

## OF KINGS AND THE KING

Isaiah 10:5-34

**Illustration:** Pastor referenced an email he recently received from a friend traveling in the Middle East. It spoke of horrific evil being perpetrated against our Christian brothers and sisters in those countries — indeed, brutal and disgusting genocide by ISIS.

Chaos, confusion, brokenness, and evil is all around us —

- Current events — Our world is out of control, increasingly full of monsters!
- Personal enigmas — Our life doesn't always make sense, and its chaos and confusion is terrifyingly painful!

Debilitating evil is all around us, and as it seems to be taking more of a global dimension again (whereas in America we have largely been insulated from it), how do we obey our Savior's command to "fear not"?!

We turn in our Bibles this morning to a passage that helps us with that very important question — Isaiah 10. Here, the particular manifestation of evil that was terrifying God's people was the nation of Assyria and her insolent kings. But Isaiah had a message of comfort (cf. 40:1) for these people of God who were traumatized by terror — God is sovereign, He's still on the throne, evil is under His control, His work today is intentional and unstoppable, He's not forgotten you, He is still good and faithful.

"This brief passage, dealing though it does with a single historical event (the Assyrian invasions from 734 to 701 bc), is one of the Bible's profoundest statements on the nature of earthly history, the relation between **the King and the kings**. ... [It is] affirming divine control over history (7:18; 10:6)...[and] asserts a philosophy of history [in which] the historical facts arise from hidden supernatural causes."<sup>1</sup>

Isaiah's message is straightforward, and stabilizing: **In a world filled with sinister kings, we must trust the sovereign King.**

### REALITY: GOD IS IN CONTROL IN THE MIDST OF EVIL (vv. 5-19).

Isaiah ministered during the division of the nation of Israel into two kingdoms, and he witnessed the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 721 BC. This passage was probably written in the late 700s BC, after the fall of Carchemish in 717 BC (cf. v. 9) and before the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC, when Judah would begin to fall in divine consequence of her idolatry.

Notice how God's control over terror is so carefully and confidently depicted in this passage.

#### 1. Assyria is God's tool (vv. 5-6).

Notice three interesting details that we learn in these verses about God's use of tools (i.e., the Assyrians).

a. **God sovereignly uses tools (vv. 5-6).**

- **Explanation:** The Assyrians were God's wrath in visible form—these terrorists were His tool. He was wielding them like a punishing “rod” or “staff” (v. 5). His sovereign control of them in their punitive destruction is further highlighted by the verb “send” in verse 6. Undoubtedly, Assyria thought they merely “went” out to war; but in reality, they were “sent” out. God is the ultimate Actor (cf. Daniel 1:1-2).
- **Application:** (1) God has many tools—in fact, every tool is His. Not long ago we considered Haggai 1:6 in a Sunday evening service—“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.” We learned that the “two step forward, three steps back” times in life may be God's tool of chastening and correcting.

(2) We don't always understand God's use of tools, either. We tend to be quick to blame, question, or doubt God when things go wrong, refusing to believe that in our confusion, He knows all things—that in our chaos, He is calmly in charge. He is the ultimate Actor, always at the control, never out-manuevered, never thwarted, never inept, never indifferent, always purposeful, always working for His glory and our good...even when we cannot see, even over evil:

Amos 3:6 — “Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster [evil] come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?”

Isaiah 45:7 — “I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity [evil], I am the Lord, who does all these things.”

Job 2:10 — “But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”

While Isaiah doesn't deal with the difficulties of this tension here, that is what Habakkuk really wrestled with until the Lord told him clearly what we need to remember in the storm, too—that is, that God's righteous ones must walk by faith!

b. **God impartially uses tools (v. 6).**

- **Explanation:** Assyria was ordained to express/execute God's wrath in severe judgment and destruction (e.g., “trample”) against sin. But not just any sin—against the hypocrisy of His own people (who are ironically called here “the people of my wrath,” instead of the typical “My people”). God's people are not exempt from God's punishing use of tools.
- **Application:** God is no respecter of persons, but holds everyone accountable to His will, clearly including *His people*! How this should spur us to hate our sin and soberly fear God's punishment.

