

WHAT SECULARIZED CHRISTIANS MAY EXPECT FROM THE LORD

10 ⁵O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my indignation! ⁶I will send him against a godless nation. I will commission him against a people who incite my wrath, to seize the spoil and snatch the prey, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. ⁷However, this is not what he intends, nor what he has in mind; his purpose is to destroy and bring to an end many nations. ⁸He says, "Are not all of my commanders kings? ⁹Has not the fate of Calno been the same as Carchemish? Has not the fate of Hamath been the same as Arpad, and that of Samaria the same as Damascus? ¹⁰As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols—kingdoms whose sacred images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria—¹¹shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols the same as I have done to Samaria and her idols?" ¹²Therefore, when the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will declare, "I will punish the king of Assyria for what his stout heart [has expressed] and for the pomp of his haughtiness; ¹³because he has said, 'By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding. I have removed the boundaries of the nations and have plundered their treasures. With the strength of a bull I have brought down those who sit on thrones. ¹⁴As a man reaches into a nest, so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations; as a man gathers abandoned eggs, so have I gathered up all the countries. There was none who flapped a wing or opened its beak or [even] chirped.' ¹⁵Should the axe raise itself above the one who swings it, or should the saw magnify itself above the one who uses it?—as if a rod were to wield the one who lifts it up, or if a staff were to pick up the one who is not made of wood!" ¹⁶Therefore, the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, will send a devastating disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame. ¹⁷The Light of Israel will become a fire, and their Holy One will be a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and briars. ¹⁸He will consume the splendor of his forest and his fertile fields—both body and soul; it will be like when a sick man wastes away. ¹⁹The remaining trees of his forest will be so few that [even] a child could count them.

²⁰On that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely upon the one who struck them down; rather, they will truly rely upon Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel. ²¹Only a remnant will return—yes, the remnant of Jacob—to the Mighty God; ²²for even if your people, O Israel, were as numerous as the sand of the seashore, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, [a destruction that is] overwhelming and righteous. ²³Utter destruction, as has been decreed, shall the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, execute upon the whole land.

²⁴Therefore, this is what the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, says, O my people, who dwell in Zion, do not be afraid of the Assyrian, even though he may beat you with a rod and lift up a club against you, like Egypt [did to your forefathers]—²⁵because in a very brief time my indignation against you will be completed, and then my anger will be focused on his destruction. ²⁶Jehovah of hosts will lash him with a whip, like the time when he struck down Midian at the rock of Oreb. [Jehovah of hosts] will raise his staff over the sea, he will lift it up the way he did in Egypt. ²⁷On that day his burden will be lifted from your shoulders and his yoke will be lifted from your neck—the yoke will be broken because you will have become so fat!

²⁸He approaches Aiath, he has passed through Migron; he stores his supplies at Micmash. ²⁹They have gone through the mountain pass, and they say, "We will camp over night at Geba." Ramah trembles. Gibeah of Saul has fled. ³⁰Cry out, O daughter of Gallim! Be on guard, O Laishah! O poor Anathoth! ³¹Madmenah is in flight! The people of Gebim flee for safety! ³²This very day he will reach Nob. He will shake his fist at the mountains of the daughter of Zion, at the hill of Jerusalem. ³³Look! The Lord, Jehovah of hosts, will lop off the boughs with a terrifying stroke; the tall trees shall be cut down, and the lofty shall be brought low. ³⁴He will cut down the thickets of the forest with an iron axe, and Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One. (Isa. 10:5-34)

Introduction

What does it mean to be "secularized?"

It means to be focused on this present world and this present earthly existence, rather than on Christ and the kingdom of God. It means to ignore the standards of God and conduct your life by the standards of the world—such standards as: "Look Out for Yourself!" "If it feels right, do it!" "Just do it!" It means to be self-centered and man-centered rather than Christ-centered—pursuing the goals of personal happiness, material prosperity, and self-gratifying pleasure as the supreme objectives of life.

When the Old Testament people of God became secularized the LORD employed very severe measures against them. If we allow ourselves to become secularized, we may expect the LORD to employ similar measures against us. As we come to the tenth chapter of Isaiah, let us soberly consider the subject, What Secularized Christians May Expect from the LORD.

I. The LORD May Employ the Godless against Us (Isa. 10:5-11,13-14,24b, 28-32)

In verses 8-11 we are given insight into the mind of this great military power of Assyria that was now advancing against Judah. We hear him say, "*Are not all of my commanders kings?*" (vs. 8.) Here is godless arrogance and great confidence in his own might. "*Has not the fate of Calno been the same as Arpad, and that of Samaria the same as Damascus?*" (vs. 9.) He now proceeds to list his impressive triumphs, further fueling his sense of invincibility: "*As my hand seized the kingdoms of the idols—kingdoms whose sacred images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria—¹¹shall I not do to Jerusalem and her idols the same as I have done to Samaria and her idols?*" (vs. 10-11.) He foolishly equates the God of Judah with the idols of the pagan nations he has already conquered.

