

FOUR THINGS THAT MAKE GOD ANGRY

9⁸The Lord has sent a message against Jacob; it will fall upon Israel. ⁹All the people will experience it; namely, Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, those who say with pride and arrogant hearts, ¹⁰“The bricks have crumbled, but we will rebuild with stone cut [out of the quarry]; the sycamore trees have been cut down, but we will replace them with cedars.” ¹¹Therefore Jehovah will strengthen Rezin’s foes against them, and will stir up their enemies against them. ¹²The Syrians from the east and the Philistines from the west shall devour all of Israel with their mouths wide open. Yet, despite all this, [Jehovah’s] anger is not pacified, his hand is still raised against them. ¹³But the people still have not returned to the one who struck them, nor have they sought Jehovah of hosts. ¹⁴Therefore, in a single day Jehovah will cut off from Israel both “the head” and “the tail,” both “the palm branch” and “the reed”— ¹⁵the elders and prominent men are “the head,” and the prophets who teach lies are “the tail.” ¹⁶[All this will happen] because those who lead these people cause them to go astray, and those who are being led will be destroyed. ¹⁷Therefore the Lord will take no pleasure in their young men, nor will he take pity on the fatherless and widows, because everyone is godless and wicked, and every mouth utters folly. Yet, despite all this [retribution],[Jehovah’s] anger is not pacified, his hand is still raised [against them]—¹⁸because their wickedness burns like a fire, it consumes briars and thorns, it sets ablaze the thickets of the forest, and their ashes roll upward in a column of smoke. ¹⁹By the wrath of Jehovah of hosts the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire—no one will spare his brother. ²⁰They will devour what is at their right side, but still be hungry; they will eat up what is on their left side, but still not be satisfied. Each of them will “eat the flesh of his own arm”— ²¹Manasseh will devour Ephraim, and Ephraim will devour Manasseh, and both of them will turn against Judah. Yet, despite all this [retribution], [Jehovah’s] anger is not pacified, his hand is still raised [against them].

***10** Woe to those who make unjust laws and those who record mischievous decisions—²intended to deprive the powerless of justice and to rob the poor among my people of their rights, so that widows may be their spoil and they may plunder the orphans. ³Now what will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes upon you from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you find a secure place to leave your wealth? ⁴There will be nothing else to do but cringe among the captives or fall among the slain. Yet, despite all this [retribution], [Jehovah’s] anger is not pacified, his hand is still raised [against them]. (Isa. 9:8-10:4)*

Introduction

What makes you angry? Have you ever heard about an injustice or an act of wrongdoing and said, “That makes me angry”?

Let me tell you what happened to Jackie Poulos: In 1975 Jackie was in an auto accident that left her paralyzed. Rather than supporting her, her husband filed for

divorce and took the children with him. (*POWER*, 5/15/83) Doesn't that make you angry?

Let me tell you what happened to Sharon Brani: Sharon had been a faithful public school teacher for 14 years with an excellent reputation in the community. Then one day she was falsely and maliciously accused of child abuse and a permanent shadow was cast over her reputation. (*POWER*, 5/27/90) Doesn't that make you angry?

When we witness acts of injustice or wrongdoing it should make us angry! After all, we have been created in the image of God with the moral capacity to respond to right and wrong.

Some Christians think it is wrong to ever become angry. On the contrary, the Bible says anger is wrong only if it is for the wrong reason or if it is handled in the wrong way, namely, when it is allowed to ferment into bitterness or the taking of personal revenge.

Some people are appalled to hear that God gets angry. They prefer to view Him as some sort of neutral impersonal cosmic force, or as a benevolent grandfather figure who tolerates any and every form of moral offense with a condescending acceptance. On the contrary, the LORD God is a highly personal moral being who is aroused to anger when He beholds injustice or wrongdoing. Look at your own reaction to injustice or wrongdoing, especially when it is perpetrated against yourself. Observe how you react. Now remember that you react in this way because you are a moral being created in the image of God. Now you can gain a better understanding of how God as an absolute moral being reacts to injustice and wrongdoing.

From the passage of Scripture presently before us, we learn that when the LORD sees a people reject His law and defy His gracious chastening, His righteous anger is aroused against them. Because the LORD is a God who possesses a righteous anger, let us be diligent to abstain from those attitudes and practices that arouse His righteous indignation, so that we do not encounter His anger.

