

Prayers

Opening prayer

Dear Lord and Father; You have created the day ahead of me, and surely, You can understand that I cannot do everything that is before me, it is too much! Rescue me, and give meaning to my work. Make all I do worthwhile and pleasurable, make it sensible and make me creative, and may I eventually find that what seemed impossible has been made possible because of my faith and trust in You. Bless me, dear Lord and Father, so that at the days' end, I may find the peace that You alone can give. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

General theme of the week: CULTURE

1. For yourself

Pray that God will bless everything you do today. If the prayer above speaks to you personally, then use it to reflect prayerfully on your day's work, whether you work for pay or you work at home or elsewhere, for love

2. For your friends and family

Give thanks to God for the health of all your family members. Health can be a difficult thing to speak about, especially within families, for we think we know what others feel but we do not, and many people have very individual beliefs about health and their own bodies. Pray, and ask the Lord to break down those barriers that prevent people from receiving His blessings

3. For the church and its work

Pray that the church of God will cross cultural boundaries in its mission to deliver God's Word to all

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

Pray against racial prejudice in all its ugly forms

Meditation

Welcome the day
Let the Word of God sink deeply in
And trust your soul to God this very day
Whatever lies before you

Welcome the day
Let you and God be found together
And all God's people, bound as one
Enjoying all His gifts

Welcome the day
Let heaven be your watchword
And give yourself to God's agenda
Each and every hour

Welcome the day
Let the Holy Spirit breeze around you
And let Him guide your workspace
Determining all before

Welcome the day
Let glory be the souls' temptation
And see in front of you your destiny
The 'rest' of heaven's abode

Welcome the day!

Bible Study

Bible passage – Isaiah 10:20-32

²⁰ In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no longer rely on the one who struck them, but will faithfully rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. ²¹ A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the Mighty God. ²² O Israel, although your people are like the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, and righteous justice will overflow. ²³ For the Lord GOD of hosts will completely accomplish what He has decided to do, in the midst of all the earth.

²⁴ Therefore this is what the Lord GOD of hosts says: 'My people who dwell in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrians when they hit you with a rod and lift up a staff against you as the Egyptians did. ²⁵ For my righteous wrath will come to an end in a very little while and my anger will be directed to their destruction. ²⁶ And the LORD of hosts will whip them, as when He struck Midian at the rock of Oreb, and when His staff was raised over the sea, and when He will lifted it up against the Egyptians. ²⁷ And on that day his burden will be taken from your shoulder, and his yoke broken away from your neck.'

He has come up from 'Pene-Yeshmon'.

²⁸ He has come to Aiath;
he has passed through Migron;
his baggage is stored at Michmash;

²⁹ they have crossed the pass;
and lodged for the night at Geba;
Ramah is terrified;

Gibeah of Saul has fled

³⁰ Cry aloud, O daughter of Gallim!
Pay attention, O Laishah!
Answer her, Anathoth!

³¹ Madmenah has fled;
the inhabitants of Gebim have sought refuge.

³² He will stop this very day at Nob;
he will shake his fist
at the mount of Daughter Zion,
the hill of Jerusalem

Review

Yesterday we read Isaiah's prophesy that the Lord's wrath would eventually turn against Assyria for its wilful arrogance in invading Israel and attacking Jerusalem, and this same theme colours the whole of today's prophecy. It is remarkable that Isaiah could see the Lord at work within the considerable political and social upheavals of his day. The powerful Assyrian army was a tool that God could use to judge His people and even destroy Jerusalem (10:12), and yet even this was a power insignificant against the power of Almighty God, whose flame would burst into fire and destroy indiscriminately, leaving only a small 'remnant' of a forest left to begin growing again (10:17-19). From this stark prophecy, Isaiah spoke about a coming time when Israel would again come under the authority of God (10:20-27).

Some of this is very difficult for us to understand because our knowledge of ancient times is scarce, but we must surely be impressed by the way in which Isaiah always saw how evil was at work and how the Lord was also at work, and winning battles on earth and in heaven! Isaiah challenges us to do the same today, so that whatever is happening to us and the nations in which we live, we should be willing and able to see both the works of Satan and also the powerful and victorious works of God. As in Isaiah's day, things may be difficult to interpret or uncomfortable to hear, but in whom do we believe if we do not trust that the Creator of the world is at work right now through everything happening around us?

