

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 7

Isaiah 8:11-10:32

Isaiah 8:11-9:3

Isaiah 8:11-22 Exhortation to the Israelites

We're at the end of chapter 8 of Isaiah looking at the "Exhortation to the Israelites in verses 11-22." Between chapter 8, verse 21, and 9:2 and 3, you'll find the transition from what you might say is gloom, to joy and rejoicing. In 8:21 you read, "They shall pass through it greatly distressed and hungry; and it shall come to pass that when they shall be hungry they shall fret themselves, curse their King and their God and look upward. They shall look unto the earth and behold, trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish. They shall be driven to darkness."

Distress to Joy

The chapter division is poorly placed. Actually, 8:22 goes right on to 9:1 with no break—"Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation when, at first, he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterwards did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea beyond the Jordan and Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness had seen a great light! They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined. You have multiplied the nation, increased the joy. They rejoiced before you according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil." So you see, you move from 8:21 down to 9:3 there, from darkness and gloom and distress to rejoicing and joy and great light.

Historical Context 2 Kings 15:29-30

The area referred to in verse 1 of chapter 9, Zebulun and Naphtali, is the area of northern Palestine where the Assyrian army first came into the land of Israel. If you go back to 2 Kings 15, you read in verse 29, "In the days of Pekah, king of Israel, came Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, and took Ijon, and Abel Beth

Maachah, and Janoah, and Kedesh, and Hazor. He took Gilead, Galilee, all the land of Naphtali and carried them away to Assyria.” So you see it’s that northern area of the Northern Kingdom that Tiglath-Pileser initially invaded.

That’s 2 Kings 15:29 where you notice it’s in the days of Pekah. And then you read in verse 30, “Hoshea, son of Elah, made a conspiracy against Pekah, son of Remaliah, and smote him and slew him and reigned in his stead.” That’s the transition of final kings. Damascus was taken in 732 B.C., which was a few years after the Syro-Ephraimite War (734 B.C.). But what about the Northern Kingdom? That transition from Pekah to Hoshea was also in 732 B.C. But the Assyrians came into that same area in the northern part of Israel.

Isaiah 9:2-3 – Immanuel’s Coming

But what you read in verse 2 of chapter 9 is that the people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light and speak in verse 3 of joy and rejoicing. I think, in context, you would be justified in concluding that there must be some connection between this coming joy and the coming of Immanuel who had been prophesied in chapter 7. Immanuel was the one that was to replace Ahaz on the throne of David. When you turn to the New Testament, you find that Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee in the very region described here. Matthew 4:13-16 says, “After leaving Nazareth, he came to Capernaum, which is upon the seacoast in the borders of Zebulun and Naphtali.” And then verse 14 says, “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, ‘The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations: the people who sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them who sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up,’” alluding back to Isaiah 9:1-2.

Verse 3, then, describes the joy of the people in that day: “You have multiplied the nation and increased the joys. They rejoiced before you according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.” Now that

was a prophecy I think I used last quarter in showing the enigmatic character of biblical prophecy. If you just read this prophecy, if you didn't have the New Testament reference to it, you might wonder, "What is being talked about here?" When you see the New Testament fulfillment, you can see quite clearly how it relates to that historical situation, the coming of Assyria, and then ultimately the joy and light that comes in connection with the coming of Christ.

Why Joy in Isaiah 9:3? 3 Reasons

But why the joy in verse 3? Well, three reasons are given as you go down through verses 4, 5, and 6. The three reasons are each introduced by the Hebrew word *ki* "for." You see, in verse 4, you have, "For—*ki*—you have broken the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian." Verse 5, "*For* every battle of the warrior is with confused noise and garments rolled in blood, but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire." And then verse 6, "*For* unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders. His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." The climax is certainly in verse 6, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given." The interesting thing here is that in the Hebrew the perfect tense is used with both the verbs. The verbs there are *yulad*: you've got the Pu'al perfect, "For unto us a child *has been born* and unto us the Son *has been given*"—from *natan*, a perfect tense. These are prophetic perfects, where the prophet sees it, and is so certain of fulfillment that he speaks of it as if it had already happened. Although translated, you could certainly put it into the future. The NIV puts it into the present, "for to us a child is born, to us the son is given."