I. Let Us Abstain from the Spirit of Defiant Pride (Isa. 9:8-12)

In Isaiah 7:5-8 the LORD had declared that He would oppose Israel's ungodly alliance with Syria in their ungodly aim to destroy the southern kingdom of Judah:

[Do not become fainthearted] because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have planned evil against you, saying, ⁶Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it. ⁷This is what the Lord Jehovah says, Their plan will not be established, neither will it be accomplished—⁸because the head of Syria is [only] Damascus, and the head of

Damascus is [only] Rezin. Furthermore, within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to any longer be a people. (Isa. 7:5-8)

Now Israel is beginning to experience the LORD's opposition to their evil course; perhaps by this time the Assyrians had begun their advance into the land of Israel. But what is Israel's reaction to this calamity ordained by God in His opposition to their sinful endeavor to conquer Judah? Isaiah 9:8-10 informs us:

The Lord has sent a message against Jacob; it will fall upon Israel. ⁹All the people will experience it; namely, Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, those who say with pride and arrogant hearts, ¹⁰"The bricks have crumbled, but we will rebuild with stone cut out of the quarry; the sycamore trees have been cut down, but we will replace them with cedars." (Isa. 9:8-10)

The nation of Israel exhibits a spirit of pride and arrogance; they are described as speaking "*with pride and arrogant hearts,*" (literally, "*greatness of heart;*" i.e.; stout, hard, defiant hearts.) Their heart is swollen with arrogance, self-determination, and defiance. Far from being humbled and becoming repentant as a result of the chastening judgments of the LORD, they are resolutely determined not to give in but to resist. They are determined to withstand God and rebuild on an even grander scale: "*The bricks have crumbled, but we will rebuild with stone cut out of the quarry; the sycamore trees have been cut down, but we will replace them with cedars.*"

How do we react to God's chastening in our lives? Like these Israelites, do we stubbornly resist God, refusing to admit wrongdoing, refusing to yield to God's will? Like these Israelites, do we foolishly think that we can withstand God and then rebuild a life in defiance of God? Let us consider the words of Job 9:4b; "*Who has hardened himself against [the LORD] and prospered?*"

Therefore, because of this spirit of defiant pride and arrogance in the face of His former judgments, the LORD will now bring upon them even greater judgments: "*Therefore Jehovah will strengthen Rezin's foes against them, and will stir up their enemies against them. ¹²The Syrians from the east and the Philistines from the west shall devour all of Israel with their mouths wide open" (vs. 11-12.) "Jehovah will strengthen Rezin's foes against them." Note: The pronoun "them" is a reference to Israel—the LORD will not only allow the Assyrians (defined as "*Rezin's foes*") to defeat Syria, He will allow them to defeat Israel as well—literally, they will be "*set up on high against [Israel].*" Consequently, the Syrians, now under the control of Assyria, would conquer the ten northern tribes of Israel—furthermore, the Philistines would attack the two southern tribes of Israel, namely, Judah—as is described in 2 Chronicles 28:16-19. Thus, "*all of Israel*" would suffer at the hands of foreign aggressors. (Note: This passing reference to the Philistines' attack against Judah serves as a warning to the southern tribes that they, too, are not without sin and therefore should not view the impending judgment against Israel with a sense of self-righteous satisfaction.)*

Two things become evident from this. First, the very nation that had been Israel's ally, the nation of Syria, now becomes an aggressor against her since she has succumbed to the Assyrian invasion. Second, the two southern tribes that compose the nation of Judah are not without sin; on the contrary, they, too, shall suffer the consequence for their own pride and wrong doing.

Isaiah now goes on to declare, "*Yet, despite all this, [Jehovah's] anger is not pacified, his hand is still raised [against them]*" (9:12b.) That is to say, because of the people's arrogant defiance in the face of the LORD's chastening judgments (note verse 13, His anger is not pacified—because His acts of judgment have met with resistance rather than repentance, the LORD will continue to set Himself against these people who persist in their sin. Let us take to heart the lesson: If we do not give in to the LORD, He will not give up against us.

Let us abstain from the spirit of defiant pride, because such an attitude meets with the LORD's righteous anger. In contrast to defiant pride, let us exhibit the attitude of humility commended to us in 1 Peter 5:5b-6,

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another; because "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." "Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the appointed time. (1 Pet. 5:5b-6)

II. Let Us Abstain from the Spirit that Refuses Correction (Isa. 9:13-17)

In spite of what they have thus far suffered, the people have not turned to Him who has struck them (vs. 13.) In administering His chastening, the LORD's design and desire was to bring these people back to Him in repentance and restoration; as His discipline accomplished in the life of the Psalmist:

Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I obey your word ... ⁷¹It was good for me to have been afflicted, so that I may learn your statutes ... ⁷⁵I know, O Jehovah, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. (Psl. 119:67,71,75)

Their forefathers in the days of the Judges turned back to the LORD their God when He administered His discipline: *Again the people of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of Jehovah, and for seven years he delivered them into the hands of the Midianites ... ⁶And Israel was brought very low because of the Midianites; and the people of Israel cried to Jehovah. (Judg. 6:1,6)* But unlike their forefathers, this generation has shown itself to be incorrigible—incapable of learning from the correction the LORD brings into their lives, demonstrating a refusal to be reformed.

