

Isaiah 10:32–11:1 — Destruction of the Assyrian, the Shoot from Jesse

The High Ones Hewn Down, Lebanon Fallen, and the Branch Grown from Obscurity

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 10:32–11:1

“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.

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.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

God’s Eye Is on Every Detail

Verses 28 through 34 give the march of the Assyrian southward toward Jerusalem, place by place, in remarkable detail. More verses are given to this march than might seem necessary — it could have been stated in a sentence or two. But God has his eye on every action of wickedness and will bring it all into judgment. The profusion of detail, including little villages and small places not otherwise notable in Scripture, is itself a statement: nothing escapes his notice. Each little place is named because the Lord of all the earth sees each little place.

The Assyrian reaches Nob and shakes his hand against the mount of the daughter of Zion — that gesture of contempt and defiance is the last act before the answer

comes. Then, abruptly, it comes. The ellipsis that J.N. Darby places between verse 32 and verse 33 in his translation captures the sudden break. There is no more march. The Lord, the LORD of hosts, acts.

The Lopping: High Ones Hewn Down, Lebanon Fallen

Verse 33 uses the imagery of forestry: the lopping of boughs, the cutting down of thickets, Lebanon falling by a mighty one. Nothing is impenetrable to the Lord. However tall, however spreading, however densely tangled the power that has set itself against his people — it all comes down. The comparison with Romans 11:22 is apt in imagery: “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God” — branches cut off and branches grafted in. The language of lopping, though applied differently, belongs to the same family of thought. And the principle runs broad: God uses rods, and then he deals with the rods. He used Judas — an individual. He used the Assyrian — a nation. The principle applies from the individual to the national scale, and eventually to the entire sweep of world history.

Pharaoh is a further illustration. God raised him up, and the man kept hardening his own heart until God gave him judicial blindness and confirmed him in his stubbornness. The fame of what God did to Pharaoh lasted forty years — Rahab knew it when the spies came to Jericho. The Assyrian similarly: used, then broken. The haughty shall be humbled. That which is high shall be cut down. This principle repeats cyclically throughout history, each cycle pointing forward to the final occasion when the Lord himself comes in power and glory to strike it all down once and for all.

What a Contrast: Then Chapter 11 Begins

The end of chapter 10 is all about things that are great — tall stature, spreading boughs, the cedars of Lebanon, the Assyrian in his pride and might. Then chapter

11 opens with the most unlikely of images: a shoot out of the stem of Jesse, a branch from his roots.

Jesse's family was of no great account in Israel. David himself said so — how little his father's house was. And by the time the Lord Jesus came, what remained of the house of David? The Edomite was on the throne. It looked as though the line of David had been cut down entirely, like a felled tree with only the stump remaining. Yet God does fresh work from exactly that kind of material. A shoot comes forth. There is a certain freshness in a shoot; it is something new, something that springs from what appears finished.

The King James says “a rod out of the stem of Jesse.” J.N. Darby translates it “a shoot out of the stalk of Jesse.” The difference is instructive. In the King James, the same word rod is used here as was used of the Assyrian as God's rod in chapter 10:5 — which could suggest a parallel, as if both were rods of a similar kind. Darby's rendering removes that possible confusion: this is not a rod of chastisement. It is a shoot — something living, growing, bearing fruit. Darby's companion rendering of the second clause, “a branch out of his roots shall be fruitful,” makes the contrast with the Assyrian complete. The Assyrian's business was never fruitfulness. The shoot from Jesse's roots, by contrast, is precisely that.

Root and Offspring: Both at Once

In verse 1 he is the shoot — the offspring, the one who came from Jesse's line. In verse 10 of the same chapter he is the root of Jesse — the origin and foundation of everything Jesse and David ever were. The Lord himself posed this riddle to the Pharisees: if David calls him Lord in the Spirit, how is he David's son? The answer is the incarnation: he is both root and offspring, both source and descendant. He came before David and owed David nothing; he also came after David and took manhood from his line. In the last chapter of Revelation he confirms it himself: “I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright and

morning star.”

The fallen tent of David — spoken of in Acts 15:16 — will be reared up again in the millennium. What looks to the eye like a dynasty permanently cut down is, in God’s purpose, about to produce the most extraordinary shoot the world has ever seen. He came into the world in poverty — his parents offered two turtledoves, the smallest acceptable offering. He grew up in circumstances of no account. Yet from that apparently spent stem of Jesse, the shoot came forth that will bear fruit for the ages of ages.

There shall come forth a shoot out of the stalk of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots shall be fruitful.