

The Destroyer Destroyed

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[0:00] Isaiah, chapter 10, verses 5-34. This is not what he intends. This is not what he has in mind. His purpose is to destroy, to put an end to many nations.

Are not my commanders all kings, he says? Has not Kalno fared like Karchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad and Samaria like Damascus?

As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols, kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria, shall not I deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols? When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride in his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

For he says, By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding. I removed the boundaries of nations, I plundered their treasures.

[1:45] Like a mighty one I subdued their kings. As one reaches into a nest, so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations.

As men gather abandoned eggs, so I gathered all the countries. No one flapped a wing or opened its mouth to chirp. Does the axe raise itself above him who swings it?

Or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood?

Therefore the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors. Under his pomp, a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame.

The light of Israel will become a fire, their holy one a flame. In a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briars.

[2:53] The splendor of his forest and fertile fields it will completely destroy, as when a sick man wastes away. And the remaining trees of his forest will be so few that a child could write them down.

In that day, the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down, but will truly rely on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

A remnant will return. A remnant of Jacob will return to the mighty God. Though your people, O Israel, will be like the sand of the sea, only a remnant will return.

Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous. The Lord, the Lord Almighty, will carry out the destruction decreed upon the whole land.

Therefore, this is what the Lord, the Lord Almighty says, O my people who live in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians who beat you with a rod and lift up a club against you, as Egypt did.

[4:12] Very soon my anger against you will end, and my wrath will be directed to their destruction. The Lord Almighty will lash them with a whip, as when he struck down Midian at the rock of Oreb, and he will raise his rod over the waters, as he did in Egypt.

In that day, their burden will be lifted from your shoulders, and their yoke from your neck. The yoke will be broken because you have grown so fat.

They enter Aaph. They pass through Migron. They store supplies at Michmash. They go over the pass and say, We will camp overnight at Geba.

Ramah trembles. Gibeah of Saul flees. Cry out, O daughter of Galem. Listen, O Lasha. Poor Anathoth.

Madmena is in flight. The people of Geba take cover. This day they will halt at Nob. They will shake their fist at the mount of the daughter of Zion, at the hill of Jerusalem.

[5:29] See the Lord. The Lord Almighty will lop off the boughs with great power. The lofty trees will be felled. The tall ones will be brought low.

He will cut down the forest thickets with an axe. Lebanon will fall before the mighty one. A.W. Tozer said, What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.

What we think about God. Jeremiah said it. You know me, O Lord. You see me and test my thoughts about you.

You see, what you are can best be learned by your thoughts about God. And Isaiah has been testing our thoughts about God.

This book of Isaiah tests our thoughts about God. In these pages we meet one who we saw in chapter 6 is eminently holy.

[6 : 35] Whose glory fills the whole earth. We have learned that he's the eternal one. He's the righteous one. We've seen that he's full of grace and mercy.

And last week we saw in chapter 9 that he's also full of wrath and anger. Didn't we? Now if you don't think of God that way, Isaiah is telling us we need to think again.

We need to let God tell us himself what he's like. And that's what he does in his word. Now this morning in chapter 10, the rest of chapter 10, we see that God is sovereign.

And kids, that simply means that he reigns. The Lord reigns. And he reigns over everything. He reigns over all of his creatures in all their ways, at all times, everything that they do.

Nebuchadnezzar was a king who thought that he was the sovereign. And he reigned. And so he had to be humbled to learn who is it that really reigns.

[7 : 43] And he gives us an excellent definition of the sovereignty of God when he tells us that this God does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and with the peoples of the earth.

And no one can stop his hand or say to him, what are you doing? Because he's God. He is sovereign.

He has the rights of the potter to do with the clay whatever he will. And he acts in perfection of holiness, justice, righteousness as he does so.

Now it's one thing to say that you believe in the sovereignty of God in some theoretical way, sitting in church learning about God. But it's another thing to affirm the sovereignty of God when your world is coming apart and your future seems bleak and you hurt like you didn't know you could hurt. This was precisely the scene in Israel when Isaiah was given this prophecy about the sovereignty of God that he reigns over this whole situation as the Assyrians were sweeping into their land and murdering in ghastly ways and taking off the people of Israel into captivity.

[9 : 11] Well, may the Lord be honored this morning as we think about God in the ways that he is teaching us to think about him.

Last week we saw how relentless God's anger was in striking Israel because they refused to repent of their rebellion against God they felt more and more of his anger.

Remember the chorus of that song four times we sang it yet for all this his anger has not turned away his hand was still upraised to strike them because they hadn't turned to the Lord in repentance.

