

God's ways are mysterious but He has good purposes for his people

God's ways in history are very mysterious but God has good purposes for his people. Paganism – in the form of the Assyrians – was apparently triumphing in Isaiah's time, but Isaiah looks forward to something very different.

The oppressor will not continue for ever. God will act in judgement against Assyria.

The oppressor will not continue forever

¹⁶Therefore the Sovereign Lord, Yahweh Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame.

Without being specific Isaiah sees disease and fire working together, disease within and fire coming from outside, both working together to destroy Assyria.

Assyria will deteriorate to nothingness, but Israel will become a brightly burning flame

Assyria will deteriorate to nothingness, but Israel will become a brightly burning flame.

¹⁷The Light of Israel will become a fire, their Holy One aflame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and his briers.

¹⁸The splendour of his forests and his gardens, it will completely destroy, as when a sick man wastes away.

¹⁹And the remaining trees of his forests will be so few that a child could write them down.

In Isaiah's day Assyria seemed to be the conqueror and Israel was threatened with extermination, but with the eye of faith Isaiah sees things the other way around. Assyria is diseased and burnt, and Israel is the flaming fire. Assyria is reduced almost to nothing. A child could count what would be left. 'The remnant' – the remaining godly people of Israel – will conquer mighty Assyria.

• Isaiah sees the situation with the eye of faith

• The 'remnant' will conquer Assyria

The victories over paganism come by faith

The victories over paganism come by faith. It is remnant-Israel that is the mighty burning fire that brings Assyria to total defeat!

²⁰In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

Isaiah envisages an Israel that has been struck down by invading forces sent by God. Yet somehow Israel's extermination is not total. There are survivors and they come to faith as never before. No longer do they rely on Assyria; instead they look to God directly. They now know that God is indeed the Holy One of Israel.

• Isaiah sees Israel struck down by invading forces sent by God

• The survivors look directly to God

²¹A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God.

• Some people in northern Israel will return to God

In northern Israel there will be some – not the entire nation – who will return to God. ('Mighty God' is the same term that we had in 9:6.) Isaiah's son Shear-yashub ('a remnant will return') was a constant reminder that Isaiah expected that the purposes of God would continue no matter how far the nation as a whole fell below its calling to be a light to lighten the gentiles. There would always be some who would turn their lives around and come back to God.

²²But your people, O Israel, will be like the sand by the sea, a remnant will return.

A full completion has been decreed, God will act in overwhelming righteousness.

²³For the Sovereign Lord, Yahweh Almighty, will carry out the end decreed upon the whole land.

•The 'remnant' will be a large number

Not only will there be a 'remnant' of northern Israelites who turn to God. Their numbers will be large! Then 'the remnant' will be a number so large that it cannot be counted – like the sand on the seashore.

• Isaiah states this as a matter of faith – hard to see how it could happen

All of this is stated by Isaiah as a matter of faith. From Isaiah's pre-Christian standpoint no one could have had any idea how it could happen. Northern Israel was soon to be destroyed so as no longer to be a nation. So when did any kind of remnant survive in northern Israel? When did the remnant ever become a mighty multitude? Only the New Testament has the answer. We remember how Jesus went to Samaria (northern Israel which the Assyrians had turned into a half-Assyrian colony), and a large number came to faith in Jesus¹. We remember too how the disciples were told to give special attention to Samaria in its evangelistic outreach². And we recall that Samaria has its own 'day of Pentecost'. When gentiles were added to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ (consisting at that time of Jews and Samaritans) to become a more-than-ever multicultural people, 'the remnant' became a number so large it could not be counted – like the sand on the seashore. The predictions of Isaiah were fulfilled in a way that surpassed anyone's expectations.

• Only the New Testament has the answer – many came to faith when Jesus visited Samaria

¹ John 4:39-42

² Acts 1:8

• Isaiah's predictions fulfilled

If God is sovereign in history, his people need have no fear

If God is sovereign in history, his people need have no fear.

