

# The Book of ISAIAH – Chapters 1-39

## Catholic Scripture Study

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**Memory Verse: *Isaiah 41:10***

*[10] Fear not, for I am with you,  
be not dismayed, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.*

## The Arrogance of Assyria (Is 10:5-19)

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### I. OVERVIEW (ISAIAH 10:5-19)

In 10:5-19 Isaiah states dramatically the twofold truth that the people (Israel) are about to feel the rod of Assyria, but that Assyria is only a rod, and as such is subject to the will and purpose of the One who swings it.

Assyria's great sin is the one which Isaiah has condemned before, namely, the sin of pride, of acting as if there were no God, of exalting oneself to the place reserved only for the Creator.

The Lord used the Assyrians as a means to punish the Israelites, supporting them as they plundered, looted, and trampled into the mud those who provoked the Lord's wrath.

The Lord also declares that punishment shall come upon Jerusalem just as it came upon all idolatrous kingdoms that had more idols than those found in Jerusalem.

The Assyrians eventually become arrogant and proud, believing that their own power and wisdom brought about their conquests and the devastation of the Israelites.

- The Lord marvels at the foolishness of the Assyrians who do not recognize they are only His instruments.

As God deals with the wickedness of Judah, one might be tempted to ask: “Who is in control; Assyria or God?” Just because God uses Assyria to punish Judah (Isaiah 10:5-6), does not mean that he has become Assyria’s God and not Judah’s God.

- God has not switched sides. Rather, Isaiah proclaims that God is in control.

As Assyria goes on the warpath of destruction, Isaiah, speaking for the Assyrian king, names the cities Assyria has conquered: Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpaf, Samaria, and Damascus.

- But Assyria is unaware that God is permitting all this to take place.

Finally the unthinkable! Isaiah prophesies that Jerusalem, the home of the Temple and centre of Israelite worship, is next on the list of cities to be conquered.

## II. ASSYRIA, GOD’S TOOL

**Read: Isaiah 10:5-11**

***[5] Ah, Assyria, the rod of my anger,  
the staff of my fury!***

***[6] Against a godless nation I send him,  
and against the people of my wrath I command him,  
to take spoil and seize plunder,  
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.***

***[7] But he does not so intend,  
and his mind does not so think;  
but it is in his mind to destroy,  
and to cut off nations not a few;***

**[8] for he says:**

**"Are not my commanders all kings?**

**[9] Is not Calno like Carchemish?**

**Is not Hamath like Arpad?**

**Is not Samaria like Damascus?**

**[10] As my hand has reached to the kingdoms of the idols  
whose graven images were greater than those of Jerusalem  
and Samaria,**

**[11] shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols  
as I have done to Samaria and her images?"**

### **A. A Godless Nation**

In verse 6 the **godless nation** is none other than Israel.

Relatively speaking, Israel is more profane and godless than Assyria because God has blessed her in a special way and established a covenant with her.

If her moral state is still higher than Assyria's, it is also true that she has fallen the father distance. So Jesus' words, "To whom much is given, much is required" (Luke 12:48), apply both to Israel and Assyria – in God's sight they are both "godless" nations.

- Jesus' words also apply to the modern so called "Christian" West.

### **B. Exceeding his Commission (10:7)**

God sent the Assyrian king against Israel to punish her, but, in his lust for power he exceeds the divine commission and intends to destroy many nations.

### **C. The Kings' Arrogant Speech (10:8-11)**

Instead of obedience to God's will, instead of merely doing his duty, the king of Assyria begins to enjoy the divine commission to chastise Israel and to follow his own imperialistic lust for power.

In verses 8-11, Isaiah speaks prophetically for the Assyrian king and demonstrates just how far he is from considering himself the servant of Jerusalem's God.

His first speech opens by claiming that his commanders are equal in military might and prestige to the rulers of whole countries, in particular the countries which he has conquered and whose kings he has in fact replaced.

He ends by threatening to do to Jerusalem what he has done to Samaria.

### III. ASSYRIA UNDER JUDGMENT (10:12-19)

#### A. Overview

When God is finished using Assyria as His instrument, He will punish Assyria for its arrogance. Assyria will then experience divine judgment. The fragility of Assyria will become apparent by the weakness of the military and the fiery destruction of its land.

