

Because of their stubborn rebellion, God is going to take action against the people. And look at what God does. It may help us understand a little better how God does things.

In verse 14 He says he will cut off **the head and the tail**. Then He goes on to define who this is. Verse 15 is the head.

Now who **should be** the head? Who **should be** leading this nation? Should it not be God? Should it not be spokesmen for God? But who **is** the head? The elder and honorable. Then verse 16 defines it further. The elder and honorable are the leaders. And what are the leaders leading in? Evil.

All of us lead people. The question is, what do they become after following us? What do those who are open to our influence become? And what we will usually find is that they become a lot like we are. How often do you find in your children the same flaws that you display? The weaknesses that **we** display **they** display. Those things **we** prioritize **they** prioritize. This is not true of every child, but it will be true of those who are most accepting of our leadership. Sometimes you can tell what is wrong with you by looking at those who are following your leadership. It is worth looking at at least.

Here we see that the leaders are leading into sin. They are prioritizing wrong and living wrong and as a result those who follow them walk off the same cliff. But look at this. The false prophets are **the tail**. What this probably means is that **they too** are following. Instead of hearing from God and fearlessly announcing the truth like Isaiah did, instead of leading, these people were pleasing the crowd. They were following the crowd. They were telling the leaders and the crowds what they wanted to hear. They were providing a service to their hearers.

They weren't crying from the rooftops the need for the people to repent. They weren't talking about the certain destruction these people were about to face. No. They were probably joining in with the baseless optimism, talking about how good things were going to be in the future.

The prophets should have been at the head, **pointing** the people to God. With the elders, following soon after, **leading** people to God. But no. The prophets have gotten out of the way for the leaders to lead into wickedness.

So the leadership is no good. But what about everyone else? Does bad leadership get them off the hook? Can they blame their leadership for the state they are in?

**Therefore the Lord will have no joy in their young men, Nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows; For everyone [is] a hypocrite and an evildoer, And every mouth speaks folly.**

There are no Daniel's in this crowd. There are none that are grieving the horrible direction of leadership. No. These people are glad to have wicked leadership because it enables the direction they want to go anyway.

We often get the leaders we deserve. When we won't submit to **good leadership** it is not unusual to **lose good leadership** and get **bad leadership**.

Whatever the case, the people have been good followers of bad leadership. And again, look at the accusation. The primary sin is one of exploiting the powerless. By so doing they show what they are. They are hypocrites. They say they are **for** the right things. They say **the right things are right**. But when it comes to doing, that is a different matter.

Isn't it hard not to be a hypocrite? Isn't it hard to live according to what we say? We say all the right things. But living it. Now that is a different matter. About the greatest compliment I could imagine is a spouse or family member saying- "I can depend on you to **do very close** to what you **say** you should do." Or to say "**you follow your own advice**. I know when you give **me** advice **you would do the same thing** you are **telling me** to do.

The places that we stray we are being hypocritical. We are coming up with reasons why" I am an exception to the rule. I don't need to live the way I am telling others they should live."

Not being a hypocrite is hard.

And notice it says every mouth speaks folly. These people weren't even speaking wisdom. Truth was not their goal. What they spouted was probably what their seemers were saying, what their hearts were saying, what their guts were saying, what their flesh was saying what the crowd was saying. But not what God was saying.

Next passage

**Isa 9:**

**18 For wickedness burns as the fire; It shall devour the briers and thorns, And kindle in the thickets of the forest; They shall mount up [like] rising smoke. 19 Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts The land is burned up, And the people shall be as fuel for the fire; No man shall spare his brother. 20 And he shall snatch on the right hand And be hungry; He shall devour on the left hand And not be satisfied; Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm. 21 Manasseh [shall devour] Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh; Together they [shall be] against Judah. For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still.**

We need to understand something about wickedness. God will punish wickedness. But wickedness will also punish itself. We have to keep in mind that there are spiritual forces who intend us harm. Every day we are surrounded by them. And they would destroy us if they could. What do they offer? Life and peace and godliness? **Hardly**. They offer sin and its pleasures. Why? Because they love us? **Hardly**. They want our destruction. And if they cannot bring about our destruction, they want us to suffer. So how do they bring that about? They entice us with pleasure. But it is always **sinful** pleasure. It is pleasure that God does not

allow. And what happens then? This sin will eventually punish us. Satan's offerings never come without a hook.

