

**CALVARY PANDAN
BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 10
THE BOOK OF ISAIAH
CHAPTER 10**

Theme: "Woe unto them that decree
unrighteous decrees"

THEME VERSE

Isaiah 10:33 (KJV) "Behold, the Lord,
the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough
with terror: and the high ones of stature
shall be hewn down, and the haughty
shall be humbled."

INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of mankind into sin, tyrants are found throughout man's history. Absolute power corrupts sinful man absolutely! The problem is not with absolute power, for God possesses true absolute power. As a good God, His absolute power brings only good toward mankind. However, this is not true of tyrants with a sinful nature. They rule with an iron fist mercilessly. Anyone who opposes them is put to death. More often than not, even the entire families of these tyrants are put to death as well.

This was the case in Israel's history. The LORD had sent the Assyrians to chastise Israel. The LORD called the Assyrians "the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation (cf. 10:5a)." The

sovereignty of God in using these wicked nations to do His holy will does not make God an evil God. Israel needs to be punished for her grievous idolatrous sins. God had sent many prophets to rebuke Israel and to expose all her sins. Israel and her kings refused to obey the Word of God. God's prophets like Elijah and Elisha were persecuted and rejected by these despot kings of Israel.

The final judgement upon Israel was to send her into exile. Someone had to fulfil this will of the LORD. The Assyrians were used by the LORD to punish Israel. However, Assyria was one of the most evil and wicked nations that had ever conquered over God's people. The Assyrians had to be dealt with by the LORD for her over zealous, murderous rampage against God's people.

The LORD will ensure the continuous existence of His remnant. Israel cannot be annihilated from the face of the earth! Israel must survive the wrath of man as well as the wrath of the Devil. The Messiah must come from Israel and the virgin who will bring forth the Messiah must come from Israel and be of David's lineage. To fulfil these prophecies of the LORD, Israel has to remain on this earth. This was a spiritual warfare in the midst of an earthly struggle against tyranny.

OUTLINE

1. All tyrants will be dealt with (vv.1-4);
2. The LORD's heritage destroyed (vv. 5-19);

3. A remnant will return (vv. 20-23);
4. God's people must be courageous (vv. 24-34).

COMMENTARY

All tyrants will be dealt with

— 10:1-4

Chosen by the LORD to do the will of God does not give one the right to abuse and kill indiscriminately. When Israel adamantly refused to heed the call of the LORD to repent of her many idolatrous sins, the LORD had to exile her to a foreign land according to the covenant established in Deuteronomy 28. The instruments of the LORD's chastisement upon Israel were the surrounding nations such as the Syrians, Assyrians and would include in the near future, the Babylonians and in the distant future, the Persians, Greeks and Romans.

Of course, these Gentile nations did not realise or know that they were actually doing the will of God, being made His instruments used in the punishment of Israel. They attacked and conquered Israel as if they were the conquering powers and Israel was just another nation on their trophy wall! These nations were doing the will of God, as God's power is absolute. God has power over not only His people but also over all the nations of the world! They all had to do His bidding. No nation can rise or fall without the LORD's sovereign permission. Both human responsibility and God's sovereignty were involved in this incident!

Even though these Gentile nations were said to be doing the will of God according to God's behest, they were not immune to the judgement and punishment by God for what they did to God's people! In other words, these Gentile nations planned and plotted to destroy Israel on their own accord and would be held responsible by God for all that they did to Israel. Yet, in the same vein, they were fulfilling God's sovereign will to punish Israel for her sins.

This truth is applied not only to Gentile nations but also to Israel. The kings of Israel were despots and they ruled God's people with an iron hand. They were sinful and idolatrous and these words of Isaiah were meant for them more than for the despots of this world. God expected a higher moral standard from Israel as she had been given the Word of God whereas the Gentile nations were not.