God, the Holy One of Israel will do this.

In this passage, Isaiah shows that the tool is not greater than the one who uses it. Assyria's king, God's tool in this case, brags about his accomplishments, without realizing that he can accomplish nothing without God willing it.

**Note:** The "king of Assyria" here and throughout the book of Isaiah, has much more than a purely historical meaning. He is a composite character in the present chapter.

For example, Shalmaneser V destroyed Samaria in 722 BC, and Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC. Both were kings of Assyria. The "king of Assyria" in this chapter is a prophet's symbol for divine intervention in the history of his people.

**Read: Isaiah 10:12-19**

***[12] When the Lord has finished all his work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride.***

***[13] For he says: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I have removed the boundaries of peoples, and have plundered their treasures; like a bull I have brought down those who sat on thrones.***

***[14] My hand has found like a nest the wealth of the peoples; and as men gather eggs that have been forsaken so I have gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened the mouth, or chirped."***

***[15] Shall the axe vaunt itself over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!***

***[16] Therefore the Lord, the LORD of hosts, will send wasting sickness among his stout warriors, and under his glory a burning will be kindled, like the burning of fire.***

***[17] The light of Israel will become a fire, and his Holy One a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and briers in one day.***

***[18] The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land the LORD will destroy, both soul and body, and it will be as when a sick man wastes away.***

***[19] The remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down.***

## B. Assyria Will be Punished (10:12)

Verse 12 pictures a time when the sufferings of Mount Zion and Jerusalem are over and the Lord turns his attention to the “arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria.”

## C. The Axe and the Saw (10:13-14)

Assyria continues its boasting through verses 13-14, but fails to understand that it was only an axe or a saw in the hands of God. Isaiah asks, “Should Assyria exalt herself over God who was employing her?”

Such boasting on the part of one who is a mere tool in the hand of the Lord of hosts is absurd: as if an axe could tell the woodman what to chop down, or a rod the teacher which pupil to punish. It is not only absurd to talk like that: it is blasphemous.

The woodsman is the one who decides which trees to chop down, and in this case the trees are Assyrian trees. After the Lord of hosts has finished with them, ***the remnant of the trees of his forest will be so few that a child can write them down (v. 19).***

In a single day, the Lord, the Holy One who is the Light of Israel, will become a flame burning and consuming the wicked. The glory of the Assyrians will be consumed with a plague (***wasting sickness***) that will leave them wasting away.

The above most likely refers to the destruction of the Assyrian army in 701 BC (see 37:36-37), when 185,000 died in a single night.

## IV. RESTORATION OF ISRAEL PROMISED (10:20-27)

### A. Overview

The focus changes abruptly from Assyria to Israel with the promise that, since Assyria is under God’s control, the destruction which

she brings will not be total but will be subject to God's larger purposes.

When Assyria is destroyed ***the remnant of Israel*** and the survivors of the house of Jacob will return to the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. However, they will not be as many as promised Abraham, as many ***as the sand of the seashore***.

The remnant itself need not be afraid because God will destroy the Assyrians. Though the Assyrians seem to be invincible, they will be stopped before they reach Jerusalem, where they will experience the terrifying power of God.

**Read: Isaiah 10:20-27.**

***[20] In that day the remnant of Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no more lean upon him that smote them, but will lean upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.***

***[21] A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.***

***[22] For though your people Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will return. Destruction is decreed, overflowing with righteousness.***

***[23] For the Lord, the LORD of hosts, will make a full end, as decreed, in the midst of all the earth.***

***[24] Therefore thus says the Lord, the LORD of hosts: "O my people, who dwell in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrians when they smite with the rod and lift up their staff against you as the Egyptians did.***

***[25] For in a very little while my indignation will come to an end, and my anger will be directed to their destruction.***

***[26] And the LORD of hosts will wield against them a scourge, as when he smote Midian at the rock of Oreb; and his rod will be over the sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt.***

***[27] And in that day his burden will depart from your shoulder, and his yoke will be destroyed from your neck."***

### **B. In that day . . .**

***In that day*** is a broad term referring to any future time of God's judgment and/or restoration up to and including the Final Judgment. Thus, it is not necessary to limit it directly to the events of 701 BC, nor even to the events of 620-609 BC, when Assyria was finally destroyed.

