

Jacob, Israel, and Ephraim are all ways of referring to the northern ten tribes of what was once the twelve tribes of Israel. Samaria is the capital of the region. Our passage begins by declaring a word from the Lord has come to this nation. Verses eight to twelve tell of Syria and Philistine invasions that had destroyed the walls and hewn down the trees. This was a typical battle tactic. Trees were used to build siege ramps, and at the same time, it weakened the nation from rebuilding.

Everyone heard the message of God's judgments, though Israel did not think they needed to repent. In their pride and arrogance they predicted a glorious rebuilding.

¹⁰ *"The bricks have fallen, but we will build with dressed stones; the sycamores have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place."* Isaiah 9:10 This begins a series of pronouncements of increasing judgments, but each ends with the sad declaration that God isn't done pouring out His wrath on their rebellion. ^{12b} *For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.* Isaiah 9:12b

We often hear that the angry God of the Old Testament is so different from the loving God of the New Testament, but this just isn't the case. God's anger is a result of His love. God is bringing these judgments on the nation to turn them from the sins of idolatry and injustice which are destroying them from within. Someone who passionately loves another is naturally angry with whatever would destroy the one they love (Exodus 20:5).

The spouse who is watching their loved one destroy their body with a drug, hates that drug and the loved one's choice to take it. If they were to force their loved one into rehab, that loved one would be angry with their spouse for taking away their freedom and the comfort they derived from that drug. It would be an act of love that was misinterpreted.

That is exactly what we do with God's judgments and discipline in our life. Most of the time, the discipline of God is a natural result of our actions. If Israel had returned to the rule of the godly Davidic kings and the worship of YHWH, they would have been a stronger nation. The diseases that resulted from immoral practices of their false religion would not be afflicting them. In this immediate passage it is the sin of pride that is keeping them from a better future (Proverbs 16:18). It's the attitude that says, "We don't need God. We can do this ourselves without having to submit to God."

¹³ *The people did not turn to him who struck them, nor inquire of the LORD of hosts.* Isaiah 9:13 The anger of God expressed against their sin was to turn them back to the LORD. But they would not turn. They didn't even want to ask God what they should do. Instead, they dug in their heels. Have you been in those boots with heels? When we are afflicted, or we face loss, or difficulty, do we get angry with God, or do we seek His face and ask Him if what we are experiencing is a result of our sin (Psalm 139:23)?

Commented [PW1]: Exodus 20:5 (ESV)

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

Commented [PW2]: Proverbs 16:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Commented [PW3]: Psalm 139:23 (ESV)

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

Many Christians, myself included, will sometimes blame our difficulties on Satan. We'll claim it is a spiritual attack. But we had better be certain whether or not it is the Lord who is dealing with us before we make that claim. **Those times of frustration and pain are times when we are in the greatest need of stopping to do a heart check** (Psalm 26:2). Are we walking with the Lord? Are we rebelling in some area? Have we refused to listen and accept His leading in something (Leviticus 26:18)? You don't want to call the discipline of God the work of the devil. I often find the tension in my life comes from a lack of trust in the Lord and His sovereign reign over my life. I go about trying to deal with something in my own way and run into roadblocks and then get frustrated. As soon as I pray and ask God what it is about, I can see my own part in the problem.

The wife of Jonathan Edwards was experiencing physical afflictions of her own when she received news of his death. In this letter to her daughter, listen to her humble acceptance of whatever came from God's hand. "What shall I say? A holy and good God has covered us with a dark cloud. **Oh, that we may kiss the rod [of discipline], and lay our hands on our mouths!** The Lord has done it. He has made me adore his goodness, that we had my husband so long. But my God lives, and he has my heart. Oh, what a legacy my husband, and your father, has left us! We are all given to God; and there I am, and love to be.¹⁷ May God help us be so accepting in our times of loss.

Israel was so set in their rebellion against God that they would not even ask God what they should do. In effect, they shook their fist at God and while declaring they were just fine without Him. So, in love, or what one commentator put as "lovingangerkindness," God allowed the next round of trouble.

*¹⁴ So the LORD cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed in one day—
¹⁵ the elder and honored man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail;
¹⁶ for those who guide this people have been leading them astray, and those who are guided by them are swallowed up.* Isaiah 9:14-16 Their leadership was cut off in one day. While they had the very leadership they deserved and desired, leaders are still accountable to God for their actions. We see this discipline of leaders many times in Scripture. Even King David suffered the loss of his child as the result of his adulterous affair. I wonder if the whole rebellion led by Absalom and resultant loss of life would have been avoided had David looked the other way when he first saw Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:18).

We have the same problem with leadership in our nation and churches today. Where are the elders who will put God first and live godly lives of service to their congregation (1 Timothy 5:17)? Instead we have CEO men with charisma amassing fortunes and operating unchecked until some sin becomes public knowledge.