### **Ephesians 6:16**

**<sup>16</sup> above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.**

Sin is like fire. It's nature is to spread. Its nature is to destroy. It will move from one area of our lives to another. Who can commit any sin without lying? Someone challenges us about our sin and what do we do? We cover up. We lie. And that distances us even more from those who love us. We find ourselves isolated and alone. And the fire spreads.

In our text, God is spreading His wrath at the same time wickedness is burning like a fire. Some of God's wrath is experienced by the consequences of sin alone.

Romans tells us an expression of God's wrath is to give people up to the sins they love. **Romans 1:24**

**<sup>24</sup> Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves,**

Sometimes sin will accomplish bringing about the wrath of God enough.

Sometimes God will add His punishments on top of that.

In our text we see that the conflict between people makes life absolutely miserable. Everyone is devouring everyone else. They chase what they long for, but they never get what they want. Whenever an individual is at the center of the individual's world, life is going to get bad. Because people will always be spent for the pleasure or the benefit of the individual.

All of us know about this. All of us have seen what happens when we are at the center of the world. Innocent people always suffer when man is god in his own life.

Our text shows the natural results of sin. It shows people devouring people. And that is a display of the wrath of God. Yet God may not have had to lift a finger here. We do it to ourselves. We invite our suffering by pretending that we do not need God.

Look what it says.

**He shall devour on the left hand And not be satisfied; Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm.**

How gruesome is this? This is always the nature of sin. It drives us to move. But it never gives what it promises. It never ever ever satisfies the drive. It never fulfills us or gives us completion. The drive for sin is unsatiable. And if we give in to it completely it will truly destroy us.

Sometimes we may be tempted to ask, will I go to hell if I do this sin. That is an awful question to ask. If we don't **end up in hell** due to our rebellion, we will have known **what hell is like** by choosing a path that goes against God.

Sin will cause us to devour ourselves and each other. How smart is that?

And after all this self destruction Isaiah says, **For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand [is] stretched out still.**

God is still displaying His wrath. He is still angry with Israel.

Now the last section of God's wrath toward Israel.

**Isaiah 10:1-4**

**<sup>1</sup> "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, Who write misfortune, Which they have prescribed <sup>2</sup> To rob the needy of justice, And to take what is right from the poor of My people, That widows may be their prey, And *that* they may rob the fatherless. <sup>3</sup> What will you do in the day of punishment, And in the desolation *which* will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your glory? <sup>4</sup> Without Me they shall bow down among the prisoners, And they shall fall among the slain." For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand is stretched out still.**

Here we get some specific insights into the sins that God is so angry about. We need to consider this. What do we know about God's law? We can read Psalm 119 and learn wonderful things about God's law. It is amazing. And that is the law that the people of God **were to use**. But these people were acting like they were smarter than God. They did not need to do what God said. They could make up **their own decrees**. And who would those decrees serve? They would serve **self**. That is who we always serve when God is not on our throne. We serve self. And who will self exploit when self is on the throne? Whoever it can. The low hanging fruit for exploitation are always the powerless. So the powerless are the litmus test of a justice system.

When a system profits by exploiting the poor, when the rich get richer by taking from the poor, there is no longer any justice. Now this is not selling something to the poor that they are free to choose or to not choose. There are those who would say that anyone who sells something that the poor want to buy are criminals. That is not what this is talking about. What this is talking about is taking from the poor that which is rightfully theirs, like land or food or money or legal rights.

God's warning here is very straight forward. What are you going to do when judgment comes upon you who are guilty of this sin? Have you considered this in all your plans? When God comes after you in judgment, where are you going to hide?

God is saying that in that day they will realize the huge mistake they have made. They didn't think they would have to answer for their sin. They were getting away with it and profiting from it. But that will not always last. And in the day when they face judgment, they will have no one to turn to. They have abandoned their only resource. They are lost and without help. They shall fall among the slain. Why?

**For all this His anger is not turned away, But His hand is stretched out still.**

You and I have to understand that God is full of wrath. He hates sin. And those who **embrace sin and will not let it go** will face God's wrath with no means of

escape. We need to let it go today. We need to turn to Christ today and receive from Him His grace. We need to surrender our lives to His Lordship and follow Him and obey Him and serve Him. In that state we can receive His forgiveness as we see sin in our lives. And we have His power to overcome that sin in our lives.

Consider singing Hard to impress.