

"Promises . . . Promises"
Isaiah 9:1 – 10:34
Cheri Bean

We usually view anger as a negative emotion. We attach some rather descriptive words to angry behaviors we observe. When we get angry, we might be described as blowing our top, flying off the handle, throwing a tantrum, or simply losing it. We associate anger with an irritable, violent, uncontrolled response. Angry people are easily triggered. Of course, the Bible warns us against sinning with our anger in Ephesians 4:26-27, where it states, "In your anger do not sin; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold."

In sharp contrast to this sinful anger, the Bible also speaks of a different kind of anger – a righteous indignation that upholds God's holiness and takes God's side against evil. This is the sort of anger we feel against wrongdoing or injustice. For example, we feel an indignant anger when someone threatens to harm our family. We're indignant when the vulnerable are oppressed or exploited, when a child is abused, or when an elderly person loses his or her life savings to scammers.

If flawed people like us are right to be morally outraged, then how much more should the holy God be angry at those who rebel against Him? God is angry because He is holy.

Last week, we learned in chapter 7 how King Ahaz of the Southern Kingdom of Judah was fearful of an alliance between Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. But rather than turn to God for help, Ahaz chose to turn to the world. He looked to Assyria, the superpower of the day, to save him.

We left chapter 8 ending in "distress and darkness and fearful gloom" as a result of Isaiah warning Judah about the coming invasion of Assyria. People were seeking occult wisdom, roaming the earth in despair, and cursing God. You will recall that chapter 8 leaves us knowing that these people "will be thrust into utter darkness."

Isaiah 9 and 10 describe how the Lord will pour out His righteous anger against Israel and Assyria. There is good news in these chapters as well. We will focus on what the Bible teaches in the following areas:

1. The Lord Promises a Redeemer (Isaiah 9: 1-7)
2. The Lord Promises Judgment for Sin (Isaiah 9:8-10:19)
3. The Lord Promises a Remnant Will Return (Isaiah 10:20-27)
4. The Lord Promises to Protect His People (Isaiah 10:28-10:34)

As we begin chapter 9, Isaiah prophesied that in the past the land of Zebulun and Naphtali had been humbled and people walked in darkness. Ephesians 1:12 describes

this darkness as being “without hope and without God in the world.” However, in Galilee, a day would be coming when God would honor this land with a special blessing.

Looking almost 800 years down the tunnel of time, Isaiah said “But a new day will dawn when there will be true light, when joy will be increased, when there shall be deliverance and peace.” This light would be nothing less than the glory of God in the birth of the Savior. 2 Corinthians 4:6 tells us, “For God, who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”

Because of this light shining into darkness, the people will respond with absolute joy as they do when celebrating the harvest or when they rejoice dividing the plunder of a defeated enemy. Last week Dellena gave us an example of this joy when Gideon and his scant army of 300 men defeated the overwhelmingly powerful Midianites without swords in their hands (Judges 6-7). Of course, the ultimate fulfillment of this is still future when all military material will be destroyed because the nations will no longer need to prepare for war (Isaiah 2:4).

And so, we come to verse 6, our memory verse, which is one of the most familiar verses in the Bible. We see it on many Christmas cards and ornaments each year. It is the message of hope for all of us . . . the prophecy predicting the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Andrew M. Davis described this one verse as containing “the perfect proof of the deity of the Messiah, the doctrine of the incarnation, which was the stumbling block for the Jewish opponents of Jesus.”

This conqueror is revealed to be a child, a son born, described by four couplets below that beautifully meld His humanity and deity.

He is . . .

