

In the Hands of an Angry God – Isaiah 9:8 – 10:4

Introduction – As we jump back into Isaiah, we should remember from whence we’ve come (9:1-7). Now the book returns to the present reality of Isaiah’s day, the sad condition of the northern kingdom and its imminent demise. This prophecy must also be understood in light of the bigger section before us. The hand of the Sovereign God extends to all nations and to all kingdoms (10:5-11:16). The southern kingdom must listen then as well, for it is not Assyria or Ephraim/Syria with which Judah must come to terms with. It is God. In our passage, if Ephraim goes under, it will not be because she was too weak militarily; it will be because she was found lacking in faith and in her moral standards before the living God. And if it is true that *“of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end”* (9:7), then all nations in all times must heed this same message.

The Anger of God (vv12, 17, 21, 10:4) – The structure of this section is shown in the refrain at the end of each strophe (which had been used towards Judah as well in 5:25). Packer says the wrath of God is *“...His active, resolute opposition to all evil.”* His delight is spontaneous and intrinsic to His being, but His wrath is provoked by the defiance of his creatures. And the provocations in each section are both wicked and common among nations in their defiance to His law. *“His hand is stretched out still,”* reminds us of the time of the plagues against Egypt and the unrepentant heart of Pharaoh.

The Anger of God and the Proud (vv8-12) – Their sin is the pride that exalts them above God or uses God as a tool for their own plans (*“God bless America”*). The word has fallen (v8, and could be translated, *“and keeps falling”* reminding Israel that the prophets Amos and Hosea had already been prophesying the demise). Israel believes in herself and so even when she suffers a blow, she declares something like, *“we will get through this...we will come out stronger, better, with more resolve...”* (v10). *“Bricks”* have only been used before in the OT to speak of what the idolaters at Babel were building and what Pharaoh had the Hebrew slaves making. In Isaiah 65:3, bricks are used explicitly to build altars for their idolatrous offerings. Because of this self-exalting pride, God promises that her enemies will in fact devour her (vv11-12). The Bible insists that national and international consequences result from spiritual causes. In our day, *“How the great democracies triumphed, and so were able to resume the follies which had so nearly cost them their life”* – Winston Churchill. *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (1 Pet 5:5).

The Anger of God and False Leaders (vv13-17) – The leaders of Israel refuse to humble themselves before God. Their self-serving attitude results in no truly objective guidance. The LORD is striking them (v13) but in their folly they will not turn to Him (v13, 17, *“every mouth speaks folly,”* i.e. Psalm 14:1). Such folly can be dogmatic atheism or a practical atheism which believes that life can be lived without God and that He and His word are irrelevant when it comes to the real world. The pride of the nation has left them leaderless, bringing judgment upon the nation. Even the fatherless and widows, those subject to God’s divine concern (Psalm 68:5) see His compassion withdrawn.

The Anger of God and Fratricide (vv18-21) – There are two fires. One is the unquenchable fire of following after wickedness, and the second is the fire of God’s wrath giving the unrepentant over to their lusts (vv18-19). This leads to hatred even between blood relations. Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons of Joseph (Gen 41:50-52) and now they devour one another. Following Jeroboam II’s death, one bloody coup after another followed for 30 years until the Assyrian victory. A man addicted to his lusts will steal from and betray his closest relatives. A nation addicted to her idolatry will destroy herself as she attacks her own within. We are warned today of the same – Gal 5:13-15.

The Anger of God and Social Injustice (10:1-4) – Seeking their own gain, legislation is written by the leaders to deny justice to the weak and manipulate the poor. Decrees are made in the interest of class-division and personal advantage (aka *“pork-barrel”* politics). The fatherless are robbed (for they have no protection, no *“rights”* – consider the modern status of a fetus). Verses 3-4 emphasize that the problem is not Assyria’s overwhelming power dictating the fate of Israel; it is their failure to submit to God and to live by His law. The prophet declares: See the anger of God! His hand is stretched out still! Israel is the new Egypt.

The Anger of God not Turned Away – This anger is coming upon Israel, but it will come just as righteously upon all the nations (as we shall see in the following verses against Assyria). By giving His New Covenant people the Psalms to sing, we learn that these principles of God’s wrath and judgment are not archaic. They are very present (i.e. Psalm 75, and Psalm 50, esp. vv16-20).

Jesus Speaks of Righteous Anger and Judgment – In Mark 9:42ff, Jesus uses a similar repetition (using the very last verse from Isaiah) as He describes God’s wrath upon those who would consciously deprive and keep the helpless from Him. John describes a similar end for those who will receive *“the second death”* (Rev 21:8).

The Purposes of the Wrath of God – On the one hand, His wrath condemns those who finally reject Him. But for those who turn to Him, His wrath is but loving discipline, not afflicting us as we deserve, but rather drawing us to Himself. In fact, one must consider whether His wrath upon us is actually a mercy. God condescends to these tiny creatures on this little planet. Ours is a generation that has lost sight of the wrath of God, but we cannot comprehend our salvation without this awareness. His love will never make peace with our evil. Hence the Cross.