So the climax is with verse 6, and again, you're into a Messianic prophecy, much like Isaiah 7:14. Young says, "There is great rejoicing among God's people because God has broken the yoke of burden and oppression, and the burden and oppression are removed because the weapons and garments of the warrior are

destroyed, and the basic reason for these blessings is that a child is born. In contrast to the mighty foe of Assyria and also to the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, a child brings deliverance to the people of God.”

When you look at the names given to that child in verse 6, certainly they are not names that would apply to an ordinary human being. I think here, even more clearly than with Immanuel, where you have a name that implies deity. In Isaiah 7:14 you have, “The virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call him Immanuel,” where the name Immanuel—God with us--implies deity. Here in 9:6 you have the teaching that this child *is* “the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father.” but in human form. So you encounter here one of the great teachings of Scripture: that God will come in human form in the person of his Son.

Student question: Back in verses 4 and 5, is this part of the reason why the Hebrew perspective of the Father is that he’ll go and break the yoke of Babylon?

Vannoy’s Answer: Possibly; certainly you could read it that way, and it would be understandable if it was read that way. Exactly how to take verses 4 and 5, you get back into this question of literal versus figurative. But I do think it’s possible in this context. Although that might not be apparent, I’m inclined to think it that way, although someone like J. Barton Payne takes it as the second advent and Armageddon. In a very literal sense, you could say that that is also possible. But it doesn’t seem fit the flow then. The flow seems to move from the Assyrian oppression at the end of the previous chapter into the first verse of chapter 9 to the coming of Christ at his First Advent, which brings the joy. And if that’s the case, it seems that you almost have to take verses 4 and 5 as figurative of the oppression of sin. But I’m inclined to take it as figurative because of the flow moving from verses 3 to 6, and that being in between to take it figurative.

The real hope is in the coming of this individual. But that’s not to exclude the comforting words also that apply to the immediate situation referring to this attack by Syria and the Northern Kingdom against Judah is not going to succeed. But that’s not the ultimate basis for joy; it’s longer term, the coming of the child.

Isaiah 9:7 Davidic Reign

Chapter 9, verse 7, says, “Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it, to establish it with justice, with righteousness, from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” If you go back to 7:13, “Hear now O house of David.” Ahaz was an unworthy representative of the house of David while here in chapter 9 this child is going to sit on the throne of David and establish peace, justice and righteousness. His government will bring an end to war, to misery, to injustice and evil. That’s not the result of human achievement. Because the last phrase explains, “The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.”

How Does this Relate to the Millennium?

Now, again, you get a question of “how does this relate to the millennium?” If you look at your citation, to page 18, the first paragraph which is taken from page 343—Young says, “That interpretation” (he’s speaking here of verse 7 of chapter 9) “That interpretation, which would apply this prophecy to a literal throne of David to be established in Jerusalem during the Millennium must be rejected for the following reasons: The reign begins with the birth of the *yulad*, the child. He sits upon the throne of David and reigns eternally. To limit this reign to a period of 1000 years is to neglect the words ‘there is no end.’” Indeed it does say, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” Young continues, “And to make the beginning coincide with the beginning of the Millennium is to ignore the fact that it begins with the birth of the child.”

Now, a couple comments on Young’s interpretation. You read in verse 7 that “of the increase of his government there shall be no end”, and then you read the phrase that “it will be established with justice and righteousness henceforth and even forever.” You have two phrases: “there will be no end” and “henceforth and even forever.” I’m not sure that those phrases necessarily exclude a millennial

interpretation. It seems to me that Christ's kingdom was established at his First Advent, and that's the other point Young makes. The reign begins with the birth of the "child" or the *yulad*.

