

GOD'S BATTLE AXE

Jon Macon

In Isaiah 10:5, Jehovah said, "*O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.*" Assyria was going to be a tool in God's hand to accomplish His purpose in punishing His people for their wickedness. God was sending King Sennacherib and the Assyrians "against a hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets" (Isa 10:6).

Assyria and the punishment of Judah

At the time of this prophecy, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had already been destroyed by Assyria, and the "hypocritical nation" that remained was Judah. In 733 B.C., Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria had carried away captive the Israelites of Galilee, all of Naphtali, and east of Jordan (1 Chr 5:26; 2 Kgs 15:29; Isa 9:1-2). Tiglath-pileser's successor, Shalmaneser V, besieged Samaria for 3 years (2 Kgs 17:4-5; 18:9-10), from 725-722 B.C. Shalmaneser died before Samaria fell, but his brother, Sargon II, conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., and carried all the people away captive to Assyria (2 Kgs 17:6,23-41; 18:10-12). This prophecy of Isaiah 10:5-34 was given *after* the fall of Israel, because the king of Assyria says in Isaiah 10:11, "Shall I not, *as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?*" Further, this prophecy was given after Carchemish had fallen to Sargon II in 717 B.C. (Isa 10:9). Therefore, this particular king of Assyria is Sennacherib, who reigned from 705-681 B.C. He was now coming against Jerusalem and mount Zion (Isa 10:11-12; Jer 26:18-19; Mic 3:9-12). God was angry with Judah and Jerusalem for her hypocrisy (Isa 10:5), for trusting in other nations instead of in Jehovah (Isa 10:20), for taking bribes and perverting justice (Mic 3:9-12), for worshiping idols and neglecting God's law (2 Chr 29:1-11). Therefore, God had "decreed a consumption" upon Judah (Isa 10:22-23). Yes, the king of Assyria was coming: "*The Lord shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria*" (Isa 7:17). The Lord informed Judah that He would use the Assyrians as His razor to shave all their hair off (Isa 7:20)!

A limited punishment

Yet there would be a limit to what Sennacherib would do to Judah. Isaiah 8:6-8 says, "Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up upon them (Judah) the waters of the river, strong and many, even the king of Assyria, and all his glory: and he shall come up over all his channels, and go over all his banks: and he shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over, *he shall reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel.*" Indeed, in 701 B.C., Sennacherib and the Assyrians did bring a "consumption" upon Judah. They took many cities and captives (Isa 10:5-6; 36:1; 2 Kgs 18:13-16; 2 Chr 29:6-9), leaving Jerusalem as the only remaining holdout. Truly, the waters had risen up to the neck. But Judah was not going to drown as Israel had. Although the Assyrians would smite Judah "with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt," Judah was told not to be afraid because the indignation would cease (Isa 10:24-25). The Assyrian yoke and burden would

GOD'S BATTLE AXE

(continued)

be taken away (Isa 10:27). Jerusalem would *not* be destroyed by the Assyrians.

Sennacherib's pride

Even though the king of Assyria was merely an instrument in the hand of God, he boasted about his accomplishments as if he had done it on his own (Isa 10:8-11). The tool was actually boasting against the maker and user of the tool! King Sennacherib said, "*By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathers eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped*" (Isa 10:13-14; see also Isa 36:13-20; 37:21-29). Therefore, God was going to punish his "rod" because of its pride. The Lord said, "Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks*" (Isa 10:12). God asked, "*Shall the axe boast itself against him that hews therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shakes it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood*" (Isa 10:15). God then foretold the coming destruction of the Assyrians (Isa 10:16-19,26,33-34). Assyria was proud like a cedar of Lebanon (Isa 10:34; Ezek 31:3), and God said He would cut them down.

The end of Sennacherib

All of these prophecies were dramatically fulfilled in Isaiah 36-37. Like God said, in 701 B.C., the Assyrians did indeed wreak havoc throughout Judah (Isa 36:1), and then came up against Jerusalem with great pride and blasphemy against God (Isa 36:2-37:20). But like God had also foretold several years before, He now promised king Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem that the Assyrians would not prevail. In Isaiah 37:7, the Lord said, "*Behold, I will send a blast upon him, and he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.*" In Isaiah 37:33-35, God said of Sennacherib king of Assyria, "*He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.*" The prophecy of the cutting down of the Assyrians at the time of their attempted conquest of Jerusalem was dramatically fulfilled in Isaiah 37:36-37. "*Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000, and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.*" Twenty years after he had come against Jerusalem, Sennacherib himself fell by the sword at the hands of his own sons while in the act of worshiping his idols (Isa 37:38). As always, God and His word prevailed!