

Isaiah 9:8-10:4 • In Spite of All This

Introduction

This message is defined by the same, repeated phrase found at the end of each poetic stanza: “In spite of all this, His anger does not turn away And His hand is still stretched out”. This is an escalating situation wherein God has acted at each stage, and yet there has been no response to Him, warranting further action on His part. Historically speaking, Isaiah had one of the longest documented ministries, most likely extending for some 60 or so years, well through the final destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Why is it that God’s people are so often unresponsive to His attempts to steer them back onto the right course? Why do so many refuse to change even up to the very end? And what if everyone around you refuses to repent and turn back? What can you expect as a member of the overall group?

⁸The Lord sends a message against Jacob,
And it falls on Israel.
⁹And all the people know it,
That is, Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria,
Asserting in pride and in arrogance of heart:
¹⁰The bricks have fallen down,
But we will rebuild with smooth stones;
The sycamores have been cut down,
But we will replace them with cedars.”
¹¹Therefore the LORD raises against them adversaries from Rezin
And spurs their enemies on,
¹²The Arameans on the east and the Philistines on the west;
And they devour Israel with gaping jaws.
In spite of all this, His anger does not turn away
And His hand is still stretched out.

[Read 9:8-12]

Q: What does it mean that the “Lord sends a message against Jacob”?

A: This is the name by which God calls Israel when they are in a backslidden spiritual state. “Israel” was what the patriarch Jacob was named after his encounter with the angel of the Lord and he came away a changed person; “Jacob” represents his old life and character before being changed and renamed.

Q: How do we know that in this particular case, the message is directed at the Northern Kingdom of Israel?

A: Because of the reference in v.9 to the spiritual character of “Ephraim” and the geographic designation of “Samaria”. They are the dual spiritual and literal assignments for the same thing.

Q: Did Isaiah travel into the midst of a conflict to deliver this message to Israel?

A: It would seem that he is providing this message while remaining in the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Point: “Jacob” and “Ephraim” are examples of a “corporate solidarity”, when Scripture uses a single person, place or thing to represent the character of an entire group. But the message is being preached in the presence of Judah so that they might learn first hand the right lesson from Ephraim’s mistakes.

Q: But what is different about this message according to v.9?

A: “...all the people know it”. In other words, there is no ignorance of the true issues involved, so their ill behavior is something conscience and willful on their part.

Point: They know better, but that doesn’t matter to them.

Q: To what is attributed the source of their willful spiritual problem?

A: “...pride and...arrogance of heart”. (v.9)

Q: What are the two things their pride and arrogance is asserting?

1. “The bricks have fallen down, But we will rebuild with smooth stones”.
2. “The sycamores have been cut down, But we will replace them with cedars”.

Q: Why is this characterized as coming from pride and arrogance?

A: It is the wrong response to God’s judgment through what He has allowed their enemies to do to the land. Instead of repenting and returning to Him, they think they can not only rebuild on their own, but make it better, the meaning of using “smooth stones” and “cedars” instead of “sycamores”.

¹³Yet the people do not turn back to
Him who struck them,
Nor do they seek the Lord of hosts.
¹⁴So the LORD cuts off head and tail
from Israel,
Both palm branch and bulrush in a
single day.
¹⁵The head is the elder and honorable
man,
And the prophet who teaches falsehood
is the tail.
¹⁶For those who guide this people are
leading them astray;
And those who are guided by them are
brought to confusion.
¹⁷Therefore the LORD does not take
pleasure in their young men,
Nor does He have pity on their orphans
or their widows;
For every one of them is godless and an
evildoer,
And every mouth is speaking
foolishness.
In spite of all this, His anger does not
turn away
And His hand is still stretched out.

Q: What is the Lord's response to this going to be?

A: According to v.11, He will turn up the pressure by not just bringing Assyria against them, but Aram and Philistia. (Note: In Is. 7:1 & 8 it specifies that the King of Aram is Rezin.)

Q: What are the two scriptural options when it comes to God's wrath?

A: Either punishment for sin must be exacted before God's wrath is satisfied and removed, (Dt. 13:17; Josh. 7:26), or else one seeks to atone for the sin. (Ex. 32:31-32; Lev. 4-5)

Q: If God is bringing about these judgments for their sin, why the qualification, "In spite of all this, His anger does not turn away"?