How do we respond to God's disciplinary work? Do we have a tender heart towards God, or a hardened heart? Do we have a teachable spirit, or an

incorrigible spirit? Are we sensitive to the LORD's directives (from His Word as it is read, preached, or administered,) or are we indifferent and callous to those sacred directives? Are we careful not to offend the LORD, and quick to repent when we have offended Him, or are we unconcerned about our behavior and what response it will elicit from the LORD? When we have gone our own way and suffered the consequence, has that experience made us very sensitive to listen to the LORD from now on? Or do we habitually go our own way, failing to see or acknowledge any connection between our course of behavior and the painful consequences we incurred?

Consequently, due to Israel's incorrigibility, *"in a single day Jehovah will cut off from Israel both "the head" and "the tail," both "the palm branch" and "the reed" (vs.14.) Because of their incorrigible spirit in the face of God's partial judgments, the LORD will enact a total judgment against these people, cutting off "both "the head" and "the tail;" He will do so with incredible swiftness—"in a single day."*

As verses 15-16 indicate, the political and religious leaders are held to blame for the moral and spiritual state of the nation: *"the elders and prominent men are "the head," and the prophets who teach lies are "the tail."* ¹⁶*[All this will happen] because those who lead these people cause them to go astray, and those who are being led will be destroyed."*

The political leaders supported the popular practices of injustice and made no effort to enforce God's moral law: *"Woe to those who make unjust laws and those who record mischievous decisions—²intended to deprive the powerless of justice and to rob the poor among my people of their rights, so that widows may be their spoil and they may plunder the orphans."* (Isa. 10:1-2.) The religious leaders acquiesced to the people's desire and proclaimed a message of peace and immunity from judgment, instead of calling for the repentance that would result in true peace and communion with God:

... they are a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not listen to the law of Jehovah; ¹⁰[children who] say to the seers, Do not see [any more visions]; and to the prophets, Do not prophesy to us what is right, tell us things that will make us comfortable, prophesy delusions. ¹¹Get out of our way, get off the path, stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel! (Isa. 30:9-11)

But, as 9:16b indicates, the people themselves are also held accountable for their conduct: *"those who lead these people cause them to go astray, and those who are being led will be destroyed."* Note, also, 9:17b; *"everyone is godless and wicked, and every mouth utters folly."*

What about us? Do we prefer preaching that concentrates solely on the love of God—a preaching that allows us to feel comfortable with God while still practicing our sins? Do we realize how dangerous and how deadly such a situation can be? Will we pray for our preachers and teachers to be like the

Apostle Paul who did not shrink back from declaring the whole counsel of God? Will we pray that the LORD will give to each of us a heart that desires the whole counsel of God, receives that counsel, and submits to it unto the glory of God?

Let us abstain from the spirit that refuses correction, because such an attitude meets with the Lord's righteous anger. In contrast to an incorrigible spirit, let us exhibit an attitude of meekness: *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. ⁹Do not be like the horse or the mule"* (Psl. 32:8-9a)—the horse is known for being headstrong and defiant; the mule is known for being stubborn and resistant.

III. Let Us Abstain from the Unrestrained Passion for Wickedness (Isa. 9:18-21)

In 9:18 the wickedness and ungodliness of the nation is portrayed as a great wild fire that is raging out of control—this unbridled passion for wickedness is raging through the society, threatening to consume everything: *"[their] wickedness burns like a fire, it consumes briars and thorns, it sets ablaze the thickets of the forest, and their ashes roll upward in a column of smoke."*

Note 9:17b, where the people are described in the following terms: they are *"godless"* (i.e.; secular,) as opposed to being sacred; they are world-centered and self-centered, as opposed to be God-centered. They are *"wicked,"* practicing the sins of dishonesty and immorality, as opposed to living in fellowship with their God and with respect for and obedience to His holy law. They *"utter folly,"* i.e.; they propose foolish and ungodly ideas. They have lost the sense of living in the presence of God, of looking to God for guidance, of acknowledging their accountability to God and dependence upon God; consequently, their society ignores God and advocates folly.

