

Isaiah 7-12 is all about four children:

Shear-Jashub (a remnant shall return) was introduced in chapter 7.

He went with his father, Isaiah, when Isaiah confronted King Ahaz
at the upper pool on the highway to the Washer’s Field.

Immanuel (God with us) was also announced in chapter 7.

Maher-Shalel-Hash-Baz (quick to the plunder, speed to the spoil) was born in chapter 8.

And then at the beginning of chapter 9 we heard of the child whose name would be:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

All of this will come together in the coming of the Righteous Branch
from the stump of Jesse in chapter 11.

But as you listen to what Isaiah is saying,

it should become clear that the promise is not going to happen soon.

Isaiah is teaching his generation how to think long-term.

Are you ready to learn long-term thinking?

What if this virus mutates and gets worse?

What if the vaccines don’t actually provide a lasting solution?

By now, I suspect that most of us have realized

that our political situation is not going to magically get fixed.

Our nation is deeply polarized.

For that matter, the church of Jesus Christ is deeply polarized.

Everyone seems to think that they know what is happening – and what should happen.

In Isaiah’s day, the assumption was that the Son of David would always sit on David’s throne.

After all, that is what God had promised!

So King Ahaz couldn’t imagine that exile was really coming for him.

There are three parts to our text tonight.

The first, 9:8-10:4, sets up the context of God’s relationship with Israel

The second, 10:5-15, declares the judgment that is coming

The third, 10:16-34, promises that a remnant will return.

First, God has a quarrel with Israel.

There is a standard refrain from 9:8-10:4 that recurs four times:

For all this his anger has not turned away

and his hand is stretched out still. (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4)

This is borrowed from chapter 5, verse 25.

In chapter 5 the word of the LORD was against Jerusalem.

Here in chapter 9, the focus is on Israel – the northern kingdom.

1. The Lord's Anger Has Not Turned Away from the Northern Kingdom (9:8-10:4)

a. The LORD Raises Up Enemies against Israel (9:8-12)

*The Lord has sent a word against Jacob,
and it will fall on Israel;*

⁹ *and all the people will know,
Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria,
who say in pride and in arrogance of heart:*

¹⁰ *"The bricks have fallen,
but we will build with dressed stones;
the sycamores have been cut down,
but we will put cedars in their place."*

¹¹ *But the LORD raises the adversaries of Rezin against him,
and stirs up his enemies.*

¹² *The Syrians on the east and the Philistines on the west
devour Israel with open mouth.*

*For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still.*

Notice the images in the first three sections:

In the first section,

the bricks have fallen down and the sycamores have been cut down.

This probably refers to an earthquake in the days of Jeroboam II,
but rather than repent Ephraim says

We will build with dressed stones and replace the sycamores with cedars.

This was the way that Jeroboam II responded,

and he built up Samaria to be a great and glorious city.

But instead God had brought Syria and Philistia against Ephraim

These were border skirmishes, but they signaled God's displeasure.

"For all this his anger has not turned away and his hand is stretched out still"

You didn't listen to me when I warned you!

You didn't repent and return to the LORD with all your heart!

b. The Elders and Prophets Lead They Astray (9:13-17)

¹³ *The people did not turn to him who struck them,
nor inquire of the LORD of hosts.*

¹⁴ *So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail,
palm branch and reed in one day—*

¹⁵ *the elder and honored man is the head,
and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail;*
¹⁶ *for those who guide this people have been leading them astray,
and those who are guided by them are swallowed up.*
¹⁷ *Therefore the Lord does not rejoice over their young men,
and has no compassion on their fatherless and widows;
for everyone is godless and an evildoer,
and every mouth speaks folly.^[1]*
*For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still.*

In the second section (verses 13-17),
Israel again fails to turn to God,
so Yahweh cut Israel's head and tail off—its territory has been diminished.

