

The Sword Of The LORD

Swords used by the ancient Hebrews were pointed, two-edged, worn in a sheath and suspended from a belt around the waist. When Isaiah speaks of the Lord's sword this is what would be in the mind of his hearers. In scripture the phrase 'the sword of the Lord' carries the sense of divine punishment and judgment. It was Gideon's rallying cry in his role as Judge in Israel. It is also descriptive of the holy scriptures for their heart-piercing and liberating power.

Ignorance no excuse

In our passage 'the sword of the Lord' is referring to judgment and chastisement upon the nations of the world. Whether the nations ever came near to hear Isaiah's message is no hindrance to its certain fulfilment. Likewise people today who deny or ignore God's warning of judgment and eternal punishment will not hinder their coming or prevent them happening.

God of wrath? God of love?

We cannot read this chapter without realising how devastating God's judgment will be upon His enemies and the enemies of His church. Sometimes people contrast the love of God in the New Testament with the severity described in Old Testament passages such as these. Believers find no contradiction. The contrast emphasises why our Saviour suffered so violently in our place and what He endured to secure peace for us with God.

The hand that wields the sword

Isaiah speaks of indignation, fury, slaughter and destruction. Wrath flows from God's holiness revealing His response to sin. The 'sword of the Lord' brings judgment for which God is the first cause – the sword is bathed, or prepared, in heaven – however, secondary causes such as angels or men may inflict the actual physical blows to achieve God's will.

Our shield and defender

We learn from such passages how there is no escaping divine punishment except we are delivered by the Saviour Jesus Christ. Even then, sin must be paid for. Divine indignation fell upon God's fellow in His capacity as Substitute for the elect and accordingly Zechariah writes, 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts'.

Payback

The moving cause, Isaiah tells us, is the arrival of 'the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion'. Do we wonder why God delays? His timing is perfect. God's judgment comes and shall yet come on all who are outside of Christ's protection and the covenant promises. There is inevitability in divine judgment. God will most surely claim His glory in this world and avenge the wrongs inflicted on His church.

Eternal fire

Isaiah's language is alarming. Images of burning pitch and the dust of earth igniting like brimstone fuel descriptions of hell in the Gospels and Revelation. Verse nine is likely a reference to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, which are examples, Peter tells us, of 'ungodly living' and a warning of what is yet to come. God judges equally in time and in eternity and the coming fires of hell draw force from these images. Jude, for example, describes 'suffering the vengeance of eternal fire'.

Righteous anger

Actually, such is God's anger against sin the Saviour Himself declares it will be more tolerable for the men of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for those who reject Christ and His gospel. Judgment is certain. In time and eternity God's holiness will be upheld. The sword of the Lord and the Avenger of blood will go forth to recompense evil against those who have hurt His people. The God of all the earth will do righteously.

Mark my words!

The closing reference to 'the book of the Lord' seems to direct the remnant people to be always watching for when these predictions will be verified, comparing events with prophecies to see how everything will be exactly accomplished and

God's promises revealed. John tells us in Revelation, 'the words of God shall be fulfilled' and we trust and believe it is so.

Amen

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