



Preaching Through The Bible, Michael Eaton

Isaiah

Part 18

Who Holds the Future? (10:5-15)

•How God uses human sinfulness

Because of Israel's refusal of a word from God¹, terrible chaos overtook Israel as a result². Isaiah 10:5–15 is a statement of the way in which God uses human sinfulness in his own way

1 9:9-10:4
2 10:5-15

1. God is in control of the nations

1. God is in control of the nations. God says:

⁵'Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand my wrath is the club!'

•God was controlling the Assyrians

The Assyrians thought they were doing whatever they wanted in the conquering of the world. But God was totally in control of them. They were a rod in his hand, although they never knew it.

• God is in control of all nations today

When one looks out at today's nations – Argentina, Bangladesh, China, Denmark, England, France, Guyana, Honduras, India, Japan, Kenya and all the rest, more than two hundred of them – they are all under the control of God. No matter what is happening in each one they all have a part in God's plan.

•Why does God allow evil?

We all have difficulties with 'the problem of evil'. Why does an all-loving, all-powerful God allow evil at all? Why is Satan allowed to exist? Why do the wicked prosper? Why do relatively innocent children suffer? We cannot solve the problem at present although we know (i) the story is not over yet and when judgement day comes we will perhaps see some things we do not know now. And (ii) this inexplicable mystery is the very thing that makes room for faith. We would not need faith if we could answer the problem of evil. But one thing is sure. We cannot solve the problem by limiting God's power. God is in control. Assyria – with all its wickedness – is a tool in the hand of God.

•We will understand better on judgement day

•The mystery makes room for faith

2. God uses human wickedness for his own purposes

2. God uses human wickedness for his own purposes. In the eighth century BC, when Isaiah lived, God was angry with Israel because of the nation's wickedness. When the Assyrians marched into northern Israel, and later into Judah, it was in fact the chastening-anger of God which was at work. God was using the violence of the Assyrians to discipline his own people.

⁶'I send him against a godless nation, I give a command to him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets.'

• God used the Assyrians' violence to discipline His own people

God was secretly commanding a situation in which the Assyrians were showing their malice towards Israel. God uses human wickedness, without being wicked himself. The greatest example is the cross¹. When men and women are working for evil, God is working for good in the same events².

1 see Acts 2:23
2 Genesis 50:20

• God uses human wickedness without being wicked Himself

3. God gets his will done through sinners, but sinners have their own false motivation. God decreed that Assyria would bring his righteous punishment to Israel, but this is not what was on the mind of the Assyrians.

3. God gets his will done through sinners, but sinners have their own false motivation

⁷'But this is not what he intends, this is not what he has in his heart; it is in his heart to destroy, to put an end to many nations.'

God was acting in righteousness, but Assyria was acting in hatred and ambition. The Assyrians were proud of their powerful soldiers.

• God was acting in righteousness

• Assyria was acting in hatred

• The Assyrians thought their strength came just from themselves

⁸*For he says, "Are not my commanders all kings?*

⁹*Will not Calno fare like Carchemish?*

*Will not Hamath be like Arpad,
and Samaria like Damascus?"*

They were proud of the military successes they had already achieved. If the Assyrian conquered Carchemish, he can conquer Calno further south. If he took the cities of Arpad and Damascus, he can conquer the ones further to the south, Hamath and (especially) Samaria. The Assyrians thought their strength came just from themselves.

¹⁰*"As my hand seized the worthless kingdoms,
kingdoms whose images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria,
¹¹shall I not deal with Jerusalem and her images
as I dealt with Samaria and her nonentities?"*

4. Eventually God punishes those whom he has used, because of their own malicious motivations

Assyria thinks Israel's gods are not so powerful as those of the other kingdoms! Pagan people noticed the Israelites were not very successful in their idolatries!

4. Eventually God punishes those whom he has used, because of their own malicious motivations. Isaiah says:

¹²*When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, 'I will punish the king of Assyria for what the arrogance of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes have produced. ¹³For he says . . .'*

5. Great wickedness is tolerated by God temporarily

5. Great wickedness is tolerated by God temporarily. When we look out at the nations what cruelty we find: religious conflict here, tribal conflicts there, daily murders in this place, corruption in high places in that country, the murder of girl-babies here, slavery there. We are amazed and perplexed that God should tolerate it even for a few seconds.

6. Wickedness is not achieving the defeat of God

6. Wickedness is not achieving the defeat of God. God remains the King despite what is happening everywhere. The Assyrians thought they were getting their own will done.

*"By the strength of my hand I have done this,
and by my wisdom, because I have understanding.
I removed the boundaries of nations,
I plundered their treasures;
like a mighty one I subdued their kings.*

¹⁴*As one reaches into a nest,
so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations;
as men gather abandoned eggs,
so I gathered all the countries;
not one flapped a wing,
or opened its mouth to chirp."*

• God remains King

In pride Assyria reckons all its achievements to have been done by its own strength. But Isaiah has a different viewpoint:

• Any successes that came to Assyria were God-given

¹⁵*Does the axe glorify itself above him who swings it,
or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod
were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish
him who is not wood!*

God's control of the world is directed towards the needs of his kingdom

Any successes that came to Assyria were God-given. Pagan nations have no power except as it is given them from above.

God's control of the world is directed towards the needs of his kingdom. Israel needed to be humbled. God used Assyria to do the work. We must apply all of this as we look out at today's world. At certain points the church falls into

• God uses evil to humble today's world

arrogance. Perhaps it becomes arrogant towards God's Word in one part of the world. It is likely to face a century or so of spiritual dryness. Perhaps it gets proud of its own success. It may discover soon that pride comes before a fall. Perhaps it becomes racist and ill-treats others.

That section of the Christian world may find that others soon begin to return its prejudice and the measure they gave becomes the measure they get.

• We need to see God as king of the nations

God is in control of the nations. He rebukes his people here, driving them to repentance. He opens doors there, inciting them to go through the door to reach people who have no knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must get used to thinking in this way, seeing God as the king of the nations. Providence will turn against us if we turn against our heavenly Father, but God will use us – even in darkest days – if we stay faithful to him. The progress of history is in God's hand. We do not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.

• God will use us if we stay faithful to Him