“Palm branch and reed in one day”—again uses the image of cutting down trees.
But here the trees refer to the elders and prophets,
for the leaders of Israel are being cut off;
because they “have been leading the people astray.”
When he calls the prophets “the tails” he uses a bit of sarcasm:
They claimed to be the spokesmen of God,
but in fact they were tails being wagged by public or royal opinion.

How many preachers today fall prey to this?
Some preachers fall into the “social justice” trap –
but lose sight of the gospel as they are “wagged” by the liberal political agenda.
Other preachers fall into the “culture warrior” trap –
losing sight of the gospel as they promote a conservative political agenda.

The politics of the cross undermines both.
And that's what Isaiah says:

“Therefore the Lord does not rejoice over their young men,
and he has no compassion on their fatherless and widows.”
That should tell you how corrupt Israel is.
Even the widows and orphans are godless.

“Every one is godless and an evildoer – and every mouth speaks folly.”

Paul will highlight this in Romans 3.
All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

There is no way to solve humanity's problems –
there is no way to solve the *church's* problems! –

except the cross!

“For all this his anger has not turned away and his hand is stretched out still”

God’s anger is against sin.
And his people have sinned.
Therefore, his anger is against his people!

But notice *how* God’s anger burns against his people!

Verses 18-19:

c. They Consume Themselves (9:18-21)

¹⁸ *For wickedness burns like a fire;
it consumes briars and thorns;
it kindles the thickets of the forest,
and they roll upward in a column of smoke.*

¹⁹ *Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts
the land is scorched,
and the people are like fuel for the fire;
no one spares another.*

God’s judgment – as we have so often seen – is a poetic judgment.
How does the anger of God manifest itself?
Through wickedness burning like a fire.

You want to live in rebellion?
Okay – fine – you will destroy yourselves!
God doesn’t have to interfere in order to “bring judgment.”
All he has to do is leave us to ourselves!
We destroy ourselves just fine – thank you!

²⁰ *They slice meat on the right, but are still hungry,
and they devour on the left, but are not satisfied;
each devours the flesh of his own arm,*
²¹ *Manasseh devours Ephraim, and Ephraim devours Manasseh;
together they are against Judah.*
*For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still.*

Without godly leadership the nation degenerates into corruption.
Remember at the end of chapter 1, Isaiah refers to how
“the strong shall become tinder, and his work like a spark,”
idolatry contains within itself a combustible combination.
Here Isaiah continues that theme:

“Through the wrath of Yahweh of hosts the land is scorched,
and the people are like fuel for the fire.”
Indeed, the destruction is so great that people turn to cannibalism,
even “devouring the flesh of his own arm.”
Manasseh devours Ephraim and Ephraim devours Manasseh;
But together they are against Judah!

This is the way sin works.
It destroys itself.
It consumes itself.

And “For all this his anger has not turned away and his hand is stretched out still”

Why is God angry?
If his wrath is destroying – why is angry at the destruction?

Why is God angry?
Because he *loves us*.
He loves his people – whom he made!
And he is angry that we keep destroying one another.

And God cannot let this happen forever!

d. Despoiling Widows Leads to the Exile of Israel (10:1-4)

*10 Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees,
and the writers who keep writing oppression,
2 to 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!
3 What will you do on the day of punishment,
in the ruin that will come from afar?
To whom will you flee for help,
and where will you leave your wealth?
4 Nothing remains but to crouch among the prisoners
or fall among the slain.
For all this his anger has not turned away,
and his hand is stretched out still.*

In the fourth section, Isaiah brings a “woe” upon Israel’s rulers:
*Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees,
and the writers who keep writing oppression.*

Again idolatry and oppression are blended together.

While even the widows and fatherless are wicked (v17),
still they are the chief examples of those who have been wronged.

We hear in verse 2 the constituent parts of “maher-shalal-hash-baz” –
notice the words “spoil” and “prey” in verse 2.
Israel’s leaders have been “quick to the spoil, hasten to the prey” –
but they have plundered the widows and orphans!

