

Woe to the Assyrian, the Rod of My Anger

10: 5-11

DIG: The Assyrian army conquered all the cities listed here en route to Jerusalem. What attitudes did those victories produce in the Assyrian leaders? Why do they think Yerushalayim ought to be a relative “pushover”? What does this show about their deep misunderstanding of the Lord?

REFLECT: When have you taken the credit for what was really God’s work in which you were merely an instrument? How do you visibly practice giving credit when credit is due? Would you rather be “instrumental” in someone else’s judgment, or be on the receiving end of that judgment? Why? What conclusions can be drawn about the LORD’s justice as it concerns the prosperity of the wicked?

Assyria was entrusted with a mission to execute divine judgment, but she abused it. Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of My anger, in whose hand is the club of My wrath! (10:5). YHVH did give Assyria a commission. The word **woe** is an expression of angry indignation. It is used to introduce a proclamation of judgment on a person, group, or a nation. Ultimately, **Isaiah** is saying that it was not **Assyrian** might that destroyed the northern kingdom of **Isra’el**, it was the chastisement of **God Himself**. It is **God** who controls the nations, and **He** had chosen that particular time in history to use **Assyria** as **the rod of His anger** against **Isra’el**. But **Assyria** was *only* a **rod** of judgment in **His** hand. **Assyria** came against the northern kingdom of **Isra’el** in the sixth year of Hezekiah’s reign, and she came against the southern kingdom of **Judah** in **His** fourteenth year.

In this ironic note, **God** said that **He** would **send** Sennacherib (**to see link click [By - The Kings of Assyria and Judah](#)**) against a **godless nation**. Saying: **I dispatch him against a people who anger Me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets (10:6)**. Without doubt, **the Jews** considered the **Assyrians** to be a **godless nation**. Yet, **Isaiah** had the nerve to suggest that the **Assyrians** were **God’s** tool to punish *them*, and in fact, *they* were the **godless nation**! How could this be? Well, relatively speaking, **Judah** was more **godless** than **Assyria**, because **she** had more revelation from **God**. **She** had rejected more light of the Scriptures. Who were **the chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2)**? Who was **the apple of His eye (Deuteronomy 32:10)**? Who had **the Torah** to guide **them (20:1-26)**? If **Judah’s** moral state was still higher than **Assyrian’s**, it was also true that **she** had a much higher standard. **Jesus** said it this way: **From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the**

one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48b).

Although **God** clearly commissioned **Assyria** to punish **Isra'el**, **her** boasting ultimately led her to overstepping **her** commission. **But** the king of **Assyria** wanted *more* than to merely punish **Judah**. **This was not what He intended, this is not what He had in mind; His purpose was to destroy, to put an end to many nations (10:7).** Did **Assyria** know that **she was** being used by **God** to punish **Judah**? Yes! Sennacherib sent his supreme commander to bargain with him. Part of his lecture said: **Have I come to attack and destroy this place without ADONAI's approval? ADONAI himself told me to march against this country and destroy it (2 Kings 18:25 CJB).** It is clear that **Assyria** recognized that she had been commissioned by **God** to punish **Judah** for **her** sins. But **she** overstepped **her** commission.

Therefore, when **Assyria** tried to destroy **Judah**, it was not because of the divine commission. On the contrary, **Assyria** acted in **sheer self-interest and lust of conquest**. **They** assumed that **Isra'el** and **Judah** were like any other nation. **Assyria** violated a principle contained in **Zechariah** who said: **but I am very angry with the nations that feel secure. I was only a little angry, but they added to the calamity (Zechariah 1:15).** **God** was a little angry with **Isra'el** and **He** allowed the Gentiles to come in. But because **they** overstepped and went beyond what **He** intended for **them**, **God** was greatly angry with **them**.

Isaiah now speaks for the **Assyrian** king. **The Assyrians boast of successes in the past and confident assurance of easy victories in the future.** The officers in Sennacherib's army had more authority and responsibility than most other kings, and Sargon II liked to say: **Are not my commanders all kings (10:8)?** Who was Hezekiah to the king of **kings**? Therefore, he viewed his **commanders** as **kings**, because **they** had more authority and responsibility (in his eyes) than the leaders of the countries he had conquered.

Then the **Assyrian** king boasted: **Has not Calno fared like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad, and Samaria like Damascus (10:9)?** Thus, from **Carchemish** (that fell in 717 BC) on the Euphrates in the far north of Palestine to **Calno** (that fell in 738 BC), and from **Arpad** (that fell in 740 BC) fifty miles to the south to **Hamath** (that fell in 738 BC) a hundred miles north of **Damascus**, then on to **Damascus** (that fell in 732 BC) itself and then on to **Samaria** (that fell in 722 BC) just north of **Judah**, his armies had proved invincible. One by one these cities fell with little or no resistance, and the **Assyrian** king Sennacherib was thinking the same would happen to **Jerusalem**.

But then Sennacherib, king of **Assyria**, really made a big mistake. With heavy irony, **Isaiah**

seemingly overhears the king saying: **As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria - shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols (10:10-11)?** He thought that since other gods, who, in his eyes, were greater than the **God of Samaria and Jerusalem**, did not prove to be any hindrance to **Assyria**, what could the **God of Samaria and Yerushalayim** do to **Him**? The **Assyrians** had subdued Marduk, Hadad, Baal and El. And if he were able to destroy the **idols** of **Samaria**, since **Samaria** worshiped the same **God** as **Tziyon**, he would be able to destroy **Tziyon**. He did not think that **Yerushalayim** would be any more difficult to conquer than any of the other countries, **Judah's God** than any other god. But how wrong he was! **He** knew that both **Samaria and Tziyon** worshiped the same **God**, but he did not understand that **Samaria's** worship had degenerated into sinful idolatry of the golden calves. And although **the Holy City** had also been corrupted, the believing remnant (**10:16-34**) worshiped the proper way in the Temple at **Jerusalem**. **He** thought that since **ADONAI** was unable to help **Samaria**, what could **He** possibly do to help **Yerushalayim**? That was **his** big mistake, and as such, **Assyria** would be punished.