## 2. Assyria is ignorant of this (vv. 7-11, 13-14).

- V. 7 — Assyria is, of course, oblivious to God’s plan and the reality that they are a part of it. Their intention is imperial conquest—“to destroy and cut off [many] nations.” But the Almighty God doesn’t need people’s intention of cooperation to use them exactly as He ordains. Instead, it is their actual godlessness (i.e., “their heart to destroy and cut off”) that equips them to accomplish God’s purposes.
- Vv. 8-11 — They see past trophies as indicators of continued military success. In each pair of cities listed, the first city is closer than the second. Assyria had been coming closer and closer to Judah (most recently capturing Syria [Damascus] and Israel [Samaria]), and Judah (Jerusalem) was even less of a threat to them. They thought themselves assured of another victory.
- Vv. 13-14 — Assyria arrogantly and unequivocally attributes his accomplishments to “the strength of my hand” and “my wisdom/prudence,” two vital qualities for any victorious regime. Also, notice their arrogant assertions: “I have removed...I have robbed...I have put down the inhabitants...I have gathered all the earth” (this “speech” is played out in real events in 36:4-20). Twice, they attribute their success to their “own hand,” but they remain ignorant that they are merely tools in the “hand” of a much greater power (v. 5; cf. 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4).

## 3. God will punish the arrogant tool (vv. 12, 15).

- **Explanation:** Verse 12 prophesies that when God was done using Assyria’s ignorant warfare for His purposes against Israel (“Mount Zion and Jerusalem”), He would turn His judicial attention toward Assyria and punish them for their pride and self-glorification. In verse 15, Isaiah refers back to the idea introduced in verse 5 of a “tool” in God’s hand and reminds us that the tool’s boasting is nonsensical. The very element that makes a tool (a “rod or staff” [v. 5] or an “axe or saw” [v. 15]) effective is that it is wielded by someone else—it can do nothing of itself.
- **Application:** The apparent focus of judgment against Assyria is on her pride and arrogance (cf. “stout heart,” “glory of his high looks,” “boast,” “magnify,” “shake itself against”) and utter disregard for God and His appropriate glory. Indeed, “God resists the proud”!

Twice in verses 16 and 18, God targets Assyria’s “glory.” This is the Hebrew word, *kabod*, connoting weightiness, which was used of God in Isaiah 6:3, the ultimately glorious one. In light of God’s indescribably glory, anyone else’s boasting is unjustified and intolerable. As we’ll soon see in verse 17, this thrice gloriously “Holy One” (cf. Isaiah 6) becomes Himself the flame that kindles and destroys Assyria (v. 17).

#### 4. God will display His omnipotence in doing so (vv. 16-19, 28-34).

- Vv. 16-19 —The “Lord, the LORD of hosts,” who is much greater than the host of the Assyrian army (cf. chapter 37) again “sends” (cf. v. 6), now against the tool. These verses contain two images of God’s omnipotent judgment against the arrogant tool.
  - V. 16 — Against the “stout warriors,” He “sends” a “wasting sickness,” which came true as Assyria’s enemies wore them down over a period of years.
  - Vv. 16-19 — The second image used in this section is that of kindling He “kindles” a burning fire that will destroy all the “thorns and briars” (i.e., the violent soldiers) of Assyria “in one day,” “consuming” “the glory of his forest and fruitful field” (i.e., a reference to the military). According to verse 19, there will be so few soldiers left, that like scattered “trees” after a forest fire, a child could count them. This likely refers to the 185,000 soldiers who were killed in a single night by the angel of the LORD in Isaiah 37.
- Vv. 28-32 — Assyria’s progression toward Jerusalem is pictured from north to south with each city being closer to Jerusalem; terror and conquest accompany the army. The army finally comes to Nob (equated by some as on Mt. Scopus, the northern overlook of Jerusalem), where he “shakes his fist” in defiance, but never deals the crushing blow.
- Vv. 33-34 — Instead, “the Lord, the LORD of hosts” is the One who deals the crushing blow, as He “lops the boughs with terror,” “hewing them down” and “humbling them.” Now, “the Mighty One” (cf. Isaiah 9:6) is Himself the “axe,” and He “cuts down” the forest of the Assyrian army to size! This is vividly fulfilled in chapters 36-37 (cf. 37:36-38).
- **Application:** God will destroy the destroyer. Today, Assyria has been terminated; Israel remains! Today, Assyria is being resurrected (i.e., Iraq; Nineveh = Mosul [ISIS]), and so this prophecy takes on fresh relevance again.

