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Manasseh Will Feed on Ephraim

9: 18-21

Manasseh will feed on Ephraim DIG: What pictures come to mind as Isaiah describes the wickedness of the people here in these verses? What is the point of comparing their wickedness to a raging forest fire or people eating their own family?

REFLECT: When has sin by someone in your immediate or extended family led to the destruction of natural affection for family members? What was that darkness outcome? Was there civil war in your family? Was the root of the sin dealt with so that peace could be restored? How was the LORD involved?

In the third stanza of his poem, Isaiah envisions a devastation of the Land, civil war, confusion, and anarchy. Here he exposes the true nature of sin. It is not a little misguided playfulness. It is rebellion against **God** and **His** order of life. As such, it can only be destructive. So here the people's **wickedness** is pictured as burning them up **like a huge fire** with a large **column of smoke**.



The prophet talks about a **wickedness** that **burns like a fire**, and **fire** destroys from within. The failure of leadership (**9:13-17**) led to a desperate need to look out only for oneself, but without satisfaction. **Surely wickedness burns like fire; it consumes briars and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of**

smoke (9:18). The Hebrew word **wickedness** means *rebellion*. When man rebels against **God** he starts a **fire** within himself, which, if allowed to continue burning will ultimately destroy him, because sin carries within itself the seeds of its own destruction. **Wickedness** cannot be contained once it is unleashed. As a result, **Isaiah** says if the **fire** continues to burn in **Isra'el** it will destroy **the briers and thorns**, the common people, and **the forest thickets**, the elders and rulers. There are two fires being described here. They are two sides of the same coin. One is the consuming **fire** of sin and the other is the **fire** of **God's wrath**.

By the wrath of the LORD of heavens angelic armies (CJB), the Land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire (9:19:a). The judgment would not only come from **God (9:11)**, and the enemies of the nation **(9:12)**, but from within. Another result of rebellion is the destruction of natural affection for family members. For **Isra'el**, the end result was anarchy; **no man will spare his brother (9:19b).**

Relationships, either from the immediate or extended family, no longer meant anything. **On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of their own offspring (9:20).** Cannibalism was not present in the northern kingdom of **Isra'el**, so this verse must be taken figuratively. Everyone only looked out for themselves. The postmodern world of individualism is as old as **Isaiah** himself. Its best opportunity to flourish comes with social collapse; its root cause is seen in the rejection of the Word of **God**.

Sin destroys human relationships, so it is no surprise that this **wickedness**, this *rebellion*, led to civil war. **Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh.** **Manasseh** and **Ephraim** were the two largest northern tribes. They symbolized the fratricide that had characterized so much of **Isra'el's** existence. Like fighting brothers, their intertribal hostilities, which began in the wilderness, would culminate in civil war. In the end, the only thing that would cause them to stop fighting each other was their hatred of **Judah** and **together they would turn against her (9:9:21a).** Only then would they be united in their hate.

After the first wave of judgment (**to see link click [Cq - The LORD Has Sent a Message Against Jacob](#)**), and the second wave of judgment (see **[Cr -The LORD Will Cut Off the Head and the Tail](#)**), this third wave of judgment still offered no sigh of relief. **Yet for all this, His anger is not turned away, His hand is still upraised (9:21b).** Without repentance, the discipline of a loving **God** would continue.