Yes, I think Christ's reign began with the First Advent of Christ. But his kingdom was not realized in its fullness at the time of the First Advent and it hasn't been yet. We're in that already, but not yet, sort of situation, it's here, but it's not here in its fullness or its completeness. When Christ returns, the kingdom will come in a more complete form. Satan's attempt to destroy it, as we are told in Revelation 20, will fail. Christ's kingdom is indestructible. Ultimately, we are told in 1 Corinthians 15:24, "Christ delivers the kingdom up to the Father and it continues forever." So it doesn't seem to me that if you say there is such thing as a Millennium that you are either denying, number one, that there is a present aspect of the kingdom, or that, number two, there isn't a future aspect of the kingdom beyond even the Millennium. You're not denying either of those things, in the way Young is saying you must, if you are of the viewpoint that there is such thing as a Millennium. I don't think Christ's rule is limited to the Millennial period. But I think in the Millennial period, you have the manifestation of his rule. That's of a different order than the present manifestation.

The reference to "no end" refers to his government. "Of this increase of his government and peace there will be no end." I would not try to push those things to be too specific. What it's saying is that his rule and his peaceful kingdom is something that will continue forever.

Isaiah 9:8-10:4 – 4 Stanzas of Poetry Each Ending with "his anger..."

After Isaiah 9:7, there's a sharp break. Here's where there should be a chapter division instead of where it is between chapters 8 and 9. There's a sharp break after verse 7, and then 9:8 through 10:4 is the next unit. So you see the chapter division there between 9 and 10 is also misplaced. Isaiah 9:8 through 10:4 is the next unit. What binds that together is four stanzas of poetry, each ending

with the same refrain that you find at the end of verse 12, the end of verse 17, the end of verse 21, and at the end of chapter 10, verse 4. At the end of verse 12 you read, “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still,” and then in verse 17, “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.” The end of verse 21, “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still,” and then 10:4, “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.”

The idea of that phrase is that what you have is rebuke of Israel’s sin and pride and a declaration that the Lord will bring terrible punishment on the Northern Kingdom for this. In other words, it’s a poem of God’s judgment. So, it’s encapsulated in that phrase. The Lord has done certain things that should have caused the Israelites to repent, to turn back, but they didn’t do that. So it says for all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still. Judgment is still coming. So we have four stanzas ending with that refrain indicating it is a poem of rebuke for sin, an announcement of judgment to come. I’m not going to look at the specifics of that section.

Isaiah 10:5 – Judgment/Consolation Cycles Give Way to Assyria as God’s Instrument

Let’s go on to the next section beginning with verse 5 of chapter 10. Up to this point, two themes have been stressed in the book of Isaiah. The two themes basically are these: there’s a rebuke to Israel for its sin and rebellion against God and an announcement of coming judgment; and then there is consolation and comfort for those who have turned to the Lord, assuring that in the end there is blessing for the godly remnant. Those are the two lines of thought that Isaiah has stressed up to this point. When then you’re in The Book of Immanuel, chapters 7-12, we have seen that in the first chapters (1-6) you had judgment-blessing, judgment-blessing, and judgment-blessing. When you get to The Book of Immanuel, the first of those themes of rebuke centers around Ahaz’s alliance with

Assyria and what will come of that. The second theme, consolation, centers around the coming of the child, Immanuel and blessing for the godly remnant.

When you get to 10:5 and following, you have a new idea introduced. And that idea is discussed along with those other two themes that previously had been stressed. The new thought has to do with the relation of the wicked nation, Assyria, to the purposes of the Lord. You notice that the time of 10:5 is somewhat later than what we had been looking at because you read in verse 9, “Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus?” Sounds like Samaria has already fallen. So it seems that this was written later than the earlier section of The Book of Immanuel. Look at verse 11 where you read (the king of Assyria is speaking), “Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols.” The Assyrian king is saying, “Look, I’ve already taken Samaria; now I’m going to take Jerusalem, too.” So Samaria had already fallen.