But from verse 5 on in chapter 10 the whole tone of the passage changes. A beam of hope streams through the dark skies of God's judgment for in sovereign grace God's anger against them is soon to end and his wrath will be directed on the destroyer Assyria.

Assyria is not sovereign God is and this opens the door for hope even in the darkest days. Now we have five points this morning the first is that Assyria is a tool in God's hand.

[10 : 40] We see that in verse 5 woe to the Assyrian the rod of my anger God says in whose hand is the club of my wrath Assyria is the rod of my anger a tool in God's hands.

Now we understand tools don't we? When we have work to do we go to the workshop and we select the appropriate tool. If a nail needs pounding we get the hammer.

If a hole needs digging we get the shovel. If a tree needs felling we get the hatchet or the saw.

These are tools by which we get our work done.

Now God has some work to do. It's the work of his anger. The work of punishing the godless nation of Israel who had angered him with their sins.

And so he goes to his workshop which is the entire universe. And he selects a tool to punish wicked Israel.

[11 : 52] And what does he grab? He grabs Assyria the rod of my anger with which I'll strike them. Assyria ruthless cruel army pounding peoples and nations into the ground.

And with this rod God will perform his work of judgment upon Israel. He says in verse 6, I send him against a godless nation.

I dispatch him against the people who anger me. And I dispatch him and I send him on this mission to seize loot, to snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.

God is to do what I please. I send him, he goes on my mission, he accomplishes my purpose.

So God is the one who is directing the Assyrian Holocaust against the northern kingdom of Israel.

God is to completely obliterate them so that they will never again be a nation on the earth.

[13:06] And then to go down into the southern kingdom and to wreak havoc there as well. And as this cruel war machine sweeps from city to city, looting, plundering, trampling them down like mud in the streets, God says they are my tool, they are doing just what I have ordered, they are expressing my holy wrath and accomplishing my work of judgment.

And no one can hold back his hand or say to him, what are you doing with that rod in your hand? Nobody can say because he's God, he's sovereign and every bit of that overwhelming disaster was deserved.

It was righteous. We read that, didn't we? Now, is that how you think of God? I told you Isaiah will test our thoughts about God.

Is that how you think of him? You must. He is the one who is sovereign over all. So Assyria is God's work or God's tool doing the work of the sovereign God, the rod in his hand.

But that's not what Assyria thinks. Let's take the rod out of God's hand for a moment and listen to him talk and see what he thinks. Verse 7, this is not what he intends.

[14:38] We'll get to what he says in verse 8, but verse 7, this is not what he intends. This is not what he has in mind. His intention is not, okay, I want to obey God.

I want to be an instrument in God's hand. I want to carry out God's will on the earth. No, that's not in his mind at all. His purpose, we're told in verse 7, is to destroy, to put an end to many nations.

He's motivated, not out of a desire to bring about the will of God, but by greed, pure greed and a lust for power. He's bent on world domination, imperialistic expansion is all that he's thinking about, this Assyrian rod.

And yet, though he doesn't realize it, he is the rod of God's hand carrying out God's purposes.

And we learn from this that often God's tools don't even realize that they are tools in God's hands.

Probably more often than not, they don't have a clue that they are being used as the tool of Israel's God.

[15:46] They're ignorant of the sovereign God. Men have their own intentions and purposes and motivations for what they do, and God has his.

Remember, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, and what did Joseph say? He says, you intended it to me for evil. But God intended it for good.

Man has his intentions, God has his. And through that evil, God accomplished the purpose of saving many people. So Assyria did what God had planned, but Assyria did it for the sinful reasons of their own.

God is God is God is sovereign and man is responsible. God is sovereign. He's in control of all history of nations and men.

He's writing his story and he's bringing it to pass just as he pleases. But that doesn't give man an out to say, well, then he can't judge me because God holds man as morally responsible!

[17:00] God did not author the Assyrian sins, the greed and lust for power and desire to smash nations and make them his own. That was all Assyria's contribution to the equation.

So though God and so if you can't understand how can God be sovereign and man be responsible? How can God use sinful instruments without dirtying his hands as he uses them?

Well, there are some things we don't understand but his word tells us plainly they're both true. God is sovereign, man is responsible and that's where we bow, we worship and we thank him that he is what he is sovereign, ruling even over the wicked deeds of men.

Do you realize it was God's sovereign! control over the wickedness of Judah and Pontius Pilate and the Jewish leaders, those wicked men who wanted Jesus dead, it was their wickedness but God used their wickedness, he used them as instruments and tools to do the greatest thing that's ever happened on the earth and that's to bring salvation to a multitude of sinners by the crucifixion, the wicked, wicked crucifixion of Jesus.