Isaiah saw evil in the vicious thuggery of the Assyrian armies; 'the Assyrians ... hit you with a rod and lift up a staff against you as the Egyptians did.' (10:24), and he saw the impending threat of Assyria's invasion of both Israel and Judah. Nevertheless, this was all within the command and control of God. There was no going back on Israel's deserved punishment for her sins, as he says in verse 22; '*Destruction is decreed, and righteous justice will overflow.*' Nevertheless, God still loved His people even though they had rebelled

against Him, and everything that happened would ultimately work for good. Isaiah prophesied that a day would come when *'his burden will be taken from your shoulder, and his yoke broken away from your neck'* (10:27). The message is simple; God's people would have to bear the consequences of their sins, but after this, they would eventually return to their God and their burdens would be removed.

From the perspective of all who lived in Isaiah's day, there was no hope for the survival of God's people because of the coming invasion by Assyria, but Isaiah saw hope, and dared to prophecy accordingly (10:25-27). He was bold enough to use powerful language to confirm that *'the Lord God of hosts will completely accomplish what He has decided to do'* (10:23). What he required of those who heard the prophecy was that they should not be afraid of what was coming, and believe that God was indeed in control and able to save them, as he had done in the past, from Egypt (see 10:24,26).

Now, it is sobering to think that today, for even those of us who are God's people, Jesus Christ bears the punishment for our sins so that we may know God's love! Those who rejoice most deeply in their salvation are those who know the greatness of the grace of God in saving them from their sins. You may feel that this has little to do with our text, but Isaiah understood that the love of God transcends the most heinous sins of His people, and in mercy, also transcends the just punishment of those sins. This was why he was able to prophesy that despite all earthly circumstances, God would save a 'remnant' of His people and make them into those who would 'faithfully rely on the Lord' (10:20).

Going Deeper

Some of these prophecies have clearly meant a great deal to peoples of past generations, and the Hebrew text has become a little obscure with the passage of time. You will find it helpful to read the notes on the text because they show how these themes are present in what many people find to be rather strange prophecies. In our further study we will also look at the concept of the 'remnant' and its significance in Isaiah, and also look at the final five verses which are not commented upon in the first part of the study.

Notes on the text and translation

10:20 *In the phrase at the end of the verse 'will faithfully rely on the Lord ...' the word for 'faithfully' is sometimes translated 'in trust'. The Hebrew word here means 'reliability, sureness, stability or continuance.'* (BDB Hebrew Lexicon)

10:22 *At the end of the verse, some translations have 'destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness'. This sounds strange, yet the point is this; the word 'righteousness' is close to justice, and it makes much more sense to say 'destruction is decreed and righteous justice will overflow.' Destruction had come on Israel by means of God's righteous anger.*

10:23 *There is some confusion about what the Lord says He will do in this verse. The Hebrew verb means 'to bring to a completion', and hence can mean 'utterly destroy', and this is reflected in some translations (e.g. 'He will carry out the destruction decreed on the whole land' NIV). However, it makes more sense to me for the sentence to be one in which the Lord makes a solemn and absolute promise that he will do what he has said; He will complete what He has begun.*

10:24 *At the end 'in the manner of the Egyptians' could be translated 'in the Egyptian way', and just as in English, this could also mean 'at some place called "the Egyptian Way"'. However, here at in verse 26, Isaiah is referring back to the experience of the people in Egypt, hence my translation 'as the Egyptians did'.*

10:25 *There are two words for 'anger' in this verse, the first means 'indignation', or 'righteous anger' and refers to God's anger at His people for their sins, and the second is a more forthright expression for anger which God directs against the Assyrians because of what they have done.*

10:25 *It seems most likely that Isaiah is comparing what God will do to the Assyrians to what he did in the past to the Egyptians after they had mistreated the people of Israel.*

10:27 *The last part of verse 27 does not make sense in Hebrew at all, and we have to make complex assumptions about the text in order for it to make sense. This translation accepts that the flow and metre of the poem which follows requires it to be part of what follows, which is the story of Assyria's approach, beginning from an unknown place called 'Pene-Yeshmon' (see J Watts, Word Biblical Commentary).*

10:32 *The phrase 'shake his fist' could also mean 'wave his hand', and it is uncertain what such a gesture might mean. Most commentators see it as the angry approach of the King of Assyria to Jerusalem – see Isaiah 36:1, where a general of the Assyrian army (the Rabshakeh) gestures to the city from a ridge above it, to speak to King Hezekiah.*

The Remnant

It is during this prophecy that Isaiah begins to speak directly about the 'remnant' of Israel (10:20), having previously only used the word with reference to trees (10:19). The word is clearly important to Isaiah because he uses it throughout the rest of his work (e.g. 14:22, 15:9, 28:5, 37:31,32, 46:3), and the theme is also taken up more than a century later by Jeremiah (e.g. Jeremiah 6:9, 23:3, 25:20, 40:11f., 42:2f etc.). The word simply means 'those left over', and as Isaiah saw God's Judgement coming on His people, he knew that whatever happened, there would always be some people left who had been faithful to the Lord and would form the starting point for God to do a new work. Certainly, Isaiah himself had a group of followers to whom he entrusted the task of writing down his prophecies and keeping them for future generations, in prophetic conviction that he would be proved right; they remained faithful together with Isaiah.