Hence the first word of Isaiah 10 was "woe." Indeed it is woe to them who decree unrighteous decree! They will face the Judge of judges on the day of Judgement. One of such unrighteous decrees is described in verse 2. Judgement for the needy was turned aside. The right of the poor was taken away. Widows became their prey. They also robbed the fatherless and these were the defenceless people in Israel! They were supposed to be protected by the king as God had always provided for them according to God's perfect Word. They would have no one to appeal to as the decree to victimise them came from the king himself! This travesty of justice would

not go unnoticed by the LORD. He would surely judge these wicked despots.

When the LORD comes to “visit” Israel, what will she do? The visitation refers to the judgement of the LORD upon Israel. When the LORD sends the desolation that will come from far, what will Israel do? To whom will Israel turn to for help? Where will Israel leave her glory i.e. her wealth, treasures and life’s work? This understanding of “glory” is affirmed by the same usage in **Psalms 49:17** “For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him.” Where one turns to for help in times of trouble reveals the idol or God in one’s heart! This was the purpose of the LORD’s rhetorical questions! Israel was chastised to consider when or if the judgement comes, to whom would she look to for deliverance?

Without the LORD’s presence and help, Israel would surely be destroyed. Many Israelites would die and many would become prisoners! Israel’s sovereignty would be lost! Thence, Israel must realise that the LORD’s anger has not yet been turned away; for His sovereign hand is still stretched out i.e. His omnipotent hand of punishment has not been withdrawn. Israel must repent and return unto the LORD! This injunction is a stern warning to Israel that the LORD will not stop punishing Israel until she learns her lesson and stop the sin of idolatry!

The LORD’s heritage destroyed

— 10:5-19

The LORD declared that Assyria was the rod of His anger. The staff in their hand is the LORD’s indignation i.e. literally the word “indignation” means, “froth in the mouth”. Figuratively, it means the LORD’s fury and rage against a recalcitrant people who had received so much from the LORD but in return, have been sinning endlessly. New dynasties were given to Israel hoping that she would repent and turn back to God. Instead, the sins got from bad to worse and had reached the superlative level! The sovereignty of God is shown here. He controls the deeds of the wicked Assyrians. Just because they were called God’s rod does not mean that they were not guilty of the many atrocities they committed against Israel. God is not to be blamed for He was not the direct cause of the atrocities but the Assyrians were.

The LORD declared that He would send the Assyrians against Israel whom He called a hypocritical nation. The Assyrians would ruin Israel and the LORD would not lift one finger to help. Israel would be at the mercy of the wicked Assyrians. Israel was called the people of His wrath! The Assyrians would be on a mission from the LORD to inflict punishment upon Israel. This would include taking the spoil, the prey, and the treading down upon Israel as on the mire i.e. clay of the streets. Verse 7 is the most revealing verse on the doctrine of God’s sovereignty over the actions of wicked men including powerful despots! It was not Assyria’s intention to act as God’s rod and instrument of His indignation in punishing Israel. However, that was

exactly what the Assyrians, led by their King Sennacherib, became. It was the King's intention to conquer and destroy many nations, as he was ambitious and full of wickedness and evil.

The LORD knew what was in Sennacherib's heart as revealed in verses 8-11. He was boastful. He declared that his princes were in themselves kings! The implication was that each of them needed a nation to rule as king. Sennacherib had to expand his empire for his princes to rule as kings! Calno also called Calneh (cf. Gen. 10:10; Amos 6:2) was likened to Carchemish, an Assyrian city located near the River Euphrates just as Hamath, a Syrian city was likened to Arpad; another city conquered by the Assyrians and Samaria was likened to Damascus, the capital city of the Assyrians. The arrogance and confidence of the Assyrians was shocking. They were counting their chicken before they were hatched! These verses attest to their arrogance. **Isaiah 10:13-14 (KJV)** *"For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: 14 And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped."* The Assyrians had already defeated many Gentile nations, which were known to own great idols. Since the idols of these defeated Gentile nations were greater

than the idols of Samaria and Jerusalem, the Assyrians thought that they could similarly do with Samaria and Jerusalem, as they did with the Gentile nations that opposed Assyria!