Where are the political leaders who will stand for Biblical principles in spite of the direction our culture is taking? Where are the voters that will put the godly in office? Only half of evangelicals bother to register to vote and only half of those vote in a

Commented [PW4]: Psalm 26:2 (ESV)
² Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and my mind.

Commented [PW5]: Leviticus 26:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins,

Commented [PW6]: - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners. Originally from Iain Murray biography of Jonathan Edwards

Commented [PW7]: 2 Samuel 12:18 (ESV)
¹⁸ On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, "Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm."

Commented [PW8]: 1 Timothy 5:17 (ESV)
¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

presidential election. Only a quarter vote in the mid-terms. Don't blame the leaders if you don't vote. A nation without leaders is a nation drifting toward a reef of destruction.

¹⁷ Therefore the Lord does not rejoice over their young men, and has no compassion on their fatherless and widows; for everyone is godless and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. Isaiah 9:17 Israel had become a nation of godless evildoers. Every mouth spoke folly. I listen to conversations in the world, on the news, and passersby, and believe we are rapidly approaching this condition of every mouth speaking folly (Ephesians 4:29). When the Lord doesn't have compassion on the needy, it is because even the needy are rebellious toward Him.

¹⁸ For wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briars and thorns; it kindles the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke. Isaiah 9:18 This is what I was saying earlier. Sin brings its own judgment with it (Romans 6:23). Wickedness burns like a fire. It destroys homes, nations, churches, and every place it is allowed to go unchecked. It is adultery in the home, cheating in the workplace, greed in political office, and on and on. But it is also the effect of raunchy entertainment, gossip, and every form of moral compromise that we so readily excuse. Yes, some sins are more destructive than others, but all wickedness burns like a fire and spreads like one too (James 3:5).

²¹ Manasseh devours Ephraim, and Ephraim devours Manasseh; together they are against Judah. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. Isaiah 9:21 When wickedness reigns, it is every man for himself. Selfishness and greed have everyone abusing and misusing one another. Prolonged military sieges in that time resulted in cannibalism, but I believe this passage also refers to the general atmosphere of fear that prevails in ungodly nations. When you can trust no one, and when crime is rampant, fear and uncertainty are in the hearts of the people. It is a terrible way to live. Five of the last six kings of Israel had come to power by assassination. The result of sin is the wrath of God (Galatians 5:15).

Chapter ten begins with a cry against the injustice of the land. Though the Lord has declared He no longer has compassion on them, it is still sinful to abuse the needy. God asks them, *³ What will you do on the day of punishment, in the ruin that will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth?* *⁴ Nothing remains but to 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.* Isaiah 10:3-4 The poor had nowhere to turn. Now as Assyria invaded, the ones who oppressed the poor would have nowhere to turn. Their ill-gotten gains from oppressing the needy will no longer be theirs. All that will be left for them is servitude as a slave or death. And that is exactly what happened in 722 A.D.

Why is God's hand still against them? Even in slavery these people of the northern tribes are set on their idolatry and rebellion. Nothing would turn them. God's mercy is taking away every false thing they trust in, but they still will not repent. Is it possible to

Commented [PW9]: Ephesians 4:29 (ESV)

²⁹ Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Commented [PW10]: Romans 6:23 (ESV)

²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Commented [PW11]: James 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

Commented [PW12]: Galatians 5:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

be so hardhearted? Once the fire is kindled, it can grow to that extent. Put the fire out while you are still able to hear the voice of God. **You will never win a battle with God. You will never get Him to give in and allow your sin to remain.** It must go or you will continue to find Him resisting you.

We tend to worry way too much about what other people think of us. We should be concerned about how God sees us. We will never find a love as great as the unconditional love of God. It is God who truly loves us. Only in learning to love Him in return and putting His Word above that of man will we find eternal value.

⁵ Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my fury! Isaiah 10:5 Remember, whatever God is using to deal with you, it is a rod in His hand. It is not something out of His control. It is controlled by Him. He wields the staff. That should comfort us as the psalmist suggested (Psalm 23:4). Why? Because He wields it in love for our good.

Assyria was an evil nation, but God used it as a rod of judgment. He will deal with Assyria later. Though they were used by Him, it was of their own free will. The abuse of their power will be dealt with by another rod. This shows us the wonder of God's sovereignty. God does as He pleases (Psalm 115:3). He can use the evil intentions of man to do His bidding and still be just in judging the evil in their hearts. We are seeing this today as Sunni radicals fight Shia radicals. Both are killing anyone who worships Jesus, and God is using their evil mindset to judge one another.

Critics could ask how they could be judged by God for carrying out His will. God is judging the evil in their hearts. They have no intention of obeying Jesus as Lord, but they are serving Him without knowing it.