²⁴Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord, Yahweh Almighty, says:

'O my people in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrians, who beat you with a rod and lift up a club against you, as Egypt did.'

If God's chastenings are temporary, his people can look for them to end

If God's chastenings are temporary, his people can look for them to end.

²⁵'For very soon my anger against you will end and my wrath will be directed to their destruction.'²⁶Yahweh Almighty will find a whip, as when he struck down Midian at the rock of Oreb; and he will raise his staff over the waters, as he did in Egypt.

• Sennacherib will be defeated

The Assyrian king Sennacherib will be defeated, as were Oreb¹ and Pharaoh².

¹ see Judges 7:25
² see Exodus 14:15-28

The enemies of God's people will be broken; the Saviour will triumph

The enemies of God's people will be broken; the Saviour will triumph.

²⁷In that day their burden will be lifted from your shoulders, their yoke from your neck; the yoke will be broken because of the oil.

oppression by Assyria would come to an end

The oppression of Israel by the Assyrians would come to an end. The last phrase (literally 'because of the oil') perhaps has the sense 'because the nation is specially dedicated to God' (anointing with oil being a sign of dedication and consecration in Old Testament times).

• Isaiah describes the Assyrian army approaching Jerusalem

*28 They enter Aiath;
they pass through Migron;
they examine their weapons at Michmash.
29 They go over the pass, and say,
'We will camp overnight at Geba.'
Ramah has panicked;
Gibeah of Saul has fled.*

Isaiah is mentioning various towns in Israel. Aiath seems to be the town known elsewhere as Ai. The picture is of the Assyrian army approaching Jerusalem. Gibeah was known for its associations with King Saul.

• He goes on to speak of the powerlessness of the Assyrian army

*30 Scream at the top of your voice,
O Daughter of Gallim!
Listen, O Laishah!
Poor Anathoth!
31 Madmenah is in flight;
the people of Gebim take cover.
32 This day they plan to halt at Nob;
they will shake their fist
at the mount of the Daughter of Zion,
at the hill of Jerusalem.*

The towns are ones which are near to Jerusalem; Nob seems to be within sight of Jerusalem itself. But now Isaiah goes on to speak of the powerlessness of the Assyrian army.

• The arrogance of the Assyrians will come to nothing

*33 See, the Sovereign Lord, Yahweh Almighty,
will lop off the boughs with great power.
The lofty trees will be felled,
the tall ones will be brought low.
34 He will cut down the forest thickets with an axe;
Lebanon will fall, chopped down by the Mighty One.*

Despite its very threatening and rapid approach, the Lord cuts it down. Isaiah 10:33–34 prepares the way for Isaiah 11:1. Lofty trees (Assyrians) are cut down, but a little twig (the Saviour in David's line) will appear. The arrogance of the Assyrians will come to nothing¹; instead the humility of the Saviour will triumph.

• The humility of the Saviour will triumph

¹ see Isaiah 36-37

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
<p><i>These specially reformatted chapters "Slices of Bread" produced by Sovereign World Trust are available in three categories as set out below</i></p>		
<p>Slices for the Nations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For pastors, libraries and colleges in those parts of the world where resources are scarce and unaffordable In the fullness of time the whole series will be made available free of charge Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or available to download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<p>Slices for Sponsors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those in more prosperous circumstances who can afford to contribute to the development of this material and its distribution with a small monthly donation The same material as Slices for the Nations Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or by download from the <i>Slices</i> web site 	<p>Slices for Everyone / Slice of the Week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those who wish to sample the material or dip into it from time to time, a proportion of the PTTB series is available free of charge Slices for Everyone (as a download) or Slice of the Week (attached to a weekly email) The remainder of the PTTB material is available to Sponsors and those eligible to receive Slices for the Nations
<p>To subscribe please contact: slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk stating which category fits your situation. Further details are at www.slices.org.uk Details of the availability of <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> books and how they may be purchased can be found on www.ibtr.org.uk</p>		