

A Study in Isaiah 10:20–34

The Remnant Shall Return — the Consumption Determined in Righteousness

We are reading Isaiah chapter 10, beginning at verse 20.

"It shall come to pass in that day, that 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. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For a consumption even determined doth the Lord GOD of hosts make in the midst of all the land."

"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."

"And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge against 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. 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."

"He hath come to Aiath, he hath passed through Migron... Behold, the Lord GOD 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."

The Importance of the Remnant in Prophetic Scripture

The importance of the remnant in understanding the prophets of the Old Testament can scarcely be overestimated. It appears again and again throughout the prophetic books. Those who deny a future literal fulfillment of these prophecies — the post-tribulationists who would have the church pass through the great tribulation — have effectively removed the Jewish remnant from their system, replacing it with the church. The sun-clad woman of Revelation 12 is taken to represent the church, and the man-child born from her is made to come forth from the church. But Israel and the church are not

the same thing, and the remnant passages speak clearly and specifically of a Jewish remnant.

Benjamin Newton, a more astute thinker than those who followed him, at least recognized from Scripture that there had to be a Jewish remnant in the last days. But rather than let that correct his system, he posited two remnants — a Christian remnant and a Jewish remnant. That tells us something about what Scripture forces upon any honest reader. The doctrine of the remnant is too plain in these chapters to be ignored or dissolved into general Gentile blessing.

Matthew 24 is clear that the elect who pass through the great tribulation are elect saints of Israel, not the elect of the church. The house of Jacob is the house of Jacob. And the beauty of these verses — the remnant shall stay upon the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, in truth — cannot be read as referring to the church without doing violence to the plain sense.

They Shall Stay Upon the LORD in Truth (v. 20)

Ahaz was given as an example of the opposite posture: his stay, his reliance, was upon the Assyrian power. He looked to the political power that was attacking him for deliverance. The Assyrian then smote them awfully in the end. But in that coming day, the remnant shall no more stay upon him that smote them — that is, they will not look to any earthly power, any human political alliance, any arm of flesh. They will stay upon Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel.

And the last three words of verse 20 are beautiful: in truth. Those words stand alone. Truth is itself a sufficient foundation. It is not truth and peace, or peace and truth — it is simply in truth. That is what is solid. A magazine by one of the separated companies of brethren was called Words of Peace and Truth. One noted that if they had a little more light they might have put out a magazine called Words of Truth and Peace — because truth comes first. Peace follows truth. When Pilate asked, What is truth? he turned and walked out before he could receive an answer. The answer was standing in front of him. I am the way, the truth, and the life. He was playing the philosopher; philosophy is not a solid foundation upon which to stay oneself.

The Remnant of Jacob Returning unto the Mighty God (vv. 21–22)

The remnant shall return — that word return implies a departure, a going away from. This is the return of the nation from its great departure. At present, any of the remnant of Israel who are saved from what Paul calls the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16) and are incorporated into the church, the body of Christ, with a heavenly portion. But in the future, the Israel of God — the godly ones — will have a portion here on earth when Christ establishes His kingdom.

The name Jacob is significant. God had changed the name from Jacob (supplanter, a crooked character) to Israel (a prince with God). Jacob spent most of his life scheming to gain the advantage in his circumstances by his own devices. But at the end of his life, he worshipped leaning on the top of his staff. He had given up on all of his deal-making. That dependence and worship at the end of Jacob's life may have a moral similarity to the return of the remnant called here the remnant of Jacob: a people who, like their forefather, will finally give up on all self-management and lean wholly upon God.

Verse 22 introduces a striking contrast: though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return. The sand of the sea is the biblical expression for an uncountable multitude — the very promise given to Abraham. And yet it is only a remnant of that uncountable number that shall return. There are three things in Scripture said to be greater in number than the sand of the sea: Job's grief, the widows in Israel under judgment, and — most wonderfully — God's thoughts toward us in Psalm 139:17–18. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. Even the uncountable multitude of Israel is surpassed by God's thoughts toward His own.

