

Prayers

Opening prayer

Jesus, You heal my body's wounds, and I thank You.
Holy Spirit, You heal my spirit's brokenness, and I praise You.
Father God, You heal my soul's sinfulness, and I worship You.
Make me whole again, and more like You, Almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: CULTURE

1. For yourself

Pray for your work, and ask the Lord to bless you in all that you do today. Place this before Him and ask whether there is anything within your work that is unworthy of a man or woman of faith, and if so, what you should do about this

2. For your friends and family

Pray for your friends and family, especially those whose lives are somewhat different to your own. Seek the Lord's help in understanding those things that are very different to life as you understand it

3. For the church and its work

Pray that the church will not shirk its task to bring the message of God's love to all who need it, in whatever culture or life experience

4. For your neighbourhood, your country and the world (News)

Pray against all forms of prejudice, especially those that are endemic in your society. Pray against the evils that trap people into selfishness and self centeredness

Meditation

As each and every leaf and flower bursts into life,
Lord, flood my needy senses with Your living joy,
And may the radiance of your glorious brightness
fill my life.

As each and every seed finds life within the soil,
Lord, energise my dormant soul by Your capacious love,
And may Your kind and gracious faithfulness
flower within me.

As each and every plant now reaches up and outwards,
Lord, stretch my mind to touch Your plenteous righteousness,
And make me grow in joy and heavenward peace
In You, forever.

Glory be! I live my life, I breathe, I grow, I toil for You
I give my all so You may live through me within Your world
And all the great creativeness You have designed
Is found in me!

Bible Study

Bible passage – Isaiah 10:1-19

- ¹ Woe to you who make unjust laws
and write mischievous rules,
² to deprive the claimant of justice
and withhold justice from my people,
in order to plunder widows,
and prey on orphans!
³ What will you do on the day of reckoning,
in the disaster which will come from afar?
To whom will you flee for help,
and where will you leave your wealth?
⁴ Except 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.
- ⁵ Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger;
the staff of my wrath in their hands!
⁶ I will send him against a godless nation,
and order him against the people of my wrath,
to seize spoil and grasp plunder,
and trample them like filth in the streets.
⁷ However, he has not planned this,
his heart does not think like this;
Instead, it is his intention to destroy,
and to destroy not just a few nations;
⁸ for he says:
"Is not every king a vassal of mine?
⁹ Is not Calno like Carchemish?
Is not Hamath like Arpad?
Is not Samaria like Damascus?
¹⁰ Just as my hand reaches out
As far as idolatrous kingdoms,
Whose carved images surpass
those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
¹¹ shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols
as I have done to Samaria and her images?"
- ¹² When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem (he will say) 'I will
punish the boastful pride of the King of Assyria and the arrogant look in his eyes.'
- ¹³ For he says:
'I do this by the strength of my hand,
and by my wisdom, I decide
when I change people's boundaries,
I plunder their treasures,
And knock down the inhabitants
like a bull.
¹⁴ My hand has searched as in a nest
the wealth of the peoples;
and as one gathers abandoned eggs,
I gather up all the earth;
and no wing flutters!
And no mouth opens or chirps!'
¹⁵ Will the axe raise itself
Above the one who cuts with it,

or the saw make itself greater
 than the one who uses it?
 As if a rod could sway the one holding it,
 or a staff should lift someone (who is not wood!)
¹⁶Therefore the Lord GOD of hosts
 will send a 'wasting' on his vigorous warriors,
 and under his glory a burning will be kindled,
 like a blazing fire.
¹⁷So 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.
¹⁸With the glorious forests and fruitful land
 It will consume both soul and body,
 and be like a sick man wasting away.
¹⁹The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few
 That a child can count them

Review

As we read this passage, we face a challenge. This is God's Word and he can speak to us through it as much as any other passage of scripture, and yet our hearts may sink because we feel out of depth with the historical details and the sweeping oratory of the passage. It tells us in flowing language about how God used Assyria (10:5) as his tool of judgement on both Israel and Judah (10:9,10), adding that after Assyria had unleashed its power against God's people, God would turn against Assyria (10:12f.). After all we have learned about Isaiah's prophecies, this is important. God will indeed use 'other nations' to judge His people for their sins (as we saw in chapters 5 and 6), but this does not mean that these nations will themselves escape God's the rigours of His justice!