1) Wonderful Counselor: You can get counsel from a lot of people in a lot of places, but there is only one Wonderful Counselor. The word translated “wonderful” refers to the ability to work supernatural signs (Exodus 3:20). The word counselor refers to the giving of wise advice, as advisors to the king would do (2 Samuel 16:23). Jesus came to give signs and wonders and to give wisdom by His teachings. As our Counselor, Jesus takes counsel with the Father and with the Holy Spirit for our good. With Him, there are no fees involved or appointments that need to be made. Hebrews 4:16 tells us, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

2) Mighty God: Jesus is described as a powerful warrior who was absolutely divine. We speak of men as powerful warriors, but the Messiah will accomplish all that is mentioned in verses 1-5 bringing light, joy and victory. This omnipotent warrior will

return to earth to slay His enemies with the sword coming out of His mouth (Rev. 19:11-16).

3) Everlasting Father: This supernatural Father who will live forever will have the fatherly role toward His disciples. He often used "son" or "daughter" when addressing others affectionately. The Messiah will be a Father to His people eternally. As Davidic King, He will compassionately care for and discipline them.

4) Prince of Peace: Jesus reigns as a prince, a common word for a government leader. Peace is the very thing that most warlike conqueror kings can never bring about. But Jesus speaks peace to His disciples and He will fill the hearts of anyone who seeks Him. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your heart be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). Jesus gives eternal peace with God by His death on the cross (Romans 5:1).

I know that we have already spoken Isaiah 9:6, our memory verse. Now that we have examined the verse a little closer, would you please join me in saying it one more time?

"For unto us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on His shoulders."

And He will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Verse 7 closes this portion of Scripture. It promises that there will be no end to our Lord's government and peace. How does this happen? This is God's plan and purpose, and He will bring it about by His power. God's zeal, not man's zany plans, will accomplish this.

The passage of Isaiah 9:8-10:4 focuses on future judgments against both the Northern kingdom of Israel and Assyria. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is also known by the names of Ephraim, which was the largest and most influential northern tribe, Jacob, or even Samaria, which is the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

This passage of Scripture is in four parts, each part concluding with the stanza that we first encountered in chapter 5, verse 25: "*For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand (of judgment-my addition) is stretched out still.*" It follows that some call this section, "The Speech of the Outstretched Hand." In this statement, God gives us a very clear picture of His holy wrath. It is not easily extinguished. His hand is still raised to strike because there is still more to come.

In Isaiah 9:8-12, we read that Israel will be defeated by her enemies due to her unholy pride. God had warned Israel through His prophets repeatedly and has now brought some significant acts of judgment: "Aram from the east and Philistia from the west" have already devastated Israel, leveling buildings and cutting down trees. Amazingly, the people of Israel have not repented as they should have regarding this

judgment. Instead, they responded with arrogance of heart, saying, "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" (Isaiah 9:10).

In their pride, the leaders and the people of the Northern Kingdom were saying, "Who cares if God judges us? Whatever is torn down, we will rebuild with something better. We have nothing to fear from what God can bring against us."

We read in verses 8 and 9 that the Lord has sent a message against Jacob; it will fall on Israel. All the people know the message – Ephriam and the inhabitants of Samaria will face destruction. Not even the fatherless and the widows will escape this fate because all are hypocrites and evildoers. *For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. (Isaiah 9:12)*

Isaiah 9:13-17 tells us that the people do not turn to Him who strikes them. In other words, they have not learned that their hardness of heart in their refusal to repent and return to God will be their downfall. The leaders of the people will be eliminated. The Lord will cut off the head which represents the elder and honorable and the tail which symbolizes the prophets who teach lies. (The Enduring Word Commentary) *For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still. (Isaiah 9:17)*

We continue in verses 18-21, where we learn that because of prevailing wickedness, God's people will attack their own brothers. The prophet sees the wickedness of Israel as a raging wildfire which is swift, unstoppable, uncontrolled and devouring everything it touches. In this passage, the prophet speaks of the gruesome carnage that the Israelites will inflict on one another.

Davis describes the way that God's judgment burns in these words, "God merely lets the evil, hateful passions of men burn wild among themselves. God did not need to start the fire or fan the flames; He simply took away the 'fire retardant' that had held the evil, hate-filled passions of men in check" (Enduring Word Commentary).