The Consumption Decreed — Righteousness, Sovereignty, Determination (vv. 22–23)

The consumption decreed shall overflow in righteousness (Darby: overflow in righteousness). And verse 23: a consumption and one determined will the Lord Jehovah of hosts accomplish in the midst of all the land. The word consumption here is a technical expression — used also in Isaiah 28:22 and Daniel 9:27 — for the specific judgments preceding the establishment of the kingdom. It is not a vague or general catastrophe; it is something precisely determined by God.

The word determined is bound up with the sovereignty of God. What God has determined, He has not determined by waiting to see what men would decide and then accommodating their free will. He has determined it according to the good pleasure of His own will. These are not incomplete thoughts that await the input of human circumstance before they can be finalized. They are fixed, settled, accomplished in the mind of God. The overflow of the Assyrian is a word connected with the Assyrian throughout these chapters: in chapter 8:8 we read, he shall overflow and go over, he shall reach even to the neck. The overflowing is characteristic of what the Assyrian does, and it will be righteous — determined by God Himself as a means of purging Israel.

Some have propounded what is called open theism: the notion that God does not know the end from the beginning, but merely outpaces man because He is smarter. Such theories are not the result of honest engagement with Scripture. They are repugnant to faith in God's word and to the plain meaning of words like determined. They cast God in the image of a clever man rather than of the sovereign God.

Man reasons up from himself to God — but the word of God is given to reveal God downward to man. These are two fundamentally different directions. The God of these chapters is not one who is outfoxing man by being quicker. He is the God whose consumption is determined.

Be Not Afraid of the Assyrian (vv. 24–27)

For the believing remnant in Zion, God speaks a word of direct comfort: O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian. What a fearful enemy this is — yet God says to that godly remnant, do not fear him. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction — the destruction of the Assyrian. The Assyrian is a tool. He has been committed into the hand of God's indignation, used for the consumption, and when the consumption is finished, God will break the rod. The indignation and the consumption are God's, not the Assyrian's, even though the Assyrian thinks he is acting on his own ego. Chapter 10, verse 7: it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few — he does not think that he is doing God's will. He is on an ego trip of his own. Yet God uses him as the rod of His anger.

The manner of Egypt mentioned in verse 24 is worth a brief thought. In every other country there was dependence upon God for rain. Egypt alone had the Nile and left God out of its calculations as to water. If that is the force of the expression, then the manner of Egypt in which the Assyrian operates is precisely this: acting without conscious dependence on God, simply executing his own purposes. This is fully consistent with verse 7 — he thinketh not so. He is not acting as an instrument of God; he is acting as the sovereign of his own plan.

And then verse 27: the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing. The burden taken away from the shoulder, the yoke from the neck. It is the anointed one — the Christ — who destroys the yoke. This stands in glorious contrast to the hand stretched out still in chapter 9, which we read three times over as the judgments fell upon the disobedient people. Here, at last, the hand is no longer stretched out in anger; the yoke is broken.

The March of the Assyrian — and Lebanon Falls (vv. 28–34)

Verses 28–32 describe the terrifying march of the Assyrian down through the hill country toward Jerusalem — Aiath, Migron, Michmash, Geba, Ramah, Gibeah, Gallim, Laish, Anathoth, Madmenah, Gibim — trembling and fleeing before him. The detail is extraordinary and the menace vivid. He shakes his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.

And then verses 33–34: the Lord Jehovah of hosts shall lop the boughs with terror, and the high ones of stature shall be hewn down, and the haughty shall be humbled. The Assyrian himself, who has grown as

tall and proud as the cedars of Lebanon, is cut down by a mighty one. Lebanon shall fall by a mighty one. The cedar that seemed so unanswerable and permanent is felled. This is God rising in judgment against the rod He has used, once the rod has served its purpose.

For the believing remnant, this is the occasion of their full comfort and the fulfillment of the word of verse 24. The one they were told not to fear has been hewn down. The hand stretched out in anger has finally ceased. The consumption decreed has been accomplished in righteousness. And they have stayed themselves upon Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.

In truth, and in righteousness — these are God's words. May we stay ourselves upon Him in both.