

# The “Rod of My Anger” and the Remnant - *Isaiah 10:5-34*

**Introduction** – Two important doctrines weave themselves through this passage. They are the doctrine of God’s exhaustive sovereignty and the doctrine of the remnant. The former with a wrong view of the latter leaves us with a stark and grim Calvinism. Understanding the latter in light of the progression of redemptive history, the sovereignty of God blossoms into a warm, glorious and inviting teaching.

**Overview** – Assyria is God’s appointed instrument for His wrath upon Israel (vv5-6), but “woe” falls upon Assyria because its arrogance, boasting only in its winning streak and lust for more nations (vv7-8). Assyria surveys the list of conquests, beginning at the Euphrates and coming steadily southward until the wave crests upon Samaria just to the north (v9). Their graven images are greater than the gods of Jerusalem and Samaria, so Assyria is confident it will conquer Jerusalem (vv10-11). Therefore, the Lord will punish Assyria when He is finished using it as His rod (v12). Assyria boasts in its own strength, dismissing the God of Jerusalem; taking these city-nations is like taking eggs from a nest (vv13-14). But this is like the axe boasting itself against the arm wielding it (v15). Thus the prophet foretells a chilling doom upon Assyria (vv16-19).

This will teach the remnant of Israel to depend upon the LORD and they will return to the Mighty God (vv20-23). The Lord, Yahweh of hosts calls to His people not to despair even though there is a coming destruction which cannot be averted (v24), for He promises to use these events as well and will provide an astonishing deliverance over Assyria (vv25-27). Again, however, through short, hard-hitting phrases, Assyria’s relentless progress southward from a point some fifteen miles north of Jerusalem is described until it stands overlooking the Holy City (vv28-32). At that point, the Lord, Yahweh of armies, will lop off the high stature of Assyria; it will fall by the Mighty One (vv33-34, Isaiah 37).

**Arrogant Empire** (vv5-19) – There is no creature or organization of creatures which is somehow autonomous from the perfect will of the sovereign God Almighty Who “*works all things according to the counsel of His will*” (Eph 1:11). Even the vilest of persons or nations is serving God’s purposes. This doctrine runs throughout scripture (Isaiah 46:9-11, 1 Pet 2:7-9). In Judah’s day this means that while Assyria appears to be the strong nation (tempting to turn to for protection from Israel/Samaria and other enemies), Judah must realize God’s purposes for Assyria and turn to the Lord alone for protection. God is choosing this arrogant empire for His holy purposes and will at the same time judge and condemn Assyria for its arrogance. It is not simply that God knows the future (as might be argued when Jesus tells Peter of his coming denials), He makes it clear that these actions have been determined by His counsel for His purposes (i.e. the betrayal of Jesus by Judas, John 13:18-19). And the most atrocious act of wickedness, the torture and crucifixion of the Son of God, was ordained by God to accomplish the most glorious and gracious acts of God (Acts 2:23). When Herod and Pontius Pilate conspire to crucify Jesus, they are simply accomplishing what God promised (Psalm 2); but Israel and Rome would both eventually be judged for their arrogance as well.

**The Salvation of the Remnant...and the World** (vv20-34) – The doctrine of God’s sovereignty is stark and cold, especially when hard providences hit us personally, and even more so, when we fail to believe the whole flow of redemptive history. Is there more to be seen here in this passage? The “Mighty God” to whom the remnant returns (the faithful) is the One prophesied in 9:6-7 and so Isaiah has all of this in mind too. We know this because Paul will take vv22-23 and quote them in Romans 9:27-28. And this means that we have to understand the fulfillment of this verse in light of Paul’s teaching there.

**Romans 9** – Paul is considering how it is that those of us in Christ can have full assurance of our salvation when Israel, who had those promises, are being cut out. These are the same doctrines: the doctrine of the exhaustive sovereignty of God and the doctrine of the remnant. Not all Israel is actually Israel (9:6-7); in Isaac and not in Ishmael we find the promise, just as in Jacob and not in Esau we find God’s gracious election going forth (vv8-13). God has the sovereign right to harden those whom He chooses and have mercy on those He chooses (vv14-18). And then we have the stark “Calvinist” verses: the pot has no right to question the Potter (any more than the axe can question the Wielder – vv19-22). But what if the point of a chosen few was to reveal mercy to the world (Gentiles – vv23-24). Paul then quotes from Hosea where God always intended to bring in those who were “*not His people*” and make them “*His people*” (vv25-26). And then our verses from Isaiah 10: Unbelieving Israel (in Paul’s day, leading up to 70AD) will fall in unbelief, but a remnant will be spared to begin a new work of the kingdom. That work would be used to bring the Gentiles to the Messiah, turn Israel back to Him one day, resulting in a huge blessing for the entire world (Rom 11:15 – which will be the theme of Isaiah 11-12).

**One Final Point** – Old Testament prophecies and prophetic actions find their fulfillment in the coming of the Messiah. That is why Jesus would say that only a remnant would find the Way (i.e. Matt 7:13-14). That is not a prediction of the continual state of the kingdom of God in this age. It is a declaration to the first century generation in Jesus’ day. Luke makes this clear when He tells us of Jesus’ words about the narrow way missed by that generation (Luke 13:23-28) but then given and received by the world (Luke 13:29-30). And that is why it is a glorious thing that our God is exhaustively sovereign. He intends to save the world!