After the LORD had performed what He intended upon Mount Zion and Jerusalem, He would punish "the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks (v. 12)." The word "stout" means "greatness" and "glory" means "ornaments" i.e. pride and haughtiness. The fruit refers to all that the King of Assyria has borne 'out of the greatness of his heart' or all that he had boasted of; the God of Israel will destroy all. The LORD will surely humble him. The arrogance and pride of Sennacherib is seen in **Isaiah 10:13-14 (KJV)** *"For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: 14 And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped."* [emphasis added] The use of the first personal pronoun obviously points to the king's arrogance in his own power.

The rebuke from the LORD is that "shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith"? How can the axe boast against the woodcutter who is wielding the axe? This is an impossible situation! The same dichotomous truth is illustrated in the

second illustration of a saw magnifying itself against the user of the saw. To drive home the point, the LORD used a third and fourth illustration: a rod shaking itself against the one who lifts it up and a staff lifting itself as if it is not made of wood i.e. as if it is alive and could make moral judgements! God will definitely punish the Assyrians! How will the LORD punish the Assyrians? The next few verses will tell.

The use of the word “therefore” speaks of a conclusion to or what the LORD will surely do about what had just been spoken. The phrase “the Lord, the Lord of hosts” actually means, “The Lord (adonay), the Lord (Jehovah) of hosts.” The LORD God of Israel will turn the fatness of the Assyrians into leanness. Directly beneath the glory of the Assyrians, the LORD will kindle (burn) a burning like the burning of a fire. When one lights a fire under something, it is for the purpose of burning something into ashes i.e. total destruction. The “light of Israel” is the LORD Himself. He will be as the fire and to emphasise the point, He repeats the saying “the Holy One for a flame.” The LORD will devastate Assyria so thoroughly that the country is likened to a forest. The briars and thorns and trees and fruitful field, etc, will all be destroyed. The destruction will be so complete that even a child is able to write down the number of trees left. It is assumed that a child cannot count beyond single-digit numbers! The thing to note from verses 17 and 18 is the use of “his”. The LORD described the Assyrians as belonging to Him!

A remnant will return — 10:20-23

In the day of the destruction of the Assyrians, Israel will return back to the LORD. It will only be a remnant of Israel that will return. To emphasise this point, the LORD repeats telling the same truth albeit in another way. He says that they are the house of Jacob who escaped i.e. escaped from the Assyrians. The use of Jacob is to remind Israel of their rebellious nature as the word Jacob means usurper. They rebelled against the LORD and that was why the Assyrians came to punish Israel. Israel would no longer stay upon “him that smote them” i.e. the Assyrians. Israel went to the Assyrians for help because of the Syrians were attacking them. After destroying the Syrians, the Assyrians went on to attack and destroy Israel as well. The superpowers of the world cannot be trusted. They help weaker nations as long as these weaker nations are of use to them. When the time is ripe, they would readily and as easily attack them as they did the enemies of these weaker nations! Israel learned this lesson painfully.

God willing, Israel will turn back unto the LORD and stay with the LORD. The LORD here is called the Holy One of Israel. This attribute of the holiness of the LORD is emphasised deliberately to show Israel that she must return as a repentant child. The condition of coming back to the LORD has always been one of repentance because the LORD is holy. This same standard and expectation has never changed. This is why the “stay” of Israel with the LORD has to be “in

truth.” The remnant even the remnant of Jacob will return to the mighty God. Israel must not and cannot die! The salvation of the world is at stake!

No matter how devastating the destruction might be to the nation of Israel, a remnant of God’s people will be spared. The people of Israel are as the sand of the sea but the consumption, i.e. the destruction, will overflow with righteousness over Israel and she will be thrust into exile. However, a remnant shall return. The consumption is in the control of the almighty God of host and not man, no matter how powerful the despots of the Gentile nations might be. They might think that they are powerful but it is the LORD who is in absolute control.