**This ultimate righting of wrongs is fulfilled in Christ through the Gospel (TURN TO ISAIAH 9:2-7, where this “Mighty One” was promised)! The arrogant enemy, Satan, and all the evil that has stemmed from his devious rebellion will be destroyed by the Mighty Lord of Hosts, our Warrior, Jesus Christ—Satan has tools, and God uses tools, but ultimately He is the Weapon! Indeed, at the cross, He crushed the head of the serpent, and one day will end the war forever! This gives us confidence in the battles/skirmishes with evil, either on a global or personal level.**

#### **RESPONSE: WE SHOULD BE COURAGEOUS IN THE MIDST OF EVIL (vv. 20-27).**

In light of God’s unthwartable, all-encompassing control, the faithful will be courageous. Such courage has two practical expressions.

## 1. Rely on the Lord alone (vv. 20-23).

- V. 20 — “stay” or “lean” (ESV) = beautiful picture meaning rely; “in truth” = truly; “him that smote them” (cf. 9:13) = Assyria: they turn from trusting the tool, to the One wielding it
  - **Application:** It’s incredulous to us right now to think that Israel actually would have at any point relied upon Assyria, the tool who “struck them,” yet they did (cf. 2 Kings 16:1-9, which would probably have occurred just before the time of this prophecy [Ahaz became king in 735 BC]). This casts a lot of light on our own “trust” issues. We often foolishly trust the most ridiculous things in our chaos and confusion! “So irrational is man’s unbelief” (EBC)! Trust in God!
  - **Application:** God will destroy whatever we are relying on, and He may punish us through what we are relying on (e.g., government, money, people, position, athletics, etc.). He does this to purge our destructive idolatry. He is God alone!
- Vv. 21-23 — While God brings “righteous destruction [consumption]” against His great nation and the whole earth, He never forgets or reneges on His Covenant (i.e., the Abrahamic Covenant; cf. Genesis 22:17), for “a remnant would return to the mighty God” (cf. 6:13—a tenth). God’s promises weren’t being fulfilled at this time, but God wasn’t done. Ours is a God who “in wrath remembers mercy” (Habakkuk 3:2). Indeed, “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust” (Psalm 103:8-14). So, rely on your faithful God alone!

## 2. Do not fear the tool (vv. 24-27).

- V. 24 — God encourages true Israel not to fear His judgment through the Assyrians, and explains why in the following verses—He’s a greater “staff/rod” than they are.
- V. 25 — After “a very little while” (comparatively), God’s “indignation and anger” would be directed to Assyria’s “destruction.”
- V. 26 — God again uses a tool, this time “stirring up a scourge” that would enact his judgment upon haughty Assyria. The result of Assyria will be the same as that of the Egyptians and Midianites.
- V. 27 — The burden of judgment will be broken by the blessing of true freedom.
- **Application:** The worst of evil/terror is under God’s sovereignty, in His control, and being used by Him for His purposes. You need not fear it! He will not forget His covenant to you and you will not be consumed.

## CONCLUSION

Headlines are filled with global terror, our Facebook feed daily tells of new violence, and the water cooler conversation at work is dominated by all the fears of living in this modern world; economic stability is precarious, government programs fall apart, and political leaders disappoint; closer to home, personal tragedy strikes, chaos continues, and confusion prevails.

But in the midst of and above all those manifestations of evil is the Sovereign King and Mighty God. As the Sovereign King, He controls it all; as the Mighty God, He triumphed over it on the cross. Therefore, with confidence and courage, we can cling to His faithfulness, rehearse His goodness, and rest in His purpose. **In a world filled with sinister kings, we may trust the sovereign King.**

*Behold our God, seated on His throne—*

*Come let us adore Him!*

*Behold our King, nothing can compare—*

*Come let us adore Him!*

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<sup>1</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 108.