History shows that when Assyria did invade, their armies ravaged the whole of Israel and Judah, but failed to capture Jerusalem (as we will read in Isaiah 36-39) leaving Jerusalem as a 'remnant' of God's people, and when Jerusalem itself became rebellious and was invaded completely by the Babylonians in 587BC, the 'remnant' who remained faithful to God were to be found amongst the exiles in Babylon; people like Daniel and others who eventually returned to rebuild Jerusalem (Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah). At the time of Christ, Jewish people were led astray by Pharisaic teaching, and the 'remnant of God's people were the twelve apostles (minus Judas) and some other disciples; but they were only saved through the mercy of God and the work of Christ.

Because of this history, all of us who are part of God's church are a 'remnant', but saved by grace through Jesus. Nevertheless, Isaiah's words still hold for us. The principle quality of the remnant according to Isaiah, was to 'faithfully rely' on the Lord (10:20). In addition, the remnant would always appear to be a small number amongst others (10:22), they should not fear the enemy because God had proved that He will save His people (10:24), the Lord would deliver them from their enemies (10:25,26) and free them from their burdens (10:27). There is a great deal here for us to rejoice in!

The advancing army of Assyria

In order for us to be able to concentrate tomorrow on a particularly important passage in Isaiah, I have included the verses 28 to 32 in our passage today. It appears to be strange, referring to places and events which are not known to us, and in clear sequence. It is in fact a poem which describes the advance of Assyria across Israel and Judah towards Jerusalem. Isaiah had completed his general prophecies against Assyria in verse 27, and now turned his attention to describing the real events of Assyria's invasion. As we will find out tomorrow, the anticipation of Assyria's invading force led Isaiah to give yet another great prophetic announcement.

The place names mentioned in these five verses track Assyria's path across Israel and Judah; though some of the place names are unknown. Certainly, we know the names of Michmash, Geba, Ramah and Gibeah. Isaiah illustrates the tension of the coming invasion by describing one town reporting to another the progress of the invasion (10:30) until the army reaches Nob, a town near to Jerusalem (see 1 Sam 21), before arriving in sight of Jerusalem (32). The stage is set for a dramatic confrontation!

Discipleship

Application

This passage gives us significant challenges which have been outlined in the study already. The real challenge of a passage such as this is to spend enough time with it to find the treasures within. It is very important that God's people today do not walk down the road of presuming that much of the Old Testament does not have a message for Christian people today. They would miss the four good preaching points extracted above from this passage based on what Isaiah prophesied about the 'remnant' (faithfulness, fearlessness, confidence and deliverance).

Beyond this, there remains the important point that God is just and there are always consequences to sin, whether committed by Christians or others. The whole world today tempts us to believe that people can live a perfectly happy life without God, and that sin is something entirely relative to society. Unfortunately, we view things on too short a timescale. God, who sees all history and has made the moral fibre at the very centre of our humanity, has shown us that sin will have a price, and we pay with it either with our lives or by placing ourselves at the mercy of Jesus, our Redeemer. Whilst many people still live in apparent luxury and lack of need, it is unlikely that many will turn to God their maker; they feel self-sufficient. However, there are plenty of indications in our world at the present that the world as we know it is in practice unsustainable. As life on our planet becomes more and more difficult, more and more people will realise that self sufficiency

and motivation will not bring them peace with themselves, let alone God their maker. There will be a time for Renewal and Revival!

Questions for groups

1. Is it helpful, or is it not helpful to think of God's people as a saved 'remnant' who enjoy God's blessings through salvation.
2. God is described by Isaiah as a God who acts in just anger against evil. Is there such a thing as 'just anger' for people like us? Give examples.
3. To what extent does war shape the history of people and nations? What does God have to say about the wars that happen in our own day?

Discipleship challenges

- *One of the purposes of the fellowship of the church is to help people with their spiritual burdens. Is this true of your fellowship, and if not, why not?*
- *Fear is the enemy's greatest weapon, and it affects all of us in different ways. Take time to pray with someone else about your own fears, and submit them to the Lord in prayer.*

Final Prayer

We thank You, Almighty God, for the gift of faith. You have accepted us on the basis of our faith, and yet it is You who have placed faith within us! Give us the grace to continue to live by faith, to demonstrate our faith and to witness to our faith throughout our lives. Thank You, Almighty God: AMEN