In verses 13-14 the LORD reveals to us still more of the Assyrian's heart: "*he has said, 'By the strength of my hand I have done this, and by my wisdom, because I have understanding.'*" He attributes his victories to his own strength and wisdom: "*I have removed the boundaries of the nations and have plundered their treasures.*

With the strength of a bull I have brought down those who sit on thrones." The Assyrian gloats over his triumphs. It was God who set the boundaries of the nations, note Acts 17:26, *"From one man he made every nation of men, so that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."* But the Assyrian boasts that he has removed those boundaries—the Assyrians were the first empire to engage in the deportation and re-colonizing of their conquered peoples on a massive scale. He goes on to declare, *"As a man reaches into a nest, so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations; as a man gathers abandoned eggs, so have I gathered up all the countries. There was none who flapped a wing or opened its beak or even chirped"* (vs. 14.) He has become intoxicated by the swiftness and ease of his conquests. He describes himself as a man stealing eggs from an unattended bird's nest—indeed, with the exception of Egypt, Tyre, and Arabia, the Assyrians had conquered the whole of the Middle East.

Verses 28-32 describe the ruthless and irresistible advance of this arrogant and godless military power into the land of Judah and to the very gates of Jerusalem:

He approaches Aiath, he has passed through Migron; he stores his supplies at Micmash. ²⁹They have gone through the mountain pass, and they say, "We will camp over night at Geba." Ramah trembles. Gibeah of Saul has fled. ³⁰Cry out, O daughter of Gallim! Be on guard, O Laishah! O poor Anathoth! ³¹Madmenah is in flight! The people of Gebim flee for safety! ³²This very day he will reach Nob: he will shake his fist at the mountains of the daughter of Zion, at the hill of Jerusalem. (Isa. 10:28-32)

But take careful note of verses 5-6,

"O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my indignation! ⁶I will send him against a godless nation. I will commission him against a people who incite my wrath, to seize the spoil and snatch the prey, and to trample them down like mud in the streets." (Isa. 10:5-6)

The LORD identifies the Assyrian as *"the rod of my anger"* sent against a *"godless (secular) nation."* The LORD declares, *"I will commission him against a people who incite my wrath, to seize the spoil and snatch the prey."* This great and ruthless foreign power is an instrument in God's hands, being used to chastise and judge those people who had been called to be God's people but who had allowed themselves to become secularized.

The LORD brings everything back into proper perspective by asking several rhetorical questions: *"Should the axe raise itself above the one who swings it, or should the saw magnify itself above the one who uses it?—as if a rod were to wield the one who lifts it up, or if a staff were to pick up the one who is not made of wood!"* (vs. 15.) The Assyrian's boasting is as ridiculous as the scene of an axe boasting against the lumber jack who uses the axe, or a wooden staff picking up the man

who holds that staff—i.e., the Assyrian is merely an instrument in the hand of the LORD, in his godless pride he has foolishly turned everything upside down in self-delusion. The LORD now goes on to reveal what He shall do to the Assyrians because of their ungodly pride and arrogance:

Therefore, the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, will send a devastating disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame. ¹⁷The Light of Israel will become a fire, and their Holy One will be a flame; in a single day it will burn and consume his thorns and briers. ¹⁸He will consume the splendor of his forest and his fertile fields—both body and soul; it will be like when a sick man wastes away. ¹⁹The remaining trees of his forest will be so few that even a child could count them. (Isa. 10:16-19)

Because of his arrogance and self-delusion, the LORD will cause the Assyrian's army, which was the best in the world of that day, to be wasted away like men consumed by disease (vs. 16a.) He will set the Assyrian ablaze like a great bonfire; the LORD Himself ("*the Light of Israel*") will be "the match" that ignites the Assyrian into a blazing fire (vs. 17.) The consumption of this great military power is now compared to the consumption of an entire forest and fruitful field by a raging forest fire (vs. 18.) Finally, the once mighty and proud Assyrian is compared to a burned out forest that has so few trees left standing that even a young child is able to count them (vs. 19.) Isaiah 37:36-37 records the fulfillment of this prophecy. When the mighty Assyrian army besieged the city of Jerusalem, "*the angel of Jehovah went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies! ³⁷So Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and withdrew. He returned to Nineveh and stayed there.*"

But returning to the main point before us, we must be careful to understand that when His Old Testament people became secularized, the LORD resorted to severe measures against them, even going so far as to employ a ruthless and godless enemy against them: "*O Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my indignation! ⁶I will send him against a godless nation ... to seize the spoil and snatch the prey, and to trample them down like mud in the streets*" (vs. 5-6.)