The familiar stanza is repeated for a third time: *"For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still."* (Isaiah 9:21) The judgment against Israel's wickedness was not enough. There was still sin to judge and God wasn't ready to stop His work of judgment.

According to Isaiah 10:1-4, the leaders and people of Israel will be exiled and slain because of their unjust actions. They were simply unmerciful to others. They made unjust laws, issued oppressive decrees to deprive the poor of their rights, made widows their prey, and robbed the fatherless.

God's message was direct. Without Him, the people would have no hope before their enemies. This sounds like a good message for the people in our country to heed,

doesn't it? You might say that we will either bow down to the Lord in worship, or it will be said of us, without God we bowed down in suffering and humiliation.

"For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still" (Isaiah 10:4). The repetition of this phrase reminds us that God's judgment is persistent. It moves from phase to phase until it finds repentance. It makes sense for us to repent now, because God's judgment is persistent for all eternity.

Isaiah 10:5-19 is a judgment on arrogant Assyria. This passage describes how God used Assyria as an instrument of judgment against Syria, Israel, and Judah.

Verses 5 and 6 tell it all:

"Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger
And the staff in whose hand is My indignation.
I will send him against an ungodly nation,
And against the people of My wrath
I will give him charge."

Assyria was indeed a wicked nation, but God used it as an instrument of judgment. Even though God used Assyria in His divine plan of discipline, God will not excuse this nation for its attack against Syria, Israel, and Judah; and so, the Lord exclaims, "Woe to Assyria" (verse 5). We will revisit this later.

In chapter 10, God raises up the Assyrian army as the "rod of His anger" to discipline His own people. Then God judges Assyria, seemingly a more wicked nation than Israel, for doing exactly what He assigned it to do. This can be confusing to us mere mortals who do not think the same thoughts as our God (Isaiah 55:8-9).

According to Davis, "One of the most difficult aspects of Christian theology is to understand how God's eternal plans, made from before the foundations of the world are carried out to the letter while at the same time God holds all people accountable for their actions."

As we examine the hearts of the arrogant Assyrians, we see that the issue goes to motive. Verse 7 is a key verse in understanding God's actions. Referring to the King of Assyria, the message of the prophet is: ". . . It is his intent to destroy and cut off many nations." God rightly judges the Assyrians as their motives had nothing to do with His glory. They are just as godless in slaughtering Israel as Israel was in committing her idolatrous actions. According to Revelation 2:23, "God searches hearts and minds and gives to each person what he deserves."

We know that God denounced Ephraim or the Northern Kingdom for its idolatry. But God knows that Judah is also idolatrous and He asks the question, "Shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols?" (Isaiah 10:11).

While I find it staggering that God would send such an evil nation against His people, we see that both Israel and Judah have “broken His covenant and thrown His laws behind their backs” according to Nehemiah 9:26.

God has a shocking message as He speaks the verdict against the arrogant nation of Assyria: Woe to the Assyrians who will be judged for their arrogant actions even though God dispatched those actions. God will say, “I will punish the king of Assyria for his arrogant acts and the proud look in his eyes” (v. 12). How? He will send a deadly disease to the Assyrian camp which will kill thousands of their sturdy warriors in a single day. We will read more about that in chapter 37. Assyria’s arrogance is breathtaking, and God will not allow it to go unpunished. Assyria was in for a rude awakening.

Amid judgment, however, there is hope for the remnant of Israel who would turn back to God. The Lord Almighty said: Do not be afraid of the Assyrians who are mistreating you now. Very soon My wrath will be directed to their destruction. Their burden will be lifted from your necks.

Chapter 10:28-32 cites cities that would approximate the route the Assyrians took to carry the ten northern tribes into captivity. Because of the phrase “In that day” mentioned in verse 27, some commentators believe this would be the same route the antichrist will take to enter Israel in the Battle of Armageddon.

