

Text: Isaiah 10:5-19

Title: "The truth about a place like Assyria"

Time: 8/17/2025 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In the days of Isaiah, Assyria was one of the world's great superpowers. At her height the nation controlled territory from Egypt to western Iran, and from Turkey to the Persian Gulf. The kingdoms that came after Assyria, like Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon and Cyrus's Persia, built on the civil structures of a global power introduced by Assyria.

The country was positioned at the point of access to the trade routes of Mesopotamia from the West, which advantage enriched the nation quickly. She became the tollbooth of the Fertile Crescent. In the Late Bronze Age, their written language was cuneiform, and the Code of Hammurabi greatly influenced Assyrian law. Their penalties for law-breaking, however, were more severe than the Code, because the people were herders and farmers, toughened by life in the hills and continuous conflict for survival.

By the time of Isaiah's ministry, Assyria had been an independent state with a strong military for a century and a half. Those who ruled Assyria were proud of their military exploits. Sir Henry Layard, one of the founders of Assyrian studies, excavated an Assyrian palace near the upper Tigris River at Nimrud. The annals, an annual chronicling of the king's exploits, were inscribed on the building blocks used for decoration in the palace and other structures.

"The annals tell of the Assyrian army advancing relentlessly through wild territory, scaling mountains, crossing rivers and crushing their enemies in battle. Defeated leaders were tortured by mutilation and dismemberment, flayed alive, boiled, or impaled. Their wealth in gold, silver, iron, copper, rare woods, textiles, furniture and jewelry was carried back to

Assyria as plunder” (Carl Roebuck, *The World of Ancient Times*, 143).

This early Assyrian success had collapsed by the beginning of the 8th century B.C., when God called Jonah to Ninevah, an Assyrian city, to preach repentance of sin and faith toward Jehovah God. Afterwards came the rise of the founder of the Assyrian Empire. Her great king, Tiglath-Pileser III, came to rule over a small and disorganized country in 745 B.C., but by the time of his death only 18 years later, Assyria was the world’s superpower. The kings of Assyria revived not only Assyrian military ambition, but also the cruel methodologies she had used successfully in the past.

Verse 9 of our passage mentions some of the cities that fell to the Assyrian Empire – Arpad, 50 miles south of the Euphrates, was taken in 740 B.C., Calno in 738; Damascus, the capital of Aram or Syria fell in 732, Northern Israel’s Samaria fell in 722, Hamath in 720, and finally Carchemish on the Euphrates, the capital of the Hittites, was conquered in 717 B.C..

These were the days of Isaiah’s ministry in tiny Judah. His ministry included our passage, a message directed to this mighty superpower. His message is summarized by its introduction “O Assyria” (KJV) = “Woe Assyria” (ESV) or “Watch out Assyria” (same word as in 5:8, 11, 20, 21, and 22). Just like Isaiah’s God had sovereign jurisdiction over tiny Judah in chapter 5, so also He exercises that same sovereign rule over Assyria, the world’s superpower. The message the Lord gives Isaiah tells the truth about a place like Assyria, a place very much like the place you and I call home today. We will note three things the passage teaches about a place like Assyria.

I. A place like Assyria is ignorant of some important realities (vv. 5-11, 13-15).

Illustration: Last Tuesday I was at the Goffstown recreation center attending a suicide prevention training session hosted by the National Association of Mental Illness. I was glad to go, and I learned some important things about suicide and suicide prevention, but as a Bible-believing Christian it was obvious to me that the session was also determined to ignore some important realities.

The words *God*, *Satan*, and *soul* were not mentioned during the training. The word *sin* was mentioned only to condemn the word as a term that only encourages suicide through unsafe speech. It was apparent to me that ignorance of these important realities, when it comes to this increasingly tragic horror of our day, does not bode well for our ability to prevent it. I mentioned that to the organizers in the comment section of the follow-up survey. Perhaps something could change along those lines at the NAMI.

Application: We have many places in our nation that ignore the realities of biblical truth, places where that truth is not welcome. Assyria was a place like that. Substituting for this truth, Assyria believed a number of lies instead.

The truth was that the nation of Assyria was a tool of God's judgment (vv. 5-6, 15). The God of the Bible is sovereign over the affairs of men, not Assyria. The spoil and prey of v. 6 come from the name the Lord gave to Isaiah's son – *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* (*rush the spoil, the plunder hurries*). Isaiah's God not only sends Assyria to destroy these nations (v. 6), He holds Assyria responsible for their impure motives and their arrogant pride, features no mere stick or axe would possess.

The lie that Assyria believed was that they were accountable to themselves and not to Isaiah's God. It was not this nation's motive to serve the Lord, but to destroy other nations (v.7). The king of Assyria thought he was the king of kings and lord of lords, not recognizing that this is the title of Jesus Christ

alone (v. 8; Rev. 19:6, "And he [Jesus Christ] hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords").

It was Assyria's conviction that past success was a guarantee of future gain (v. 9), and that the God whom Isaiah worshipped was just another faith among many equally valid (if not more valid) faiths (vv. 10-11). Assyria believed their strength was the key to their success (v. 13a), whereas the Apostle Paul understood, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10); and they believed their wisdom had made their conquests easy (vv. 13b-14), whereas the Lord Jesus explained to some equally confident Pharisees, "If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, 'We see'; therefore your sin remaineth" (9:41). Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, wrote: "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him" (Prov. 26:12).

Illustration: I was blessed years ago by the testimony of a brother in the Lord who was born again at a place called L'Abri in Huémoz, Switzerland. The evangelist Francis Schaeffer welcomed students to this retreat in the Alps, where he would lecture to them on biblical truth, philosophy, and history.