Rather, here it speaks of the future time when all the punishment at the hands of the nations will be over and the purified remnant of God's people will be brought home.

### **C. The Remnant of Israel (10:20-23)**

Justice demands the destruction of many of the Israelites who had turned against the Lord. Although the Israelites had become a nation as numerous as the sands, only a remnant will remain to return home.

The prophet utilizes the name of his son Shear-Jashub ("only a remnant will return") to do two things here.

1. He wants to assure his hearers that no matter how great Assyria (and later Babylon) may be, they will not be able to destroy God's people. After all, they are only tools in God's hand and can do no more than he gives them permission to do.
  - Since God is gracious and compassionate, a remnant will survive.
2. However, *only* a remnant will survive, and the prophet stresses this with his recurring use of the word remnant. Isaiah is trying hard to guard against false expectations. No one should get so focused on the future survival as to forget the terrible judgment that precedes that survival. Thus, he insists to his hearers that

even though the destruction will not be complete, it will be thorough. It has been so **“decreed”** (10:22).

But the remnant will be different from their predecessors in at least one respect. They will no longer “rely on” (10:20), or trust, their worst enemy before they will trust “the Holy One of Israel.”

Finally the enemy will be totally destroyed; no part of the earth will ever again be overrun or oppressed by the king of Assyria (v. 23).

### **D. Deliverance from Assyria (10:24-27)**

The Lord’s anger against Zion, however, is about to cease and when it does, the Lord will destroy the Assyrians. On that day, the oppression of the Assyrians will cease and the yoke around the neck of the Israelites will be shattered.

Because Assyria will be destroyed the people of Israel need not live in fear. When God’s purposes for using Assyria are complete, Assyria will disappear from the scene, and the Israelites should make their plans with that fact in mind.

### **E. God’s Power to Protect**

In 10:26 the prophet turns to two experiences from the past as confirmation of the Lord’s power to protect his people from massive threats.

Whether it was the multitude of Midianite troops led by Oreb (Judges 7:25) or Egypt’s chariot corps, the finest in the world at the time of the Exodus, neither was any match for the power of the Lord Almighty.

Because of that, the heavy “yoke” of oppression that the Assyrian kings used to boast about putting around the necks of conquered peoples will be broken (10:27).

## V. JERUSALEM IS SPARED (10:28-34)

### A. Overview

The following passage describes an army's relentless approach to Jerusalem. The army progresses southward from a point some fifteen miles north of Jerusalem until it finally stands overlooking the Holy City.

The places along the invader's route are named: ***he has come to Ai'ath; he has passed through Migron, at Michmash he stores his baggage . . .***

The last place, ***Nob***, is certainly one of the hills around Jerusalem, perhaps the Mount of Olives, or Mount Scopus.

Some commentators believe that Isaiah is describing, prophetically, the attack on Jerusalem by the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BC, in which Jerusalem is spared, just barely, by divine intervention.

Historically, that attack came up from Lachish southwest of Jerusalem.

According to the account in Isaiah 36-37, in the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and took them (36:1). But Jerusalem survived:

***As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,  
so the lord is round about his people (Psalm 125:2).***

**Read: Isaiah 10:28-34**

***He has gone up from Rimmon,  
[28] he has come to Aiath;***

*he has passed through Migron,  
at Michmash he stores his baggage;  
[29] they have crossed over the pass,  
at Geba they lodge for the night;  
Ramah trembles,  
Gib'e-ah of Saul has fled.  
[30] Cry aloud, O daughter of Gallim!  
Hearken, O Laishah!  
Answer her, O An'athoth!  
[31] Madme'nah is in flight,  
the inhabitants of Gebim flee for safety.  
[32] This very day he will halt at Nob,  
he will shake his fist  
at the mount of the daughter of Zion,  
the hill of Jerusalem.  
[33] Behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts  
will lop the boughs with terrifying power;  
the great in height will be hewn down,  
and the lofty will be brought low.  
[34] He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an axe,  
and Lebanon with its majestic trees will fall.*

## **B. The Enemy at the City Gates**

So near to Jerusalem has the Assyrian come that he may now defy it from where he is. **Nob** was very close to the Holy City.