Assyria was a nation so evil that it enjoyed psychological warfare by the abuse of those they conquered. Surrender and give up all your wealth and you would not be abused; but resist and you would face torture. *⁶ Against a godless nation I send him, and against the people of my wrath I command him, to take spoil and seize plunder, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.* Isaiah 10:6 When the Israelites heard this they would surely have asked how in the world they could be considered godless compared to Assyria. But God doesn't judge by comparing the depth of our depravity (Acts 10:34). All sin is rebellion against God. The more we know of God and His will, the more heinous our rebellion is toward Him. Refusing to obey is to be in effect, godless. Israel had the prophets of God. They had received these warnings we have just read, and they arrogantly went on their prideful way refusing to turn (1 Peter 4:17). "God is able to use godless worldly powers to discipline his godless covenant people. Human oppressors don't even have to be aware of God to be useful for his purifying purpose."²

In spite of the evil in man's heart, God has His way in human history. When we are defeated, God is not defeated. It does not mean that God is on the side of the victor.

Commented [PW13]: Psalm 23:4 (ESV)

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Commented [PW14]: Psalm 115:3 (ESV)

³ Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

Commented [PW15]: Acts 10:34 (ESV)

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,

Commented [PW16]: 1 Peter 4:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

Commented [PW17]: John Ortland Jr. - Preaching the Word – Isaiah: God Saves Sinners.

God will judge the outworking of evil in man's heart even if it serves His purposes. God is never compromised by the evil.

¹² When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, he will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the boastful look in his eyes. ¹³ For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I remove the boundaries of peoples, and plunder their treasures; like a bull I bring down those who sit on thrones. Isaiah 10:12-13 When God deals with Judah through Assyria, then God would punish the king of Assyria. I have told you before how Assyria conquered all but Jerusalem and how God spared Jerusalem. Then how the boastful and arrogant king of Assyria was dealt with by man. That, too, was the God guiding and orchestrating history while still allowing man to do as he pleases.

Historical records of the kings of Assyria show their prideful boasts that correspond with these verses.³ We all have the same old nature within us. When believers go astray it is often connected to them believing they have been successful because they were special in some way. Even if you were the perfect servant of God, your voice, your breath, your opportunities, your acquaintances, and your intelligence all came from God (1 Corinthians 4:7). You and I are merely His instruments. He will take the willingness of a believer and use it for His glory, doing wonderful things through our lives, much of which we don't discern. He can also take the outworking of evil in the heart of those who rebel against Him and use it for His glory though they know not what they do or how God is using it.

¹⁵ Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood! Isaiah 10:15 All glory to God. If anything is accomplished through the life of a believer, all the glory goes to God. Every good thing you have comes from God (James 1:17). Every opportunity to serve Him was prepared by Him before you were born (Ephesians 2:10). He picked the time and place you were to be born to draw you to Himself and work through you for His glory (Acts 17:26).

I've have a couple chainsaws. I had a few cords of oak to cut up for winter, thanks to Jory hauling it out of the woods for me. The chainsaw didn't get me out of bed one morning and take me to the wood pile as it sawed up the logs as I hung on. It didn't move my hands to pile it up. Neither can I say a sermon comes from my own power. I can't tell God, "Look what a great job I did explaining these verses!" Nor can you say, "This week I won a soul to Jesus." It is God who works in you to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). Let's thank Him for letting us be His instruments. Let's joyfully yield to His guiding hand at every leading of the Holy Spirit. Let's give Him all the glory. It is joyful privilege to be a willing and cooperative instrument in His loving, powerful hands. In God's kingdom there is no place for pride.

At the same time, let's be sensitive to His correction and discipline. Let us be aware that our hearts can deceive us (Jeremiah 17:9). Let us be like Mrs. Edwards, graciously, with

Commented [PW18]: ARAB 1:110

Commented [PW19]: 1 Corinthians 4:7 (ESV)

⁷ For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Commented [PW20]: James 1:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

Commented [PW21]: Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Commented [PW22]: Acts 17:26 (ESV)

²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,

Commented [PW23]: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Commented [PW24]: Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)

⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

humility and reverence receive whatever God's hand might bring into our lives. Our ultimate example did just that in the Garden of Gethsemane. He yielded to the Father and did not resist wrath of man, but trusted God to work our salvation through it. Let us follow His perfect example.

Questions

- 1 Why does God become angry?
- 2 How did the people respond?
- 3 How should we respond to adversity?
- 4 What was the second judgment?
- 5 What does verse 18 teach us?
- 6 How do we devour each other?
- 7 What happened to the oppressors?
- 8 Why should the staff in God's hand comfort us?
- 9 How does the passage describe God's sovereignty?
- 10 What is Jesus example in accepting the will of God though painfully difficult?