

Isaiah 10:14–25 — He Gathered as Eggs That Are Left

The Empty Boast, the Four Tools, the Remnant Shall Return, and Be Not Afraid of the Assyrian

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 10:14–25

“And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people; and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth: and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.

Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?

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 remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.

Therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction.”

As One Gathereth Eggs That Are Left

The Assyrian's boast in verse 14 is that his hand gathered the riches of all peoples as easily as gathering unguarded eggs from an abandoned nest. He makes it sound like a great feat of military and economic conquest — by the strength of my hand, by my wisdom, for I am prudent. But look at the image more closely. He did not overcome a defended nest. He did not drive away the mother bird in spite of her fierce resistance. He found the eggs already abandoned and helped himself. There was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.

The ostrich in Job 39 leaves her eggs in the earth and forgets them, because God has deprived her of wisdom. The result is that anyone passing by can gather them up without opposition. That is the character of the Assyrian's great conquest. The riches of the nations were lying unguarded because those nations lacked wisdom — they had not laid up treasure in heaven where neither moth nor rust corrupts and where the Assyrian cannot reach. Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. Lot looked at Sodom. The five kings who fought the four kings carried Lot away captive along with all the goods of Sodom. But Abraham was in the mountains with God, and his riches could not be touched by any army. The Assyrian's boast, examined honestly, amounts to: I found some things no one was guarding, and I took them.

The book of Proverbs notes that it is better for a man to rule his own spirit than to capture a city. The man who captures a city has just as good a claim to boast as the Assyrian — and yet the scripture puts ruling the spirit far above it. Self-judgment is the most difficult of all kinds of judgment. The Assyrian, if he had been wise, would have used the axe of verse 15 against his own pride first of all. He did not. He used it against everything else.

Four Tools and Their Right Use

Verse 15 names four tools: the axe, the saw, the rod, and the staff. These four are not identical in their associations. The axe and the saw are for cutting down —

they reduce, they fell, they bring low. If the Assyrian had been a wise man, he would have used these against his own pride first. The rod and the staff are the shepherd's tools, associated in Psalm 23 with comfort and care: "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." The rod strikes the wolf on the nose; the staff guides the sheep; but the net result is the comfort and safety of the flock. So there are two kinds of tools in the verse — tools for bringing down pride, and tools for the shepherd's care of the sheep.

The moral of verse 15, then, is not that cutting down and breaking down are wrong in themselves. Used rightly by the right hand, they accomplish good. The question is whether the tool is wielding itself, or whether the craftsman is wielding the tool. The Lord's response to the Assyrian's boast is: you are the tool. You are the axe. You are the saw. You did not pick yourself up. And therefore, instead of magnifying yourself, magnify the Lord — as the Scripture says, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together."

Leanness Sent Among His Fat Ones

The Lord's response to the proud instrument is swift in verse 16: the Lord of hosts shall send leanness among his fat ones, and under his glory kindle a burning like fire. The fat ones — the well-provisioned, well-armed, prosperous hosts of Assyria — will have leanness sent among them. The glory of his forest and his fruitful field, both soul and body, shall be consumed. His great army, described as a forest, will be reduced to so few trees that a child could write them down. This is the consuming work of the light of Israel and his Holy One when they become a flame against the Assyrian's thorns and briars.

The Remnant Shall Return to the Mighty God

Verses 20 through 22 give the outcome for Israel. The remnant of Israel and the escaped of the house of Jacob shall no more lean on him that smote them, but

shall lean on the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return — even the remnant of Jacob — to the Mighty God. This is the name given to the Lord Jesus in Isaiah 9:6: the Mighty God. They return to the very person who was born as a child and given as a son.

The phrase “no more again lean on him that smote them” is a remarkable expression. It speaks of a chronic tendency to look to the instrument of God’s chastisement as a source of strength — making an alliance with the very rod that God used to strike them, treating the agent of judgment as a friend and protector. This is what Israel has done throughout her history, and what she will be delivered from in the day of her restoration. The remnant will lean on the Lord alone, and in truth.

Be Not Afraid of the Assyrian

Verse 24 turns directly to address those in Zion who are under the Assyrian’s hand: “O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt.” This is God’s pastoral word to those under the rod. He does not deny the smiting; it will happen. But he says: be not afraid. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease.

The phrase “after the manner of Egypt” is full of meaning. Egypt’s rod was upon Israel with great severity, and Egypt seemed invincible. But God’s rod was lifted up over that sea, and Israel passed through while Egypt was swallowed. The Assyrian will seem as invincible as Pharaoh, and Israel will be as helpless as they were at the shores of the Red Sea. But the manner of Egypt includes the manner of the deliverance from Egypt. The same God who stretched out his hand then will stretch it out again.

The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the Mighty God.