**God’s people must be courageous
— 10:24-34**

The words of hope and encouragement to Israel are always present as the end of the punishment of the LORD is not destruction but restoration. Israel must shine for the LORD as a spiritual light. But when darkness shows instead of light God has to intervene. Therefore the LORD’s words to Israel include –

* the punishment is temporary – “*O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. 25 For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction.*” The LORD’s appeal to Israel is one of fatherly love for his wayward children. The children must be punished for sins committed. However, the punishment

will soon come to an end. The LORD’s anger will be turned against Israel’s enemies.

* the enemies will be punished – “*26 And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt. 27 And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.*” It appears that the LORD referred Israel back to the days of Gideon where he discomfited the Midianites thoroughly using only 300 men. The second reference was to Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea and how the mighty Pharaoh and his Egyptian chariots were destroyed in the Sea. These two past references point to the greatness and goodness of God in delivering Israel against all her powerful enemies. Then Israel will be freed. The burden would be lifted from their shoulders; the yoke from off their necks. The yoke would then be destroyed because of the anointing i.e. literally means “oil”. The implication is that Israel is the chosen nation through which the Messiah would eventually come. The LORD had anointed Israel with oil by, in the spiritual sense. So, being the chosen nation, Israel cannot perish. It must remain until the coming of the Messiah and all the promises of God for Israel are fulfilled.

* the march of the enemies – “*28 He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up*

his carriages: 29 They are gone over the passage: they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled. 30 Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim: cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth. 31 Madmenah is removed; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee. 32 As yet shall he remain at Nob that day: he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.” These verses describe the march of the Assyrians against her enemies. No city is able to stop her armies from enlarging her territories. It appears as if the Assyrians were invincible. Cities like Gallim (a city of Benjamin north of Jerusalem) and Laish (a Danite city) and Anathoth (a city of Benjamin where Jeremiah was born) will fall. Their inhabitants will weep and mourn because of the destruction brought by the Assyrians. He will arrive at the gates of Jerusalem shaking his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem. In other words, the Assyrians will destroy all the cities in her path and will threaten Jerusalem.

* Suddenly cut-off – “**33 Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. 34 And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one.**” While her power peaks, the LORD will suddenly cut the enemy of Israel off. The LORD will ‘disbranch’ the Assyrians like cutting off the top of the tree trunk and branches. These despotic kings from

Assyria will be humbled by the LORD. Lebanon is used to describe the Assyrian Empire. Like the majestic forest of Lebanon, it will fall with the loudest of sound for the bigger they are, the greater would be their fall. In short, the LORD knows what He is doing in Israel’s life. God’s plan of salvation for mankind through Israel is on track even though Israel and Judah were both rebellious nations. They could not thwart God’s sovereign plan of providing mankind with the Saviour, Jesus Christ.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Powerful men are powerless men – Powerful men abound throughout man’s history. However, it seems that the LORD will grant every nation a moment to shine brightly before switching off her light permanently. This chapter in Isaiah describes the power of the Assyrians. They were filled with pride in their own might. They truly believed in their own invincibility. They were unstoppable and truly perceived in their own deceitful hearts that they were like gods. Lives of men, women and children were in their hands, or so they thought.

However, through it all, it was the LORD who was in sovereign control. The Assyrians, like all the nations of the world both great and small, exist to do the bidding of the LORD of hosts. They rise and fall according to God’s plan. They are not able to do anything against the God almighty.

The twin doctrines of Human responsibility and God's sovereignty – Charles Spurgeon, arguably the greatest preacher that ever came out of England, once said that the doctrines of human responsibility and God's sovereignty are like two parallel lines that never meet on earth but they will meet in heaven before God's throne of grace. How very true is Spurgeon's observation! When man tries to reconcile them, they end up with a distorted doctrine. Those who reconcile in favour of man's responsibility diminish the sovereignty of God. If man can resist the will of God, God would cease to be absolutely sovereign over ALL the affairs of all men. When man tries to reconcile them in favour of God, then man's responsibility is diminished. Sinful men become blameless for their sinful actions as God controls all his actions. He is not held accountable for his own actions because they could argue that God made him do them!