If we allow ourselves to become secularized (as individual Christians and as the church of Jesus Christ), we may expect the LORD to resort to severe measures against us, even employing the ruthless and the godless against us. Consider the comment of an old Russian Christian when the Communists took control of his country: "This has happened to us because we have forgotten God."

II. The LORD's Purpose Is to Reform and Restore Us (Isa. 10:20-21)

Verse 20 speaks about the day when all these things shall befall the people of God. (Note: This prophecy was written prior to the actual invasion of Judah by the Assyrian armies.)

In foretelling what is about to befall the nation of Judah, the LORD also foretells the effect these severe measures shall have upon His people:

“On that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely upon the one who struck them down; rather, they will truly rely upon Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel. ²¹Only a remnant will return—yes, the remnant of Jacob—to the Mighty God” (Isa. 10:20-21.)

Judah’s present sense of self-reliance and reliance upon men—they *“will no longer rely upon the one who struck them down”* is a reference to Ahaz and the leaders of Judah initially calling upon Assyria for deliverance from Syria and Israel—shall be replaced by a genuine reliance upon the LORD their God. These people shall prove to truly be the people of God by returning to the LORD their God, the One from whom they had departed (vs. 21.)

Note: While verses 20-21 contain the promise that *“a remnant”* shall return unto the LORD, verses 22-23 emphasize that it will **only** be a remnant. The LORD has determined to visit the nation with His righteous judgment, even if the nation were a vast, innumerable host, as numerous as the sand of the sea, that would not deter nor prevent the LORD from accomplishing His judgment against it.

This is the point we must be careful to take to heart: When His Old Testament people became secularized, the LORD resorted to severe measures against them, but He did so with the gracious intention of reforming and restoring His people to Himself.

If we allow ourselves to become secularized, we may expect the LORD to resort to severe measures against us, but we must understand that the purpose of those measures is to reform and restore us to Himself. In this regard, note the testimony of the Psalmist: *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word ... ⁷⁵I know, O Jehovah, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me”* (Psl. 119:67,75.)

III. The LORD May Need to Resort to Severe Measures before He Can Comfort Us **(Isa. 10:24-27,33-34)**

Verse 24 begins with the word *“Therefore.”* Because of the beneficial effect His severe measures will have upon His people, causing them to return to Him (vs. 20-21,) the LORD is now able to address the following words of comfort to them.

The LORD reassures His people of their status with Him (*“O My people”*) and exhorts them to *“not be afraid of the Assyrian, even though he may beat you with a rod and lift up a club against you”* (vs. 24.) When the LORD finds it necessary to resort to severe measures, and when those measures have had their beneficial

effect of turning His people back to the LORD their God, then there is the need for comfort and assurance, and the LORD ministers such to His repentant children.

In verses 25-27 the LORD gives the following assurance to His people:

... in a very brief time my indignation against you will be completed, and then my anger will be focused on his destruction. ²⁶Jehovah of hosts will lash him with a whip, like the time when he struck down Midian at the rock of Oreb. [Jehovah of hosts] will raise his staff over the sea, he will lift it up the way he did in Egypt. ²⁷On that day his burden will be lifted from your shoulders and his yoke will be lifted from your neck—the yoke will be broken because you will have become so fat! (Isa. 10:25-27)

The LORD will, in due time, bring His judgment upon the Assyrian empire—He did so by causing Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians to conquer them. He will cause His people to be delivered from the Assyrian oppression: *“his burden will be lifted from your shoulders and his yoke will be lifted from your neck.”* He will cause His people to once again experience His abundant blessing: *“the yoke will be broken because you have become so fat!”*—the fatness that results from the LORD’s blessing shall cause the yoke to burst from off the neck of His people.

This is the point we must be careful to appreciate: When His Old Testament people became secularized, the LORD resorted to severe measures against them; and it was only after those measures had their desired effect upon the people—turning their hearts and lives back to the LORD their God—that the LORD could minister His comfort, assurance and promise of blessing. If we allow ourselves to become secularized, we may expect the LORD to resort to severe measures against us; and it is only when we turn back to Him in repentance that we will find Him ministering His divine comfort, assurance and blessing to us.

Conclusion

To what degree have our lives become secularized?

If we find that we have allowed ourselves to become secularized, and if we do not take the necessary steps to correct the situation, (once again giving the LORD the pre-eminence in our lives, returning to a Christ-centered outlook and life,) we may expect the LORD to employ severe measures against us.

If He should find it necessary to do so, may we recognize His good and gracious intention; namely, to reform us and restore us to Himself, note Hebrews 12:5b-6a, *“May we not forget the word of encouragement that addresses us as sons: My son, do not disregard the LORD’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the Lord disciplines those whom he loves.”*