A: By not learning the right lesson from judgment and continuing in their pride and arrogance, God's judgment will always escalate. Since they are not seeking atonement, they will experience punishment.

Q: What is the meaning of "His hand is still stretched out"?

A: Biblically, God's outstretched hand is a symbol of His power, ready to act either for good as in the Exodus Narrative (Ex. 15:12; Dt. 4:24, 5:15, 7:19), or for punishment of sin. (Jer. 21:5; Eze. 6:14; Zeph. 2:13) In this case, it is to effect more punishment.

Application: There is an unrelenting issue of **pride** in spite of already enduring God's **judgment**, a belief they can **recover** without returning to Him.

[Read 9:13-17]

Q: What is the compound, two-part issue?

A: They not only "do not turn back to Him", but neither "do they seek the LORD". They are neither responsive nor seeking to respond.

Point: Apostasy is not just simply falling away from God spiritually, but no longer at all seeking Him.

Q: What is the chief problem now?

A: "For those who guide this people are leading them astray; And those who are guided by them are brought to confusion". (v.13)

Point: There is a complete compromise of truth and knowledge both in how it is given and received. It is particularly dark in this regard when it is "the prophet who teaches falsehood".

Q: How do v.13-17 describe a different, more intense response from God than that of the previous verses?

A: Whereas God previously brought external forces to exert pressure from without, now internal strife exerts even more pressure from within.

Q: How would we characterize the categories of people involved?

A: Both the important and unimportant; there are no exceptions when it comes to the consequences of pride and arrogance.

Q: Who is responsible for the suffering experienced?

A: Both the religious and political leaders who deceived the people on both fronts.

Q: How severe is the level of societal sin?

A: The wickedness is so pervasive that there won't even be pity on the helpless because "every one of them is godless and an evildoer". (v.17) They are demographically corrupt from the very top to the very bottom.

Isaiah 9:8-10:4 • In Spite of All This, Page 2 of 5

¹⁸For wickedness burns like a fire; It consumes briars and thorns; It even sets the thickets of the forest aflame And they roll upward in a column of smoke.
¹⁹By the fury of the LORD of hosts the land is burned up, And the people are like fuel for the fire; No man spares his brother.
²⁰They slice off what is on the right hand but still are hungry, And they eat what is on the left hand but they are not satisfied; Each of them eats the flesh of his own arm.
²¹Manasseh devours Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh, And together they are against Judah. In spite of all this, His anger does not turn away And His hand is still stretched out.

Q: What did this all ultimately result in?

A: Not just wicked behavior, but the corruption of speech even by ordinary citizens.

Q: Why is God's anger still not turned away?

A: Because in spite of what He did to them internally, they still refuse to learn the right lesson, repent, and return to Him.

Application: A lack of the **truth** and **knowledge** characterizes not just an unwillingness to **repent**, but no longer even **seeking** Him.

[Read 9:18-21]

Q: What are the two fires burning in Israel?

A: The first fire is the wickedness of the people (v.18), the second the fire of God's wrath. (v.19)

Q: How do we know that v.18 is a metaphor for people?

A: Isaiah previously used "briars and thorns" as a representation of people in the course of his parables in Isaiah 5:6 and 7:23-25.

Q: But what is particularly powerful about the source of this fire? Is it brought about solely by those outside enemies attacking Israel?

A: The source is actually, "No man spares his brother". In other words, these are the consequences of personal sin.

Q: And how do v.20-21 describe the nature and casualties of this sin?

A: The wicked take it out on each other in a picture of cannibalism.

Q: What is significant about listing Ephraim and Manasseh together in v.21?

A: They were literal brothers, the sons of Joseph. This is employing the concept of a corporate solidarity to show how the family is turning against one another.

Q: And what is the meaning of including Judah?

A: The behavior and its effects will not be contained, but experienced by the whole family even if they are politically divided into two governments at this time. The two unfaithful brothers turn on the remaining faithful brother.

Application: A repeated historical cycle has been observed of how issues within the Church never remain confined to the group in which they originate, but quickly spread in varying effects to everyone else. Ever notice how many variations of "Baptist", "Brethren" or "Methodist" have come into being?

Q: Why is God's anger still not turned away?