In today's study, I will explain this further and identify some interesting features that have a bearing on Isaiah's important later prophecies. However, where are all these prophecies heading? There are significant passages in Isaiah from here to the end of chapter 14, and we will work through these in the coming days. But from chapters 15 to 34, Isaiah prophesies against the nations and elaborates on the same themes we have already discovered. Moreover, many of these prophecies refer to historical events of which we know nothing. For this reason, after chapter 14 (which has been used, debatably, to describe the fall of Satan – see 14:12f.), we will skip forward to two interesting chapters (26 and 27) and then to chapter 35. From there, we pick up the story of Isaiah after King Ahaz died and see what actually happened when the Assyrians tried to destroy Jerusalem; it is a fascinating story! This will lead us into the famous prophecies from chapter 40 onwards, some of which are the famous 'servant songs' of Isaiah. *(An aim of this website is to cover the whole of Scripture, so I will complete work on the remaining chapters of Isaiah later, when I can provide sufficient alternative studies for those not so deeply into the series. Following Isaiah in this way will enable us to follow all Isaiah's important themes, which develop progressively towards a deeper understanding of God's Messiah.)*

There are two significant themes within this passage however. Firstly, Isaiah speaks with commanding oratory and authority about how the Lord God is in command of all history. The King of Assyria was by all accounts the mightiest king throughout the known world at the time (10:8-11), making every nation across Central Asia into a 'vassal' state and enforcing the payment of heavy dues(10:8,9). The king boasted of supremacy in all things and was worshipped as a god; but Isaiah described him as one who had stolen eggs from nests, pilfering what he wanted (see 10:14)! However, God was in control and the King of Assyria would one day be punished for his arrogance (10:12); *'will the axe raise itself above the one who cuts with it?' asks Isaiah (10:15).* Before the days of instant information, a gifted communicator had to produce memorable sound-bites through drama, oratory or sheer poetic quality in order to be heard. These verses show that Isaiah was a master of these techniques!

Finally, as Isaiah prophesied judgement on Assyria and described it burning like a fire (10:16f.), his thoughts turned from the burning of trees to his hope of a 'light of Israel' (10:17) which would shine out beyond the destruction. He prophesied that after the terrible burning of the land, only a small number of trees would be left, a 'remnant' (10:19). As we will find out tomorrow, this idea of a 'remnant' inspired Isaiah on to greater prophecies about the work of God. Although we have already seen this principle at work within Isaiah's prophecies (see 6:13, for example), this is the first place in Isaiah and all scripture where the word 'remnant' appears.

Going Deeper

As we study further, we will look at the way Isaiah's prophecies lead us towards a greater understanding of what God was doing with His people. Despite the apparent complexity of the passage, All these prophecies come together into a structure which explains God's plan, which will eventually come true. It is my belief that because Isaiah prophesied things which came true, his words were preserved during the critical times of the collapse of both Israel and later, Judah.

Notes on the text and translation

- 10:4 *The first word, 'biltee' (except) is very difficult to translate, with little agreement amongst scholars about it. Most translations are different. My version allows the prophecy to flow by assuming the word is a rare conjunction.*
- 10:8 *Most translations read 'are not my commanders all kings', as if the King of Assyria was boasting about the strength of his army. However, the Hebrew supports the idea that the King of Assyria was boasting about his making all the kings in the region his vassals; that is, subordinate to him and under his rule.*
- 10:12 *This is a fascinating verse. Initially, Isaiah reports what the Lord says, but changes to quote the Lord's own words directly. There is no punctuation in Hebrew, so I have added the words 'he will say' to help the verse make sense; but put them in brackets because they are not part of the text..*
- 10:12 *In the second half of v12, the Hebrew text says literally; 'I will visit on the great fruit of the heart of the King of Assyria!' Here, 'to visit' means 'to punish', and the 'fruit of the heart' means the pride of a man in a general sense. Hence my translation.*
- 10:13 *Again, you may well find that your own Bible says something rather different. Most of the Hebrew words are well known, but the differences in interpretation are in this case a matter of how the translator interprets the poetic flow of the language.*
- 10:16 *It is uncertain what the Lord will 'send', and on whom. The Hebrew says that the Lord will send 'a wasting on his army of fatness'. The 'his' means the King of Assyria, and because 'fatness' can be a euphemism for vigour and even glory, the idea is that the best of the Assyrian army will become ineffective.*
- 10:19 *The Hebrew of the very end reads literally, '... the trees of the forest will be so few that a child will write them down', and that is what some translations have. However, 'writing down' was an ancient phrase which includes the idea of doing sums as well as writing characters. It makes more sense to speak of the children counting the trees!*

