

The Biblical Examiner

An Examination of the Biblical Principles Involved in Issues at Hand.

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Hardness of Heart

Isaiah 9:8-10:4

AMAZING

Those of us who are pastors stand amazed and heart-broken at the hardness which can be exhibited by people who profess Christ. Many times we do everything except name names (maybe we should, but it sure is hard to bring ourselves to do so, 3 John 9), yet it appears that the people are totally oblivious to what is taking place. It would seem that the facts are as obvious as anything can possibly be, yet the blindness is astounding.

We have a message with which God has burdened our heart. We spend the hours in prayer pleading with God to send His Holy Spirit to make His word effective, then we deliver it with all the love and meekness we can claim by the grace of God, all to no avail. The people sit and look at us like a calf staring at a new gate, or worse yet, they are thinking about how much so-and-so needed this. "Too bad they are not here to hear this."

As usual, the word of God has the answer to every problem which we as pastors or as people encounter, including the obvious and discouraging hardness that is so evident.

HARDNESS OF HEART

Isaiah 9:8 tells us that this prophecy is for the northern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah is speaking from the southern kingdom, Judah, but the principle contained here are obviously for God's people of all times.

The four divisions of this prophecy are easily defined, with the third one our goal.

In this prophecy the Lord identifies four types of sin, then identifies the just judgment against each of the four, closing each with the statement, *For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.* V. 7 points out that King Jesus' rule and judgment is always just, and their sin is going to cause their destruction.

I. Vs. 9-12. The first thing Isaiah does is to identify the basic sin of the people of God which is leading to their destruction, *pride and stoutness of heart.* *Stoutness* would be stubborn, stubborn in having their own way.

V. 10, the evidence of the results of their stubbornness is all around them. The decay is obvious, but they refused to admit that the reason for this decay was their turning from God and obedience to His word. Instead, their plan

was to build an even stronger kingdom without the Lord.

Today, the evidence of decay in our lives, homes and families, education system, labor force, society in general, is all around us. But sinful man, either as an individual or as a group, refuses to admit that the cause of this decay is his turning from the Lord God of the Scriptures and not doing what God would have him to do.

Vs. 11, 12. The judgment of the Lord is identified as an invasion of the land by the Syrians and the Philistines. This judgment will be without mercy, yet even this invasion does not cause them to return to the Lord.

It is significant that this *pride and stoutness of heart* of the general population of the people of God is mentioned first. This shows us that the root of the sin is in the people. The evil leaders of the next group in v. 16, who led the people away from God and to destruction, were able to do this because the people WANTED to be lead away from God.

Thus, the next three evils which Isaiah mentions stem from this basic evil, and cannot be corrected until this is corrected. Any change in society must result from a change in the heart of the general population of God's people, 2 Chronicles 7:14.

The people are corrupted, therefore easily led away from the Lord. The only hope is to deal with the corruption, and this is the promise of the new Covenant made in the Messiah, Jeremiah 31:33.

The indifference of the people of God is leading to their destruction, but we have a promise that because of the Messiah, the hearts will be changed according to His Spirit's working. Our Lord clearly refers to this promise when He promised to send back the Spirit of God, John 16:7-14. Without this promise there would be no hope in our service of the Lord. When this reproving of the Spirit is missing in an individual, church or society, judgment is burning and destruction is on its way.

Even in the midst of Isaiah's hopeless situation, he found this promise worth praising the Lord over, Isaiah 12.

II. Vs. 13-17. The next point here is that the people willingly follow their ungodly leaders away from God. Their leaders, both civil and religious, *cause them to err.* Instead of leading them in the path of life (the ways of the Lord), they lead them to destruction.

The reason they are able to do this is because *the people love to have it so*, Jeremiah 5:31. We must not forget this point. We have rule going to the highest bidder because the people want it that way. Until there is a change in the heart