The best approach is one of humility. We acknowledge that we are not able to reconcile the two doctrines. We just teach that both these doctrines are taught in Holy Scriptures.

God's Plan cannot be thwarted – The plan of God cannot be stopped or disrupted by sinful man. This is also true of the failures of God's people. When evil men try to stop the work of God, they will be severely punished. Those who undermine the work and will of God must take note. This is not a matter to be trifled with. It is a very serious matter to God when enemies fight against God's people. They are

not fighting against God's people per se but against God Himself. Sinful men are often blind to this truth when they are consumed by their own pride and hatred for God's servants and His work.

They behave like men possessed. Common sense leaves them. They are hell bent on destruction but they could end up destroying themselves in the process. Even when God's people sin and fail the LORD, the LORD will for His own glory and the fulfilment of His sovereign plan, turn around their failure.

Hope and Courage are Siamese twins – Hope gives courage. Israel would be thoroughly punished by the Assyrians for they were sent by the LORD to discipline Israel. This is revealed clearly in Isaiah 10. This revelation is for Israel and Judah's benefit. They must not give up. The reason behind their hope is that there is still a remnant that loves the LORD despite the fact that Judah and Israel were rebellious nations. This consists of men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and his three friends, etc. who needed encouragement. This remnant must hold on to faith and not be discouraged but be courageous in the face of these devastations by the Assyrians.

With hope from the LORD that Israel is still the chosen nation for the coming Messiah, Israel must be strong and courageous and keep on holding to the truth by faith. God's dealing with the people of Israel must not be confused with individual salvation. The former is a matter of a national

covenant whereas the latter is one of a personal covenant. This is also true today when God deals with the local church, for the local church has replaced Israel as the visible witness of the grace and mercies of God on earth. When a local church turns rebellious and becomes neo-evangelical or liberal, there might still be a few born again believers who remain within till it is time for them to leave. AMEN.

- 2. Should we pray for the despots if they are the leaders of your country as we have been instructed to pray for kings and our leaders in 1Timothy 2:1-3? Please explain your answer.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Isaiah 10:1-19;

TUESDAY: Isaiah 10:20-34;

WEDNESDAY: Isaiah 10:1-34;

THURSDAY: Isaiah 10:1-34;

FRIDAY: Isaiah 10:1-34.

- 3. Do you understand the doctrines of human responsibility and God's sovereignty in your life? What is the practical implication of this wonderful truth?

Discussion Questions

- 1. Explain your understanding of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in the light of your life and the rest of the world? Share one practical implication of this wonderful doctrine.

- 4. Should God punish His anointed today? Who are the Lord's anointed today? Please list them.

5. Do you have a problem accepting the fact that the LORD used even more wicked and evil people to punish wayward Israel? Do you have a problem with the LORD using an unbeliever to rebuke you when you sin against God? Please cite one biblical and one personal example to support your point.

6. Do you think it is fair for the LORD to punish the Assyrians since it was the LORD who used them to punish rebellious Israel?

7. Do you think that America will lose her might and power one day, like all the superpowers of old? Is there a difference between a superpower like America and the past super powers like the Assyrians, Babylonians, Greeks, Romans and even the British?

8. Do you like to boast of your own accomplishments? Why is it wrong to boast of one's own accomplishments especially when it is done accurately and honestly, without addition?

9. Do you think that the period of the local church witness would soon be over just as the national witness of Israel was replaced? If this is true, then how important is your life in the church to you?

10. What action/s could bring about the wrath of God upon any local church such that God would rightfully remove her from being a blessing? Give reason/s for your answer/s.

11. Does the continuous existence of any local church mean that the church is spiritually healthy? What constitutes a spiritually healthy church? Please explain.

12. Is CPBPC a spiritually healthy church? If CPBPC becomes derelict and turns neo-evangelical, do you think it should still exist? If not, why not? Please give reasons for your answer.

13. What lessons can you learn from this chapter about God's Word and about yourself?