And Peter says on the day of Pentecost, this man Jesus was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge. God determined it, God decreed it, but you with the help of wicked men put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

[18:48] God is sovereign, he planned it, nothing happened but what his determined purpose said would happen. But Judas is in hell today for his contribution and so are others who never repented of their sin because they are morally responsible for what they did to the Lord Jesus.

The Son of Man will go just as it has been decreed and planned from eternity past but woe to that man who betrays him it would be better for him that he had never been born.

So Assyria is a tool in God's hand and she's only doing exactly what God decreed should happen only touching which nations that he decrees she should touch and yet in doing what she's doing she is responsible!

Assyria is responsible! before God for her wicked actions that's the first point Assyria is a tool in God's hands secondly God's tool oozes with self sufficient pride God's tool is quite impressed with itself we hear the king of Assyria boasting in verse eight are not all my commanders kings he says and then he lists six cities and what do they all have in common well my hand sees them all I grabbed them all none could stand me none of their idols could save them from me and included in his list is Samaria the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel she's already fallen to the Assyrians this is after 722 BC there's no end to the Assyrians potential not only have I destroyed all these cities and nations but I've got my sights now on Jerusalem the prize of the southern kingdom of Judah and she'll be the next to fall into my hands shall

I not deal with Jerusalem and her images as I dealt with Samaria and her idols he's on a roll and Jerusalem's the next to be steamrolled and the God of Jerusalem is viewed as just one more of the worthless idols of the nations that could not save these peoples from my hand oh that sounds a lot like the boast of the Assyrian field commander that we'll meet in chapter 36 outside of Jerusalem's gates yes this Assyrian king made the mistake of thinking that Jehovah is no different from the other gods and he's going to pay dearly for that he's going to have to go to a class of theology 101 and learn that this God is sovereign over all he's not like the other no gods he's not like the images and idols he's sovereign and so this king continues his self sufficient boast in verse 13 by the strength of my hand

[21:59] I have done this and by my wisdom because I have understanding I remove the boundaries of nations I plundered their treasures like a mighty one I subdued their kings and I did it all as easily as a man reaching in to a nest and seizing eggs that have been abandoned have you ever taken an egg out of a nest I'm not saying you should boys but have you ever taken an egg out of an abandoned nest was it a hard thing to do no there's no bird around it was abandoned it was easy we say it's like like taking candy from a baby in their day it was like taking abandoned eggs from a nest and he's boasting that's how easily I took nations took all their wealth see how proud he is how self sufficient he thinks he is he's forgetting something he's just a tool there's a hand that's moving the tool and he's absolutely not acknowledging that fact that there is a

God there is a God no acknowledgement of God he's taking all the credit to himself so God has some questions tell me does the axe raise itself above the one who swings it does it just operate on its own an axe no can the saw boast against him who uses it can you imagine a saw boasting to the carpenter I cut a pretty straight line didn't I or trowel boasting to a mason how about that wall what's going on here can a rod or a club wave the one holding it without the lumberjack the axe lies still without the carpenter the saw does nothing and without me you can do nothing!

him you are putting yourself in the place that is reserved for God alone and you will live to regret that God has a beef with the tool that is puffed up with pride Pilate's upset at Jesus he's not answering him don't you realize I have the power to kill you or to release you would have no power over me had it not been given you from heaven Jesus says the axe lies motionless without the hand that picks it up you see the sovereignty of God is hard on human pride it's hard on human pride it strips us of any boasting whatsoever it leaves no room for it and that's why the sovereignty of God is such an unpopular teaching today 1st corinthians 4:7 who makes you different than anyone else and what do you have that you have not received and if you have received it why do you boast as if you had not

I will not boast in anything no gifts no power no wisdom but I will boast in Jesus Christ his death and resurrection so this boasting king of Assyria putting himself in God's place is going to find out that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble Nebuchadnezzar had to learn that Israel herself had to learn that is that not what you and I need to continually learn that we ought to humble ourselves before this God that he might exalt us rather than finding that when we lift ourselves up in pride he opposes us well the third lesson is that God's tool will be judged this proud tool will be

judged after being God's rod to punish others Assyria herself will get the rod we see this as early as verse five the first word out of the mouth of the prophet is whoa that's a pronouncement of judgment verse 12 picks up on it when the

Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion in Jerusalem all his work of judging them for their pride and sin then he will say I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes just because God used the wicked the wickedness of this king of Assyria any more than just because he used the betrayal of Judas to bring about the crucifixion doesn't mean he was approving of Judas betrayal no Assyria will be held accountable for every proud word every proud thought and every haughty look of their eyes therefore verse 16 says the Lord will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors under his pump a fire will be kindled like a burning flame so

[27 : 54] God's going to turn his wrath now away from Jerusalem and Judah and focus his wrath upon Assyria and he describes his wrath and his destruction that he's going to give to Assyria under two things a wasting disease and a burning forest fire God himself is a consuming fire and that's what Assyria will find and she will be completely destroyed the population of this nation or its soldiers commentators aren't sure but there'll be so few that even a child that doesn't know how to count very high will have no trouble writing down the Assyrians how the mighty are fallen so God's out to bring low all that exalt themselves in Assyria is thinking he's some wonderful thing for having wreaked such havoc upon the nations and he doesn't realize it but as he's marching down to

Jerusalem he's confidently marching right into the fire he's going to meet the God of Israel the consuming fire the fourth point this morning is that God's remnant will return God's remnant will return now we have to understand the time sequence as Isaiah is making this prophecy the destruction of Assyria when she'll be reduced down to just a few that's all in the future but right now as Isaiah is speaking this word to Israel Assyria is alive and well they're on a roll the nations and cities are just falling and crumbling before his steamroller her massive arm was carrying out the Lord's destruction upon the whole land it was overwhelming and righteous destruction every bit deserved and Assyria has already destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and is now soon to come like a flood up to the neck of the southern kingdom of

Judah this was the daily reality of Isaiah's hearers and it's in the midst of such dark days and dark judgments that God pronounces this bright word of hope a remnant will return return that was the name of Isaiah's first born son wasn't it a remnant will be turned that's to have a fulfillment in Israel's history we learn that this remnant is the key to unlocking the history of Israel God intends to keep his promises and he promised that he would put a son of David on the throne of David who would reign forever and ever over all and he's not about to let that promise fall to the ground unfulfilled and though the rod of his anger would take them into exile and would greatly reduce their numbers so that though they used to be like the sand of the seashore there will just be a remnant left nevertheless a remnant will return that's why the

Assyrian threat would not totally destroy them that's why Assyria's doom is sure the sovereign Lord acts in history to preserve his remnant people and from that remnant he was to bring forth the Lord Jesus Christ the Savior of the world now when Paul quotes this passage in Romans about a remnant shall return he says that remnant has been chosen by grace why will any return why will any of these people come back from exile in the nations and come back well it's because of grace that has chosen them they all deserve to perish under God's judgment but through grace a remnant would return the method of who should survive the judgment of

God is all of grace has nothing to do with how they lived or how they would live it's I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy you see it's the sovereignty of God again in choosing this remnant to survive judgment the judgment of God oh the sovereignty of God is hard very hard on human pride as men would like to think that they're saved because of something they contribute and at every page of the book it's almost as if God sets himself against such a thought if any are to be saved it will be totally of my grace altogether undeserved now notice this surviving remnant is marked by two things faith and repentance in that day the remnant of Israel the survivor of the house of Jacob verse 20 says will no longer rely on him who struck them that was

[33 : 20] Assyria they thought Assyria could bring them salvation from the other nations and they relied on him only to find that their savior but in that day when the remnant returns they'll no longer rely on Assyria but they will rely on the Lord truly rely on the Lord the Holy One of Israel that's faith what you rely on is what you trust in what are you leaning on what are you leaning your hopes of

salvation on in that day the remnant will lean only on the Lord our Savior and not only faith but also repentance because as they turn away from all their God substitutes like the arm of the Assyrians and any of their own plans to save them and turn to the Lord that's repentance it's turning away from our sinful trust in other things and turning to the

Lord the very word return is a word of repentance we're going this way and we turn we not just to the land yes they would return from exile to the land that would been given to them but that's not what it says here they will return to the Lord to a person that's repentance they put their trust elsewhere they will turn from those false gods to the true God and trust in him alone and faith and repentance have ever been the mark of those who are the remnant of God's people do you have such faith repentance where did you get them they are gifts of God gifts of his grace that none might boast and if God is tearing our replacement gods out of our lives he's calling us back to himself lean on me he's saying trust in me alone to fight your battles for you well there's this great encouragement in what

God will do for the salvation of his remnant oh my people verse 24 my people my remnant he says do not be afraid of the Assyrians who are beating you with a rod you see that's what was going on right then they were being beaten with his rod and lifting up a club against you because very soon my anger against you will end and my wrath will be redirected to their destruction you see I'm not out of tools I have a whip!