Verses 19-21a portrays the consequence of a society giving free rein to an unbridled passion for wickedness—God's judgment takes the form of allowing the society to consume itself:

By the wrath of Jehovah of hosts the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire—no one will spare his brother. ²⁰They will devour what is at their right side, but still be hungry; they will eat up what is on their left side, but still not be satisfied. Each of them will "eat the flesh of his own arm"—²¹Manasseh will devour Ephraim, and Ephraim will devour Manasseh, and both of them will turn against Judah. (Isa. 9:19-21a)

The picture is that of a prairie fire that ravages the land and leaves men desperate for food; and in this condition the people exhibit utter selfishness: every man for himself. The passage is referring to the civil strife that characterized the ten northern tribes that composed the nation of Israel in the

last days of its history (note 2 Kings 15:23-25,29-30,) as well as the conflict between Israel and Judah:

In the fiftieth year of Azariah [i.e.; Uzziah] king of Judah, Pekahiah son of Menahem became king of Israel in Samaria, and he reigned two years. ²⁴Pekahiah did evil in the eyes of Jehovah. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. ²⁵One of his chief officers, Pekah son of Remaliah, conspired against him. Taking fifty men of Gilead with him, he assassinated Pekahiah ... in the citadel of the royal palace at Samaria. So Pekah killed Pekahiah and succeeded him as king ... ²⁹In the time of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria came ... He took Gilead and Galilee, including all the land of Naphtali, and deported the people to Assyria. ³⁰Then Hoshea son of Elah conspired against Pekah son of Remaliah. He attacked and assassinated him, and then succeeded him as king in the twentieth year of Jotham son of Uzziah. (2 Kgs. 15:23-25,29-30)

The whole structure of society (civic and economic), which should be based upon morality and integrity, fear of God and respect for one's neighbor, collapses into anarchy and chaos.

Let us abstain from the unrestrained passion for wickedness, because such conduct meets with the LORD's righteous anger. In contrast to the unrestrained passion for wickedness, let us exhibit the spirit and conduct commended to us in 1 Peter 4:1-3,

Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, also fortify yourselves with the same attitude, because he who suffered in the flesh is done with sin. ²As a result, he does not live the remainder of his earthly life for evil human desires, but for the will of God. ³You have spent enough time in the past doing what the Gentiles choose to do: living for debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. (1 Pet. 4:1-3)

IV. Let Us Abstain from the Practice of Social Injustice (Isa. 10:1-4)

In 10:1 woe is pronounced against those who write unrighteous and perverse laws: *"Woe to those who make unjust laws and those who record mischievous decisions."* The reference is to those who seek to use the legal system for their own selfish ends—instead of enacting justice.

According to 10:2, the design and effect of such practices is to take unfair advantage of those who are socially and politically powerless and helpless: *"Woe to those who make unjust laws and those who record mischievous decisions—²intended to deprive the powerless of justice and to rob the poor among my people of their rights, so that widows may be their spoil and they may plunder the orphans."*

What about ourselves? Would we dare to use the courts of justice for our own personal gain? Would we use your access to the courts (our ability to hire an attorney, our acquaintance with a judge or other public official) to dispossess the poor—to deprive a widow of a piece of property we might want for ourselves; to deprive a migrant of a house we might desire for our son?

In verse 3 the question is posed to those who would pervert justice and manipulate the legal system for their own personal gain at the expense of justice: *“Now what will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes upon you from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you find a secure place to leave your wealth?”* To whom will you turn for defense when the Righteous Judge calls you before His judgment seat and enacts His sentence of judgment against you?

In verse 4 the answer is provided: *“There will be nothing else to do but cringe among the captives or fall among the slain.”* There will be no escape for such people when the judgment of God comes, in the present instance in the form of foreign invasion and conquest.

Let us abstain from the practice of social injustice and the use of the legal system for personal benefit at the expense of justice, because such practices meet with the LORD’s righteous anger. In contrast to the practice of social injustice, let us heed the counsel of the LORD as found in Zechariah 8:16-17,

These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; ¹⁷do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this, declares Jehovah. (Zech. 8:16-17)

Conclusion

Because the LORD is a God who possesses a righteous anger, let us be diligent to abstain from those attitudes and practices that cause His holy anger to be aroused. To the extent that we have engaged in such attitudes and practices, let us give them over to our Lord Jesus Christ in repentance, seeking the LORD’s mercy and forgiveness on the basis of His atoning sacrifice.