A: The "civil war" which has now ensued so as to bring a deeper level of judgment to God's people has still not resulted in learning the right lesson, repenting, and turning to Him.

Application: Sin in the general course of life produces **wickedness** in personal circumstances so that conflict is not just experienced with the **world**, but with those within God's **house**. Unresponsive to the tool of **external** war results in **civil** war.

¹Woe to those who enact evil statutes
And to those who constantly record
unjust decisions,
²So as to deprive the needy of justice
And rob the poor of My people of their
rights,
So that widows may be their spoil
And that they may plunder the
orphans.
³Now what will you do in the day of
punishment,
And in the devastation which will come
from afar?
To whom will you flee for help?
And where will you leave your wealth?
⁴Nothing remains but to crouch among
the captives
Or fall among the slain.
In spite of all this, His anger does not
turn away
And His hand is still stretched out.

²⁰Now in that day the remnant of
Israel, and those of the house of Jacob
who have escaped, will never again rely
on the one who struck them, but will
truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of
Israel.

²¹A remnant will return, the remnant of
Jacob, to the mighty God.
²²For though your people, O Israel, may
be like the sand of the sea,
Only a remnant within them will
return;
A destruction is determined,
overflowing with righteousness.

²³For a complete destruction, one that is
decreed, the Lord GOD of hosts will
execute in the midst of the whole land.

[Read 10:1-4]

Q: What has been the progression of the consequences of their behavior up to this point?

1. In 9:8-12, an unwillingness to repent stemmed from general pride and arrogance; they even thought they could rebuild things better on their own.
2. In 9:13-17, a lack of truth and knowledge, actually morphing into falsehoods, no longer simply impeded repentance, but resulted in no longer even seeking God.
3. In 9:18-21, these things combined to produce personal wickedness so that they not only turned away from God, but turned on each other.

Q: What has this produced here?

A: A complete corruption of the treatment of others characterized by behaviors described as “evil” (v.1), “unjust” (v.1), “deprive...justice” (v.2), “rob...people of their rights” (v.2) and to exploit the poorest and weakest exemplified by “widows” and “orphans”.

Application: Groups who turn on God inevitably deteriorate to the place where they not only turn on each other, but actually exploit its weakest members.

Q: What is the point of Isaiah’s rhetorical question in v.3?

A: Everyone will be ultimately held accountable at the coming of the Lord.

Q: Why is God’s anger still not turned away?

A: The right lesson and hoped for repentance has not been exhibited even right up to the very end; they have become even worse again.

Application: There is no **safety** in numbers in the **absence** of spiritual faithfulness; the **rebellious** will inevitably **turn** on each other.

[Read 10:20-23]

Q: But in spite of the circumstances described above, what is always present where God’s people are concerned?

A: A “remnant”—individuals who remain faithful in spite of and even into the very judgments of God.

Q: What is particularly powerful about “escaped” in v.20?

A: The underlying Hebrew word is often used to describe God’s deliverance. (Gen. 45:7; 2 Ki. 19:30-31; 2 Chr. 12:7, etc.)

Q: What is the meaning of “will never again rely on the one who struck them”?

A: Historically, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had attempted to make a treaty with Assyria, the very tool of judgment God used against them. They relied on a representative of the world instead of the One True God.

Q: But does the presence of a faithful remnant eliminate the execution of God’s wrath?

A: No. Although they will be individually preserved, the overall national consequences are unavoidable.

Q: What spiritual result is intended to come from this literal, physical judgment?

A: According to v.22, “righteousness”. Whereas the majority have given themselves over to “wickedness” (v.18), He will begin again with a righteous remnant.

Application: When **apostasy** is the chief characteristic and behavior of the day, biblical **hope** is reduced to the level of individual **faithfulness**.

Overall Application

It is no coincidence that what has been described here in the final days of Israel is mirrored in that which Jesus tells us to expect in our own Last Days in the Olivet Discourse when it will not simply be a time when the world goes mad, but the apostasy disintegrates the relationships most personal to us, even turning against us. Not surprisingly, this is also seen in Revelation 17-18 when “Babylon the great”, the personification of the religious system who worships the Beast turns on itself as well. Whether of the world or formerly of Christ, a spiritual deterioration to the point of allowing wickedness to become one’s defining quality inevitably results in not just judgment, but the wrath of God.