

**Isaiah 9:8-21**  
**April 15, 2018**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: When you discipline(d) your kids, what outcome were you hoping to see?

[Compliance/obedience? true change of heart, i.e. repentance? Let people engage.] (For those who didn't raise kids, look at this question from the vantage point of our parents who disciplined us.)

Q: How did you feel when your child kept disobeying you, even after you had disciplined them?  
[Let people engage]

Q: So how did you handle continued disobedience? Did you walk away and say "I guess it really doesn't matter. They aren't listening to me?" What did you do? [Let people engage.]

Though I have never been a parent, I can only imagine the range of emotions a parent might feel if their child kept persisting in wrong or dishonoring behavior – even after disciplining their child. I can imagine frustration, concern, anger, and perhaps self-doubts about your own parenting skills.

**Transition:** Now imagine God, our *perfect* Father in heaven, who loves us unconditionally. He knows us intimately and what discipline will work for each child. How do you imagine He feels when He sees His children continuing to engage in sin, after He's already disciplined us? [Let people engage.] As we read today's text, I think you'll find that God never gives up on His children, but at the same time He's not afraid to administer severe discipline when necessary. He always has a problem with sin, and it needs to be dealt with. As we go through today's passage, let's consider that we CAN honor our Father BY tending to the wellspring of life, which is our heart. If we tend our hearts, we will avoid the CHARACTERISTICS of an unhealthy heart and the commensurate JUDGMENTS that follow.

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.8:

- The Lord has sent a message against Jacob; it will fall on Israel.

V.9:

- All the people will know it— Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria— who say with pride and arrogance of heart,

V.10:

- "The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone; the fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars."

V.11:

- But the LORD has strengthened Rezin's foes against them and has spurred their enemies on.

V.12:

- Arameans from the east and Philistines from the west have devoured Israel with open mouth. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.
- V.13:
- But the people have not returned to him who struck them, nor have they sought the LORD Almighty.
- V.14:
- So the LORD will cut off from Israel both head and tail, both palm branch and reed in a single day;
- V.15:
- the elders and prominent men are the head, the prophets who teach lies are the tail.
- V.16:
- Those who guide this people mislead them, and those who are guided are led astray.
- V.17:
- Therefore, the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men, nor will he pity the fatherless and widows, for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks vileness. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.
- V.18:
- Surely wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briars and thorns, it sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke.
- V.19:
- By the wrath of the LORD Almighty the land will be scorched and the people will be fuel for the fire; no one will spare his brother.
- V.20:
- On the right they will devour, but still be hungry; on the left they will eat, but not be satisfied. Each will feed on the flesh of his own off- offspring:
- V.21:
- Manasseh will feed on Ephraim, and Ephraim on Manasseh; together they will turn against Judah. Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.8: Who is the Lord sending a message to when he says “Jacob?” [Northern Kingdom of Israel]

Q: And what’s the message? [The Northern Kingdom is going to “fall”]

Q: What “fall” is Isaiah forecasting? [The coming fall (God’s judgment) of Israel in 722 BC by the Assyrians.]

Background: Ephraim is one of Israel’s largest tribes, which represents the Northern Kingdom. Samaria is the Northern Kingdom’s capital.

Q V.9: What CHARACTERISTICS of an unhealthy heart do you see in these people? [pride and arrogance]

Q V.10: What are some examples Isaiah cites to demonstrate their pride and arrogance? [The people had confidence to rebuild their towns with the bricks that will have fallen down; they will replace fig trees with cedars]

Q: What's the problem with this kind of thinking? [There is no indication that they are seeking God for His help. Nor is there any indication that there will be repentance once judgment falls upon them. Pride and arrogance was standing in the way of having a humble heart.]

Q V.11: The Lord knows something the Northern Kingdom doesn't know. What is it? [The Lord strengthened Rezin's (King of Aram) foes against them and has spurred their enemies on.]

Q V.12a: Who are the enemies specifically? [Arameans from the east and Philistines from the west will devour them. They will be trapped.]

Q V.12b: Isaiah makes a powerful statement about God that gets repeated two more times. What is Isaiah saying? [This is the outstretched hand of God's judgment, not His mercy. God is still angry.]

Q: So what is God looking for such that He will no longer be angry? [He's looking for a contrite heart, not a hardness of heart. He's looking for humility, not pride or arrogance. He's looking for people to deal with their sin.]

Q V.13: After God applied discipline, what result occurred? [The people still refused to return to God or to seek Him in any way.]

Q: So what CHARACTERISTICS of an unhealthy heart do you see? [Rebellion; hardness of heart; stiff-necked; unteachable;

Q V.14: It's no surprise that God has to be more forceful in His discipline! What is His next level of discipline? [He will cut off from Israel both "head and tail" and palm branch and reed "in a single day." This is a figure of speech called a **merism**, which is the combination of two contrasting words to refer to an entirety.]

Q V.15: Who is Isaiah referring to regarding the "head and tail" and "palm branch and reed?" [The "head" represents the elders and prominent men, while the "tail" represents prophets who teach lies.

Q V.16: Why were the elders and prominent men guilty before the Lord? [They mislead the people and led them astray.]

Q V.17: This verse reads hits hard. Why does the Lord not take pleasure in even the fatherless or the widows? [Because *everyone* is ungodly and wicked; every mouth speaks vileness.]

Q: So what CHARACTERISTICS of an unhealthy heart do you see? [Vile; wicked; ungodly]

Q: We see the same refrain that we read in v.12. What is the purpose of repeating the refrain, “Yet for all this, his anger is not turned away, his hand is still upraised.” [The goal is to heighten the effect of God’s intense anger and underscores the certainty of continued judgment.]