This day the enemy will take a stand at Nob, possibly within sight of Jerusalem, there to make ready for the attack upon the Holy City. Here he will rest and regain strength for the attack.

Now he can shake his hand in threat against Jerusalem. He is ready for final action.

- The power of the world is aligned against the city of our God.

Rapidly the enemy comes. He chooses many approaches in order to suddenly overwhelm the defenders. The blow is ready to fall, but the outcome is known. God is in the midst of the city, and no world power can be victorious against the **LORD** of Hosts who dwells in Zion.

- The LORD of hosts is the ruler of the world – *not* Tiglath-pileser or Sargon or Sennacherib or any modern dictator.
- The earthly Zion may go, but the Zion of the people of God abides forever.

Will the blow fall? Will Assyria reach Jerusalem and surprise and destroy her? We're ready to hear of her victorious attack, but Isaiah interrupts our expectation.

Look! The Lord of Hosts is again before us. He will act. The Lord has allowed Assyria to come almost to the gates of Jerusalem. But the Lord has her in his control and is now ready to act.

In verses 33-34 we now see the enemy no longer as a mighty approaching army, but rather as a forest.

### **C. The Destruction of Mighty Assyria (10:33-34)**

Finally (vs. 33-34) the awesome fate of Assyria is described as the destruction of a great forest of majestic trees. The LORD of Hosts will take an axe and cut down the powerful, well-established leaders of an empire that had survived for centuries and had spread all over the world.

Even her most magnificent and precious achievements, her “cedars of Lebanon,” will be destroyed.

As in vs. 16-19, they will be *no* remnant; not even a stump will survive from that proud and evil forest.

**Read verses 16-19 again!**

# Application: Contemporary Significance

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## VI. GOD'S LORDSHIP OVER HISTORY AND HUMAN PRIDE

### A. Recent History

When we think of God's lordship over the nations today two great examples in the lifetime of some of us come easily to mind:

1. The fall of the mighty Soviet empire and the humbling of Russia in the last twenty years and,
2. The defeat and destruction of Nazi Germany in WWII (1945).

The parallel to what Isaiah is talking about here is startling. The Holocaust may well be seen as a modern parallel to the Babylonian Exile.

Then, as now, a mighty power set itself to destroy the people of God. In the case of Assyria and Babylon, they were allowed to succeed to the extent they did only because God permitted it as a source of discipline and punishment for the unbelief of those people.

Is it possible that this is the case with Nazi Germany? Yet if Germany was a tool in the hand of God, it certainly did not see itself as such. Like Babylon and Assyria, it saw itself as supreme in itself, with the power and therefore the right to destroy whoever it wished.

But like Assyria and Babylon, Germany was terribly destroyed and God's Jewish people not only survived but prospered.

- No nation can set itself up a superior to God and survive.

### B. Today

Will the United States and the Western world learn this lesson before it is too late?

- What is it that God wants to do through us in the world today?
- Will we make any serious attempt to discover that?
- And if we do, will we carry out all tasks in humility, recognizing the terrible risks of pride?

The history of nations in the Christian West is not encouraging in this respect. One after another has come to power proclaiming its dependence on God, and one after another has departed the stage in disgrace, having come to believe that human beings are ultimate in themselves.

- Pride is the ultimate enemy, both of nations and of individuals.

The tendency is to focus on ourselves as both the source and end of our lives. This is what St. Paul talks about in Romans 1:21ff:

***So they are without excuse;***

***For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.***

***Claiming to be wise, they became fools . . .***

***Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,***

***Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.***

Having put ourselves in the place of God we then create a religious system to support this tragic and fatal reversal of reality. The end is the worship of the creation as an act of self-worship. And so:

- God is made in our image and can be changed as necessary to support that image.

We *must* worship something outside of ourselves to give ourselves any sense of significance. Thus, having already rejected a God who calls for surrender, the modern descent into the occult is wholly predictable.

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## Preparation for Isaiah Week 12

### The Shoot from Jesse

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1. Read Isaiah, Chapter 11
2. Read Chapter 3, pgs 27-28, in *Come and See Catholic Bible Study – Isaiah*.
3. Answer questions 12-15 in *Come and See* (pgs. 31-32).
4. Catechism of the Catholic Church – CCC 1831 – The Gifts of the Spirit.