Our brother explained to Dr. Schaeffer at one point that he did not want to trust Christ as Savior because he did not want to lose his personal autonomy or sovereignty. Dr. Schaeffer explained to my friend that any such thoughts of personal autonomy were mere illusions. His supposed personal sovereignty was simply not real. No one is really in charge of his own life. My friend came to realize how true it is that we have little real control over so much that happens to us, and that realization helped him yield to Christ's sovereignty over his life.

This brother avoided the misunderstandings of Assyria, and we need to do the same this morning. If we do not, we need to

see what happens to Assyria because they are ignorant of these realities. It is when our assumptions clash with reality that we get hurt.

II. A place like Assyria is headed for a tragic end (vv. 12, 16).

Illustration: Lord willing, next year our nation will celebrate its 250th birthday. The Assyrian Empire of Isaiah's day had newly arisen on the world's scene, and it would disappear in a little over 100 years hence. "The collapse of the Empire followed quickly upon the death of Ashurbanipal. Babylonia asserted its independence of the Assyrians and made an alliance with the Median Kingdom. In 614 B.C. the two states invaded Assyria. In 612 they took Nineveh, destroying and plundering the city. Although a remnant of the Assyrians fled to Harran, the Babylonians took that city in 610 and thus ended the last vestige of Assyrian dominance" (Roebuck, 147-148).

Application: That tragic end was not one that the leaders of Assyria could see coming, but it is one that Isaiah, God's prophet, could see. It turns out that Assyria's success was merely a part of God's whole work on tiny Mount Zion and in little Jerusalem (v. 12). Assyria's success was a test of the faithfulness of the kings of Judah, a test that Ahaz miserably failed while Hezekiah later passed with flying colors. When the true Sovereign, the Lord of Hosts, was done using Assyria to deal with the people of true significance – tiny Judah – Assyria's glory would go up in smoke (v. 16). Our history books tell us that this is what happened.

Do we see what our end shall be better than Assyria saw their end? The Lord has provided us with warnings just as true as those He gave Assyria in this passage. Verse 13 warns against putting confidence in your own strength and wisdom and against laying up treasures on earth. Jesus tells you and me, "You cannot serve God and mammon," and "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust do corrupt

and thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21). Where are we laying up our treasure? Where really is our heart? Are we headed for the end that Assyria experienced?

III. A place like Assyria needs to see the light (vv. 17-19).

Illustration: You may remember that last Wednesday evening we had quite a thunderstorm roll through our area in the evening. Our neighborhood lost power, as it has many times before, but this time was different at the Hobi home. 30 seconds after the lights went out on us, Maureen and I heard the newly installed generator kick in, and shortly after that the lights came back on. I was so happy to see the lights come on that I broke out into a song repeating the word *generator* to the tune of the Hallelujah Chorus. My wife puts up with a lot.

Application: In the book of Isaiah, light is always a blessing, unless you are on the side of darkness. Verse 17 mentions again the Light of Israel and his Holy One. This is the Light of Isaiah 9:2, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

Here in chapter 10, we learn that this Light is the light of a flame of fire. The burning of this fire shall consume, on the one hand the thorns and briars that are His, as well as the glory of His forest and His fruitful field. Both soul and body will be affected, so the thorns, briars, forest, and orchard are all symbols of people with bodies and never dying souls. They are consumed in one day. That day will be like the fainting of a standard bearer, like an ensign who after leading troops into battle falls to the enemy. That fall will result in a remnant that is numbered, which a young man identifies as the survivors.

Some see the *his* of these verses as a reference to Assyria again. I believe that a closer look tells us that *his* refers to the Light of Israel. The thorns and briars belong to the Light of Israel. He consumes the glory of His own forest and orchard, both soul and body. He does so in an unexpected way, for the Light of Israel is the standard bearer who faints in battle. But after this fainting, He is the young man who identifies the number of trees in His forest, who in the end continue to belong to Him. It is Jesus Christ who consumed the glory of the nations in judgment, but who also suffered so that a remnant of them might survive into the future as His own. The child of 9:6 is the young man of 10:19.

This is the light that Assyria could not see in their commitment to their own darkness and unbelief. But Isaiah wrote about this Light of Israel so that all could see, not just Israel. It is the people who walk in darkness that the Light of Israel has come to help see. People like you and like me.

Conclusion: One other truth about a place like Assyria is described in the Book of Jonah. It is the simple truth that a place like Assyria is a place that God loves and calls it to repentance. God sent Jonah to Nineveh that they might see the light and be saved, and the entire city was miraculously spared by faith in Jonah's day. God tells his disappointed prophet that the people of a place like Assyria are far more important than his gourd that had just died:

"Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand [120,000] persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:10-11). God rejoiced that, in Jonah's day, this city of Assyria repented and believed, in part because Assyria was a place of many little children and some innocent cattle too.

Whether in the days of Jonah, or the later days of Isaiah, Assyria became the place it was because its people were the people they were, either the humbly repentant trusting the word of the prophet, or the stubbornly proud rejecting that word. In Jonah's day, they believed in repentance the prophet's message of their impending overthrow. In Isaiah's day, they continued to live satisfied with the success of their prideful unbelief, convinced that the word of the Lord had no bearing.

Our place is like Assyria in that it too will be the kind of place we make it to be. Will we be like the Assyrians of Isaiah's day, stubborn, boastful, and ultimately destroyed unbelievers, or will we be like the Assyrians of Jonah's day, see the Light of Israel's offer of salvation, repent of our unbelief, and trust in Him.

These truths about a place like Assyria are true about us as well.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*