Q: What should we conclude from this? [Let people engage. The Lord finds pleasure in His children, but their sin prevents it; The Lord focuses on the sin problem, not necessarily a person’s circumstance. Sin is sin, and it needs to be dealt with.]

Transition: In case you’re wondering what “wickedness” is like, Isaiah chooses to paint a picture for us.

Q V.18: What is wickedness like? [It’s like a “fire that consumes briars and thorns, sets the forest thickets ablaze, so that it rolls upward in a column of smoke.”]

Q: Have any of you ever seen a forest fire? [It’s pure devastation]

Q V.19a: How will the land be scorched? [By the wrath of God]

Q V.19b-20: How will the nation ultimately be destroyed? [By the people themselves! The nation will destroy itself by its own wicked deeds. People would oppose each other, devour each other, etc. They will self-destruct.]

**LOOK:**

If the people of the Northern Kingdom had taken an interest in their spiritual heart condition, the results could have been quite different. We saw the following CHARACTERISTICS of their heart: pride, arrogance, rebellion, wickedness, vileness, and ungodliness. An unrepentant heart draws the wrath of God, and He will continue to chasten and discipline us to help us turn the corner. In the meantime, if we want to honor our Father, let’s tend to our heart condition and make sure we’re pulling the weeds and unwelcomed attitudes that can lead to the very characteristics we read about in today’s passage.

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Comforted* (pp. 38–39). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

*The Lord judged Israel for their sins (Isa. 9:8–10:4).* This long section describes what will happen to the Northern Kingdom when the Assyrians invade. While Isaiah's ministry was primarily to the people of Judah, he used Israel as an object lesson to warn the Southern Kingdom that God does not take sin lightly. Judah had sinned greatly, but God in His mercy spared them for David's sake (37:35; 1 Kings 11:13; 15:4; 2 Chron. 21:7). However, God's long-suffering would one day end.

The key statement is, "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still" (Isa. 9:12, 17, 21; 10:4; and see 5:25). This is the outstretched hand of God's judgment, not His mercy (65:2; Rom. 10:21). God judged them for their *pride* in thinking that their present difficulties were temporary and the nation could rebuild itself better than before (Isa. 9:8–12). He also judged them for their *hardness of heart* in their refusal to repent and return to the Lord (vv. 13–17). God's loving purpose in chastening is that we yield to Him; but if we harden our hearts, then chastening becomes judgment (Heb. 12:1–11). Israel was being led astray by false prophets and foolish leaders; the nation would not listen to God's Word. Ephraim's own wickedness was destroying the nation, the way a fire destroys a forest or a field (Isa. 9:18–19). But the sinners would become fuel for the fire *God* could kindle! In their greed, the people of the Northern Kingdom were devouring one another (v. 20) and battling one another (v. 21); but they would soon be devoured and defeated by Assyria.

**Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 1054). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

*a. Israel judged because of arrogance (9:8–12)*

9:8. Though Isaiah was writing to the nation of Judah he often used the Northern Kingdom of **Israel** (also called **Jacob**) as an example of the fact that God judges His sinful people. The **message** was one of coming judgment on the North. When these words were written, the Northern Kingdom was already in some disrepair (v. 10a). The coming **fall** of Israel (in 722 B.C.) should have warned Judah that God is active in the affairs of His people. Judah should have realized that she too would be destroyed if she persisted in the activities that characterized the North.

9:9–12. The coming judgment on Israel would be widely known, but it would not be enough to turn her back to God. **Ephraim**, one of Israel's largest tribes, often represented the entire Northern Kingdom (cf. 7:2, 17). **Samaria** was the Northern Kingdom's capital city. Apparently Israel's inhabitants felt that they would experience only a temporary setback (**the bricks have fallen**) and in proud confidence thought they could **rebuild**. In fact they felt that they would be able to make their nation better than ever. But this was not to be the case. They were going to be squeezed by **Rezin's foes** (Rezin was the king of Aram, 7:1, an ally of Israel). Those foes were **from the east** (other **Arameans**; Rezin was king of part of Aram) **and Philistines from the west** (cf. 2:6). This was the Lord's doing. But even this judgment did not appease God's wrath because the people continued to refuse to deal with their sin. So God would continue to chasten them. This section (9:8–12) ends with a refrain which is repeated three more times in the following verses: **Yet for all this His anger is not turned away, His hand is still upraised** (vv. 12, 17, 21; 10:4).

This repetition heightens the effect of God's intense anger and underscores the certainty of continued judgment.

*b. The entire nation judged (9:13–17)*

9:13. The prophet lamented that even though the Northern Kingdom had suffered at the hand of God, they still had **not returned to Him**. So their continued refusal would lead to more judgment. Israel was like a child who stubbornly refuses to obey his parents and therefore is punished more severely.

9:14–17. Israel's refusal to turn to God would result in the most severe judgment imaginable. The whole nation, from rich to poor and from old to young, would be cast aside. **Both head and tail** (v. 14, explained in v. 15) is a merism, a figure which gives opposite extremes to include the whole spectrum. **Elders (the head)** and false **prophets (the tail)**, **guides and those who are guided**, and **young men ... the fatherless ... widows**- these were all **ungodly and wicked** and therefore would be judged by God. On the refrain in verse 17b see comments on verse 12.

*c. A description of wickedness (9:18–21)*

9:18–21. The people's **wickedness** (cf. v. 17) is pictured as burning them up **like a huge fire** with a large **column of smoke**. The judgment would come not only from God (v. 11) and from enemies of the nation (v. 12), but also from within. The nation would destroy itself by its own wicked deeds. **People** would oppose each other (v. 19), **devour** each other (v. 20), and even entire tribes will be in conflict (v. 21). On the refrain in verse 21b see comments on verse 12.