Isaiah lived in a time when it appeared that evil was triumphant. Assyria represents one of the most ruthless and wicked aggressors the world has ever known. The Assyrians were known for their cruelty, for their ruthlessness, for the terror they instilled in other peoples. One writer says of Assyria, “No people was ever more abject than those of Assyria, no sovereigns ever more despotic, more covetousness, more vindictive, more pitiless, more proud of their crimes. Assyria sums up in itself all the vices. Aside from bravery, it offers no single virtue. One must seek over the whole of the world’s history to find here and there in a most troubled period, public crimes whose frightfulness may be compared with the horrors committed by the men of Nineveh in the name of their god. An Assyrian is not an artist, not a man of literature, not a lawgiver, he’s a parasite facing his organization of pillage and a formidable military power.”

The Assyrians were a ruthless people. And yet, they were successful; they were taking city after city. Isaiah is living in a context of watching that Assyrian advance and succeed. So, chapter 10, verses 5 and 6, “O Assyrian, the rod of my

anger and the staff in whose hand is my indignation! I will send him against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I command him.” Then there is this play on the name Maher-shalal-haz-baz—“to take the spoil, to take the prey, to tread them down like the mire of the streets.” So, the Lord says to Isaiah that the Assyrian is an instrument in the hands of God to punish sinful Israel. “O Assyrian, the rod of my anger.” Verse 6, “I will send him.” The Lord sent him. Now you see from the side of God’s purposes, Assyria is an instrument in his hands to bring judgment on his own people.

In chapter 10, verses 7-14, you see the other side of it. You see Assyria’s attitude, how she thought of herself. Verse 7 says, “How be it he means not so, neither does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations, not a few. For he saith, ‘Are not my princes altogether kings? Is not Calno like Carchemish? Is not Hamath like Arpad? Is not Samaria like Damascus? As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria, shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Therefore, it shall come to pass that when the Lord has performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem: I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria and the glory of his high looks.’ For he saith, ‘By the strength of my hand I have done it,’” (Notice all the “I’s” and “my’s” here). “By the strength of *my* hand I have done it and by *my* wisdom, for *I* am prudent; and *I* have removed the bounds of the people and have robbed their treasures, and *I* have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man. And *my* hand has found, as a nest, the riches of the people, and as one gathers eggs that are left, have *I* gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.” So, from Assyria’s side, rather than being conscious of the sovereignty of God and being an instrument in God’s hand, Assyria views herself as sovereign, as all powerful. The situation is, that Assyria is unwitting and unconscious of her being under God’s employ. In verses 7-11 you have that list of places that mention places that had fallen in Isaiah’s

time: Calno, “Is not Calno like Carchemish?” which fell in 738 B.C. “Is not Hamath like Arpad?” Hamath fell in 720 BC. Samaria, 722 B.C. “Is not Samaria like Damascus?” Damascus fell in 732 B.C. So you see you have a list of places right in this general time frame that had been captured by Assyria.

So, even though the Assyrian is an instrument in God’s hand, God says Assyria is going to be punished. We read that in verse 12, “Therefore, it shall come to pass when the Lord has performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem: I will punish the stout heart of the king of Assyria, for he said, ‘By the strength of my hand.’” Even though the Assyrian is an instrument in God’s hands, Assyria will be punished for what she has done because she has done it in pride and out of her own wicked heart. Assyria refused to give any recognition of glory to God. And so, she herself will be liable to God’s punishment.

Isaiah 10:15 – Boasting Ax Metaphor [Assyria]

The imagery of verse 15 is beautiful. It almost makes you smile because of the absurdity of it when you see how it applies to the situation. Verse 15, “Shall the ax boast itself against him that hews with it? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shakes it? As if the rod should shake itself against those that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were not wood!” That’s exactly what Assyria was doing. Assyria was a rod in the Lord’s hand. “Shall the ax boast itself against him that hews with it?” That’s exactly what Assyria was doing. Shall the instrument exalt itself against the one who holds it? Of course, the answer is “No, that’s absurd.”