They will simply receive their just desserts from the Lord of Hosts!

Israel cannot escape the judgment of God.
God’s sovereign judgment is coming,
and when it does, “Nothing remains but to crouch among the prisoners
or fall among the slain.”
“For all this his anger has not turned away and his hand is stretched out still”

This is the word that will “fall” on Israel.

How will it fall on Israel?

Through the rod of Assyria.
The long wars with Philistia and Syria will look like nothing
compared to the fury of the Assyrians.

In our day, we see the same sorts of things happen.
The poor have often been trampled underfoot.

Those with power have regularly set up the rules in order to keep power –
and in order to prevent other people from gaining power!

2. Woe to Assyria, the Rod of My Anger (10:5-15)

a. Assyria Thinks That His Own Power Does This (10:5-11)

⁵ *Woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger;
the staff in their hands is my fury!*
⁶ *Against a godless nation I send him,
and against the people of my wrath I command him,
to take spoil and seize plunder,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.*

Again in verse 6 we have “plunder” and “spoil,”
Maher shalal hash baz strikes again!

But now Isaiah is proclaiming a woe against Assyria – the rod of his anger.
Yes, God uses godless people as his instruments of judgment.
But because they are equally wicked – they also fall under his judgment.

⁷ *But he does not so intend,
and his heart does not so think;
but it is in his heart to destroy,
and to cut off nations not a few;*
⁸ *for he says:
“Are not my commanders all kings?
⁹ Is not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?
¹⁰ As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols,
whose carved images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
¹¹ shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols
as I have done to Samaria and her images?”*

We see here the sovereignty of God in the affairs the nations.

The King of Assyria has his own ideas of what he is doing,
but God is going to use him for his own purposes.

Once again we have a clear chiasm.

The framework of the section can be clearly seen in verses 5 and 15
with the two references to the rod

Assyria is the instrument in God’s hand that will serve his purposes.

Verses 8-11 report the speech of Assyria as he boasts in his power.

Assyria has defeated Damascus,

and now sets his sights on Samaria and Jerusalem

“As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols,
whose carved images were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols,
as I have done to Samaria and her images?”

Verse 12 forms the very heart of the chiasm.

God has his own purposes with Assyria.

He will use Assyria to do his work on Mount Zion,
but when he is finished with Assyria,

“he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the King of Assyria”

Now the chiasm moves backwards in 13-14 and we hear a second speech,

as the King of Assyria boasts of the power of his hand in plundering his enemies.

Remember Maher-Shalel-Hashbaz?

We are not finished with Isaiah’s children.

Speed-spoil-haste-booty is coming!

But then verse 15 closes the chiasm by reminding the king of Assyria
that he is but the axe in the hand of Yahweh. (Read verse 15)

b. He Is But an Axe in the Hand of the LORD (10:12-15)

¹² When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he^[g] will punish the speech^[h] of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes. ¹³ For he says:

“By the strength of my hand I have done it,
and by my wisdom, for I have understanding;
I remove the boundaries of peoples,
and plunder their treasures;
like a bull I bring down those who sit on thrones.

¹⁴ My hand has found like a nest
the wealth of the peoples;
and as one gathers eggs that have been forsaken,
so I have gathered all the earth;
and there was none that moved a wing
or opened the mouth or chirped.”

¹⁵ Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it,
or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it?
As if a rod should wield him who lifts it,
or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!

Now, while verse 15 closes the chiasm of 10:5-15, through the image of the rod,
it also connects with verse 34 through the image of the axe,
connecting these two central sections of Isaiah’s “word” to Israel.

If the King of Assyria is an axe in the hand of Yahweh,
he should remember that an axe is made of wood.
He too comes from the forest—

and the forest is vulnerable to the burning fury of God’s wrath.