This chapter ends with a description of the Lord lopping off the boughs of trees and cutting them down with great power. Assyria would be like a tree cut down at the height of its glory never to rise again. Judah, the royal line of David, would be like a tree chopped down to a stump. But from that stump, a new shoot would grow – the Messiah. He would be greater than the original tree and would bear much fruit. The Messiah is the fulfillment of God’s promise that a descendant of David would rule forever (2 Samuel 7:16).

Closing Thoughts . . .

There are three significant messages that I would like to emphasize from these passages.

1) Earlier, I made mention that we would revisit how God uses wickedness to further His will. On a personal level, you may ask, “How can God bring any good through an evil person or thing that affected me?” We can’t know in advance exactly how God will bring the good, but we can trust that He will as we continue to yield to Him and seek Him.

Several Bible stories substantiate this fact. Joseph’s brothers sinned against Joseph, but God used their wickedness in His plan. Saul sinned against David, and God used it for His purpose and judged Saul. Judas sinned against Jesus, but God used it for His purpose and judged Judas.

The second question you might ask is, "Doesn't God care about what evil people have done to me?" God does care and He will bring His correction or judgment according to His perfect will and timing. We must not grow impatient, but trust God for the unique work He is doing in us.

2) As members of a culture which teaches that we need to be problem solvers and take care of our problems independently, I am sure that some of us can relate to Israel's "can-do attitude." When trouble comes, our natural tendency is to rely on our own intelligence, strengths, and abilities to find a solution. We find security in what we can do and what we own. We take pride in being self-sufficient and self-reliant.

When life is going well, we may not feel an urgent need for God. We listen less to His word, pray less, gather less with His people for worship, fellowship, and encouragement even though we know our schemes and dreams can be overturned in a moment. In Israel's case, the Lord raised up the Assyrians and Philistines to knock Israel off its proud perch. In our case, it may be a moral failure, a broken relationship, a difficult illness, the loss of a job or even a loved one.

Like Israel and Assyria, we, too, are guilty of pride. We like to be first. We seek to make a name for ourselves. We believe we're always right. We need to stop and consider why it is that God is so angered by human arrogance. **It's because pride prevents praise.** It robs God of the glory He alone is worthy to receive. Pride is the opposite of thankfulness. We take the credit and give God none. Pride exalts self above God.

From our study of Isaiah chapters 9 and 10, we see how important it is for us to be humble and not arrogant in our walk with the Lord. This is a key point for any who want to be used by God. We need to realize we are instruments in His hand. The Lord doesn't need us. He can use rocks in our place (Luke 19:40). Yet, He gives us the privilege of being used in His service. It is important to realize that when the Lord uses us, it is not because of our winning personality, enormous faith, or eloquent prayers. He uses us solely because of His grace. We are just tools in His hand. We can be put back in the toolbox as soon as we think we are deserving of God's favor and God will reach for someone who is amazed and full of gratitude and humility to be used. May the Lord help us see our need for Him each day.

3) Finally, I want to draw your attention to the yoke mentioned in verse 10:27. It speaks of the future freeing of Israel from any compulsion to render service to foreign oppressors. This is a significant prophesied blessing to God's people. And it brings to mind the prophesied blessing that will be ours as believers that Jesus Christ is our Savior. I am reminded of the greatest yoke of bondage (verse 27) in human history which is sin. In Christ alone can that yoke be broken and fall from our necks. Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection is the true deliverance that He offers to the remnant chosen by grace. Amazingly, God will judge the remnant based on Christ's motives and actions - not ours. His perfect righteousness is imputed to us by faith.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has defeated Satan's seemingly unbreakable yoke of sin and death on humanity. Satan's dark kingdom has imploded – Satan turned his evil weapon of death on Jesus and by killing Him destroyed his own kingdom. And we who were enslaved by Satan through fear of death are released to serve God in joy (Hebrews 1:14).

God used Assyria to discipline His people, but He would not permit this godless nation to go beyond His purposes. God may use unbelievers to accomplish His will in the lives of His people, but He is always in control. We need never fear the disciplining hand of God, for He always disciplines in love (Hebrews 12:1-11).