

Isaiah 5:25–30 — The Hand Stretched Out Still

God's Judgment, the Invading Foe, and the Close of the Fifth Chapter

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 5:25–30

“Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far, and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly.

None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed, nor the latchet of their shoes be broken:

Whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent, their horses' hooves shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind:

Their roaring shall be like a lion, they shall roar like young lions: yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it.

And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea: and if one look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow, and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.”

God's Anger: Not Turned Away

The subject of the anger of Jehovah is introduced here at verse 25 and is taken up at length throughout chapters 9, 10, and 11. The refrain “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still” appears no fewer than five times — in 9:12, 9:17, 9:21, 10:4, and here. It is a solemn repetition that demands attention.

The hills are something that appear quite stable, and yet even what is stable is touched by God and taken away. In the judgment of God there is nothing left to stand on. The carcasses were torn in the streets. His judgment fell, and it did not stop.

It is worth asking whether, had the people repented at any point, that refrain might have been broken. Consider Nineveh and other examples where impending judgment was turned back. But here, even through it all, there is no repentance.

Suffering Has No Atoning Value

It is a common tactic of the flesh to reason that God's anger ought to diminish simply because of suffering — as though the pain itself carries some atoning weight. But the fact that His anger is not turned away, and His hand is stretched out still, is proof that such sufferings are not atoning sufferings. God did not remove sin by them.

On the cross, when the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for us — in those hours of darkness — His sufferings were of a different character entirely. They were atoning sufferings. The outrage of God against sin was there, at the cross, satisfied. That is something to contemplate with adoring hearts.

The Invading Foe: No Discrimination in Judgment

The description of the invading enemy in verses 26 through 30 is uniformly fearsome. Note carefully: there is no discrimination in any of these details. None shall be weary or stumble. None shall slumber or sleep. Their girdles shall not be loosed, their shoes shall not be broken. Their arrows are sharp — all of them. Their bows are bent — all of them.

It is not as though seventeen arrows are sharp and one is dull, and the dull one will happen to land on someone who deserved a lighter blow. That is not the case. The description is altogether uniform upon the whole of the target. A person of faith looking on might wonder: where is the discriminatory judgment of God in this? It is not visible in these particular verses.

Yet faith must be exercised. As Abraham said, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Where there is trust and confidence in God, one is as safe in a day of storm and trouble as if it were a calm, peaceful occasion — if one is sheltered. God knows how to use overwhelming circumstances to accomplish a work of discriminatory judgment, even when that discrimination is not visible on the surface.

God's Government and the Nations

The text of verse 26 in J.N. Darby's translation reads: "He will lift up a banner to the nations afar off, and will hiss for one from the end of the earth." The change is subtle but significant. Not a coalition, not a league — God will hiss for one. And they will come. The nations engaged in the act of invading have

not the slightest consciousness that God has summoned them to serve His governmental ends.

The Assyrian is the clearest example of this. Isaiah 10:7 captures it plainly: “Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.” What God summons the Assyrian to do, and what the Assyrian himself intends, are two entirely different things. God uses him as the rod of His indignation, and when the work is done, He breaks that rod.

Nebuchadnezzar was different — he was part of the times of the Gentiles, the one into whose hands the power of empire had been passed. God even showed mercy to Nebuchadnezzar in the end. The Assyrian does not share that status. And yet, there is in Scripture — as in Psalm 83 — a confederacy of nations that will one day form for a final assault on Israel, and from that assault the Lord Himself will personally deliver His people.

We are so accustomed to reading history as though it unfolds by its own momentum — the reeling and the to-and-fro of nations — that it can seem to go on by itself. Yet God is over everything. The reinstatement of Israel as a state does not in itself signal that the times of the Gentiles have concluded. The worst treading down is still to come. It is helpful to recall the Crusades, when political and military control of Palestine changed hands repeatedly without lasting prophetic significance.

Chapter 5 Draws to a Close

These last several verses of chapter 5 bring a general subject to a conclusion. Chapter 6 opens with a time reference — “In the year that King Uzziah died” — signaling that another subject is beginning. Faith, as these chapters of judgment are read, must account that God is able, even in general catastrophes, to apply His justice. Always to do right. With discrimination. With great discrimination, even when we do not know and need not know all the reasons why.

Isaiah 4:4 gives a perspective that illuminates all these chapters: “When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof, by the spirit of judgment, by the spirit of burning.” In chapter 5 we have been largely in the spirit of judgment. In chapter 6, we will encounter the spirit of burning.

The transition to chapter 6 is imminent. A wholly different scene awaits.