The structure of the prophecies

We need to recap a little if we are to understand the 'flow' of what is happening here is Isaiah. In chapters 7 and 8, Isaiah had a confrontation with the Judean King Ahaz in Jerusalem because he would not trust God to help him when faced with two enemies in alliance, the kings of Israel (Pekah) and Syria (Rezin). To Isaiah's great annoyance, Ahaz paid the Emperor of Assyria protection money to keep Judah safe from Israel and Syria (2 Chronicles 28:21). In the course of his anger at Ahaz for doing this, Isaiah prophesied that Assyria would destroy both Israel and Syria (8:1f), but that out of this tragedy, God would bring salvation through 'a child born to us ...' (9:6). The rest of chapter 9 was a prophecy against Israel because of the godlessness which led it to fight its own brothers, the people of Judah!

Now, in our passage today, Isaiah prophesies that Assyria will be God's 'rod' of judgement against not only Israel but Judah (10:10) as well! It was as if Isaiah was saying to King Ahaz that his trust in payments to the King of Assyria were ill-founded; the King of Assyria would come and get what he wanted (10:14)! However, having used the Assyrians in this way, the Lord would judge them because of their arrogance and disrespect for God, the Creator of the whole world. To the people who first heard these prophecies, what Isaiah said was remarkable, and was completely contrary to the conventional wisdom of the day; but what Isaiah prophesied was no less than a declaration of 'no confidence' in King Ahaz and his foreign policy to defend Jerusalem. Instead, Isaiah prophesied utter reliance on the Lord God as the only foreign policy worthy of His people. We can hardly argue with that!

Some clear messages

What is interesting is that the picture of burning which ends this passage begins as a picture of the burning up of the Assyrians, but it has the result of burning up and consuming all the land of God's people ('so the light of Israel will become a fire ...' – 10:17). This is picture of purification, and purification is always what happens before the Lord begins to do His work afresh. Look at how the last few verses are filled with words which indicate the work of God; Isaiah says that God's 'Holy One' will be like a flame (10:17), that only a

'remnant' will be left for re-growth of the forest (10:19) and then right at the end, Isaiah speaks of a young child counting the trees that are left! Remember, the heart of Isaiah's prophecy at this point in the book is about the coming of God as a king in the form of a child (7:14, 9:6)!

What appears to be happening is that all kinds of pictures and signs of God's work come together. Most remarkable of all is the addition of the symbol of fire, traditionally a symbol of God's presence by His Spirit! The meaning of all these signs is not drawn together in the same way as in the New Testament, giving us the Holy Spirit as God's purifying fire and Jesus as the Son of God born as a child; however, we can begin to see how these ideas come together from ancient times when God's plans were only just being glimpsed.

Discipleship

Application

It is often the case that God reveals things to us very slowly, and we do not get the picture all at once. Many people testify that things have happened in their lives, for example, which they can only understand many years later. Certainly, if you stay close to the Lord, you will find that He uses almost every part of your life's experience in order to develop your own spiritual life and ministry. When I was young, I was something of an 'all-rounder', being good at a number of different things; Music, Art, Model-making, Physics, Sport. I did not know that the Lord would give me a life which has included five different 'professions' so far, each of which have drawn on my own experiences in different ways.

In our scripture today we have seen some glimpses of the revelation God's eternal plan; through judgement, through Isaiah's 'child to be born', and through the purification of the fire of the Holy Spirit. It is not right to make all these signs out to be more than they are, yet they are indicators of God's greater plan which is redemption of the world He has made. God always builds greater things out of small things (as with faith as 'large as a mustard seed' – Matt 17:20). Just as Isaiah saw the beginnings of many aspects of God's plan of salvation from afar, so we glimpse the glory of God from afar, through Jesus. One day we will experience the fullness of God's glory. Thanks be to God for all who have gone before to reveal something of this to us for our benefit.

Questions for groups

1. Discuss in your group whether church leaders and speakers today have lost the ancient powers of oratory, in our age of TV sound-bites.
2. Which word picture painted by Isaiah sticks in your mind from this passage?
3. In what ways does God purify His people today? Are there any similarities to how he did this in Old Testament times?

Discipleship challenges

- *Focus on the word 'justice' and watch out each day for issues which are in need of a touch of God's justice*
 - *Explore the evidence for God being at work in the world beyond the church and using secular or pagan things for His purposes*
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Final Prayer

Bless us with true peace, Lord Jesus we pray. Love us, heal us, comfort us, guide us, forgive us, encourage us, empower us and challenge us we pray. Turn us into people fit for active service in the Kingdom of our God; we praise You Lord Jesus Christ! AMEN