in my workshop and I am going to whip them I'm going to lash them with a whip Assyria and when I do it will bring about your deliverance as in two great deliverances in your past history like when Gideon in his 300 destroyed the Gideonites at the Rock of Oreb and secondly like when the rod was held out over the Red Sea to swallow up all the Egyptians chasing after you that's the kind of deliverance I'm going to do for you from the Assyrians who are steamrolling you your sin got you into this trouble but my grace will get you out of it folks if that's not a door of hope in a valley of trouble I don't know where there is one your sin got you in this trouble my grace is going to get you out and we're led to expect an amazing thing that will be done for the deliverance of God's people something shocking just as Gideon's 300 defeating the 135 thousand Midianites just as shocking as the the Red Sea swallowing up the Egyptians and was it ever a shocking deliverance and that leads us to the last point God's God's axe gets the axe or Assyria the arrogant Assyrians are to be humbled and what he does is he portrays this Assyrian army on the march they're coming they're coming closer and closer they're closing in on Jerusalem with relentless determination 11 cities of Judah are on this conquered list and with each city it gets closer to Jerusalem than the last city so there you got the picture kids you set up the dominoes and there they are just set up so nicely and as soon as you start the first one you start to see them all falling here's 11 cities and they're fallen and the last domino to fall is

[38:16] Jerusalem and and just before Jerusalem they come to the city of Nob it's it's just overlooking Jerusalem they can see it and from there we're told that the Assyrians will halt and will confidently shake their fist threatening to destroy Jerusalem if they don't surrender to them so that's the picture that we have here but then suddenly at the last minute deliverance comes when the threat has reached the very gates of the city of Zion deliverance comes to the remnant of God's people and it's something amazing look at the first word in verse 33 see it's the word behold behold here's something amazing behold a virgin will conceive and bear a son behold look stop and consider this the

Lord almighty will lop off the boughs with great power the lofty trees will be felled the tall ones will be brought low he'll cut down the forest thickets with an axe they will fall before the mighty one so Assyria is seen as these mighty cedars of Lebanon this whole forest strength and at the last second God just comes in with his axe and they're down now that's the poetic form we have to wait till chapter 37 to see what this axe job looks like in real life but it was a glorious display of the sovereign Lord's powerful intervention to save his unworthy remnant folks all of these Old Testament deliverances of God saving his people they all point us to the most amazing deliverance of all that is coming when

John the Baptist will say behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world at just the last moment when it seemed that we were to be destroyed for our sins in hell forever behold the Lamb as one having been slain sets us free from the burden and bondage of our own sins destroyed our enemy Satan by crushing his head at Calvary turn God's wrath away from us by taking it on himself and so made us trophies to his grace forever and ever bow and wonder and worship and boast only

in the Lord if we learn something from

Isaiah chapter 10 we learn that human pride keeps this world from being what God made it to be it's not supposed to look like this and so Isaiah promises that God himself will deal decisively with human pride in amazing amazing ways and so we're on the edge of our seat to see what God will do to deal with human pride what shocking thing will he do and God the second person of the Godhead becomes a man and he humbles himself and he goes to the cross and he dies for our stinking pride he humbles us by humbling himself that's shocking look behold wonder worship and that's not all his son will come the second time in power and great glory to destroy all those who refuse to bow to this most gracious sovereign he doesn't owe us anything but wrath but he's such a kind sovereign that he welcomes you here and now to humble yourself trust in him repent of your sin turn from it come to him humble yourself in the sight of the

Lord and he will lift you up this is our savior mighty to save let's pray oh father there was no human explanation to the question why should jerusalem be left standing when the mighty assyrians were on the roll taking city after city and coming to the very doorstep of jerusalem the answer was you you intervened supernaturally undeservingly sovereignly in grace and you saved a people for yourself and when we ask why is it that people all around us are perishing in their sins and facing an endless eternity in hell why is it that your wrath did not swallow us up too and so we gladly confess with

[44 : 06] Isaiah that it is nothing because of who we are or what we've done it is entirely because of your sovereign grace we bow and we worship and we thank you for Jesus who took our place and took our wrath that that mighty anger that we would have felt for all eternity might be turned away from us forever thank you Jesus for what you bore for us we say so glibly that Christ died for my sins make us to tremble to think of what you suffered Lord Jesus in our place and because of our sins make us to rise up as forgiven ones to trust in no others and to declare our proud glorying in Christ that this is the only savior for sinners we ask you loose our lips to his eternal praise we ask in Jesus name amen