While God will use the King of Assyria to cut down the forests of Israel and Judah,
once he is finished, God will burn down the forests of Assyria. (Read 16-19)

c. Therefore the Lord GOD of Hosts Will Destroy His Forest (10:16-19)

¹⁶ Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts
will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors,
and under his glory a burning will be kindled,
like the burning of fire.

¹⁷ The light of Israel will become a fire,
and his Holy One a flame,
and it will burn and devour
his thorns and briers in one day.

¹⁸ The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land
the LORD will destroy, both soul and body,
and it will be as when a sick man wastes away.

¹⁹ The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few
that a child can write them down.

Conclusion: Shear-Jashub – A Remnant Shall Return (10:20-27)

²⁰ In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean on him who struck them, but will lean on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. ²¹ A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God. ²² For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness. ²³ For the Lord GOD of hosts will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth.

And In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob
will no more lean on him who struck them,
but will lean on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel in truth.
No more will Israel and Judah be entangled with an Assyrian alliance.
But a remnant will return.

We are not finished with Isaiah's sons.

Shear-Jashub is here.

(verse 21): Shear-Jashub, shear-Jacob, el-El gibor

A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.

Do not be afraid when the King of Assyria comes.

He is but the instrument in the hand of God.

Remember what God did to Midian by the hand of Gideon?

That is what God will do to Assyria. (Read 24-32)

²⁴ Therefore thus says the Lord GOD of hosts: "O my people, who dwell in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrians when they strike with the rod and lift up their staff against you as the Egyptians did. ²⁵ For in a very little while my fury will come to an end, and my anger will be directed to their destruction. ²⁶ And the LORD of hosts will wield against them a whip, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb. And his staff will be over the sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt. ²⁷ And in that day his burden will depart from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck; and the yoke will be broken because of the fat."

Do not be afraid, Adonai Yahweh of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power;
the great in height will be hewn down, and the lofty will be brought low.

He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe,

and Lebanon will fall by the Majestic One."

When God felled the forests of Israel and Judah,

Assyria was the axe in his hand.

But now who is the axe in the hand of Yahweh?

God is sovereign over the nations.

He uses the rulers of the world to accomplish his purposes.

But he doesn't need them.

Isaiah 37:36 reports that the angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 Assyrians.

Now there is no reference to that in the annals of Sennacherib.
It simply says that he came to Jerusalem, beseiged it,
Jerusalem paid some tribute, and he went home.
There's no mention of 185,000 troops dying one night.
Then again, why would you tell the world that your army just died one night?
Not exactly good propaganda for troop recruitment...

Sennacherib made it home, but his sons figured his dramatic loss
would weaken him in the eyes of the generals,
so two of them murdered him, and a third took the throne.

Isaiah says this somewhere in the 730s.

It takes ten years for part of it to happen – thirty years for another part –
150 years for another part – and 700 years for another part.

And there is a way in which you and I are *still* waiting for the final time it happens.

Isaiah is teaching the people of God to think *long term*.

Yes, in this world you will have trouble!

But take heart, Jesus says, I have overcome the world!

Many people think that abortion is going to bring God's judgment against America.

Sure – but abortion *is* God's judgment against America!

When a person kills their own child – they are cutting off their own flesh.

They are devouring themselves.

It fits the classic biblical picture of a self-destroying judgment.

One thing leads to another.

But God promises that a remnant shall return.

There is a *surprising* future – a surprisingly *good* future – for the people of God,
for those who put their trust in the LORD.

And some of those good things happen in this lifetime!

Think about this:

in the year 1500, there were lots of Christian

who were really frustrated about the condition of the church –

and especially the corruption of the papacy.

But *no one* in 1500 came anywhere close to imagining

what actually happened in the Reformation.

All they could see was that everything was going to hell in a handbasket.

In other words, we've *always* had the problem

of not being able to see where God is going with this!

We only get to the *really* good news next week!

For tonight, we just hear that ‘shear-jashub’ – a remnant will return.

There is a future – a *good* future – for those who hope in the LORD!