Isaiah 1-16-19 – Forest Image of Destruction of Assyria

The result is in verses 16-19. And what you have in 16-19 is under the picture of a forest. Isaiah shows the punishment and destruction that will be done to the Assyrian empire. That forest is going to be cut down. Verse 16, “Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his

glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the Light of Israel shall be for a fire and his Holy One for a flame; and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day, and shall consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field, both soul and body; and they shall be as when a standard bearer faints. And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be so few, that a child may write them.” Assyria is pictured as this great forest that’s going to be destroyed.

Judgment will come on Assyria.

Isaiah 10:20-23 Remnant Returns

In verses 20-23, Israel will not always lean on such an untrustworthy foreign power, but will lean on the Lord. And although God is going to bring judgment, and even by the hand of Assyria, a remnant will return and receive God’s blessing. That’s in verses 20-23. “And it shall come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel, and such as have escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again lean upon him who smote them.” They won’t trust in some sort of foreign power, “They shall no more lean upon him who smote them but shall lean upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the Mighty God. For though my people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return; the full end decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a full end, even determined, in the midst of all the land.”

Isaiah 10:24-27 – Judah Will Not Be Conquered by Assyria

And then verses 24-27, despite the serious threats, God will not allow Assyria to conquer Judah, but will deliver Judah from her. You read in 24, “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts: ‘O my people that dwell in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite you with a rod and shall lift up his staff against you, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while and the indignation shall cease, and my anger in their destruction.’”—that is, the

Assyrian's destruction—"And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb'." (The smiting of Midian at Oreb, that was a rock where the princes of Midian who had escaped the battle were killed by Gideon back in Judges 7:25.) So, "The Lord of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb; and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt." In other words, just as the Lord delivered Israel through the Red Sea, he is going to deliver them from the Assyrians. "And it shall come to pass in that day that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing." So despite the serious threats, God will deliver Judah in a miraculous way. And, of course, you find the fulfillment of that again in the time of Hezekiah when that very thing happens.

Isaiah 10:28-32 – Closing in on Jerusalem but God Intervenes

Chapter 10, verses 28-32, sort of recapitulates what has been said here. First, you have a picture of the coming of the Assyrian army, advancing from city to city. It reaches the climax in verse 32. You see in 28, "He is come to Aiath, he is passed to Migron; at Michmash he hath laid up his baggage. They are gone over the passage; they have taken up their lodging at Geba. Ramah is afraid; Gibeah of Saul is fled. Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim: cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth. Madmenah is removed; the inhabitants of Gebim gather themselves to flee." Then the climax comes. "As yet shall he remain at Nob that day; he shall shake his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem." It's picturing that army coming in, closing in, as it were, around Jerusalem.

But then what's going to happen? God is going to intervene. "Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, shall lop the bough with terror: and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. And he shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one."

Just when it appears that Jerusalem is to be taken, you have God's intervention. And again, you have the imagery of the forest being cut down. "Shall lop the bough with terror; shall cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon"—a figure for the forest—"shall fall by a mighty one."

Summary of Isaiah 10

So, this chapter 10, beginning at verse 5, gives a picture of the significance to the attacks, to the rise of the Assyrian empire and its success, and its threat to Judah. Assyria was an instrument in God's hand even though Assyria didn't recognize herself as that instrument. And, therefore, she herself will be judged. What you find is all of that was literally fulfilled in history. Assyria did come into Judah; it did come up to Jerusalem; God did intervene and deliver Jerusalem. And then, the book of Nahum, minor prophet, later describes a hundred years later, in 612 B.C., the destruction of Nineveh. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, itself was destroyed and it never rose again as a nation. So, you have a remarkable chapter there, as far as both the theological concept and the historical situation to which it addresses itself.

The principle applies across the board, to Assyria but it applies to us as well. The Lord can use us to do something and yet we can think that we are the ones that are doing it by our great abilities or whatever have been the things that have been decisive in that without giving credit to the Lord. And we can be just like the ax that boasts itself against the master.

It's really amazing, isn't it, the way that the parallel seems so strong. Okay let's stop here and move on to chapter 11 next hour. Chapter 11 is another one of those key eschatological passages.

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