

SHALL THE AX BOAST ITSELF AGAINST HIM THAT HEWETH THEREWITH? (Is. 10:15)

This is one of those profound statements in Scripture that's needs taking time to explore. The complete verse says, **Is. 10:15** *Shall the axe boast [glorify] itself against him that heweth therewith ['chops with it', 'swings it']? or shall the saw magnify [exalt] itself against him that shaketh it [moves it to and fro]? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood.*

The background to this verse is God's impending judgement on Israel, particularly the disobedient people of Jerusalem. They had sinned in turning away from Him and their sin had impacted on many aspects of life, especially their care, - or lack of it, - for the less fortunate, **Is. 10:1** *Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; ²To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless!*

This follows on from the instruction given in the opening chapter, **Is. 1:16** *Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; ¹⁷Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.* However, they chose not to, and in the meantime the rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer and God was ignored.

Meanwhile, politically, the Assyrians were the dominant regional power, ruling over all the nations including Israel and Jerusalem. They were a proud idolatrous people whose history went back to Nimrod, the son of Cush, the son of Ham, the cursed son of Noah. The curse had never been rescinded, so no matter what they did, they were a condemned nation ... and no friend to the people of Israel.

Nevertheless, there was relative peace in Israel, their economy was fine, their form of religion suited their practices resulting in the people turning away from God, His Word and His laws. They would not listen to the faithful prophets He sent. They saw no necessity to repent of their sins and they openly paraded their disobedience before God ... As Jesus commented later, they killed the prophets and they stoned them who God sent (Mt. 23:37). Their rebellion resulted in the enemy ransacking their city and carrying them captive into Babylon. ... Let's have a look at the enemy ...

THE ENEMY WAS GOD'S INSTRUMENT God raised up Assyria, - the goddess nation did not raise itself up, as the psalmist wrote, **Ps. 22:28** *For the*

kingdom is the LORD'S: and he is the governor among the nations. He used Assyria to chastise His disobedient people ... He described Assyria as ⁵ *the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation*. ... And He told Isaiah to tell the people of Jerusalem He was sending Assyria as judgment, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them [*the people of Jerusalem*] down like the mire of the streets (v.6). God would use this outside Godless and pagan nation against His own beloved people because they had become an hypocritical nation (v.6). When it suited their purposes, they claimed to belong to God, but when His ways did not suit them they broke His commandments, they rejected His Law, they condemned His servants and God described them as ⁶ *the people of my wrath*. ... No other nation had the privileged relationship with God the people of Israel had. Because of Abraham and the Patriarchs, He loved them, - and He will always love them, - but the generation in the times of the prophet had 'pushed' Him to wrath and the enemy was to become **God's instrument**.

THE ENEMY'S INSOLENC The 'other side' of this was that Assyria would boast of her ability to achieve all that was hers, - she did not recognise the hand of God in it all. Like any unbelieving nation, Assyria would not credit God with her victories, - *she* achieved them on her own. Jehovah didn't feature in Assyria's thoughts for Assyria boasted, ⁸ *Are not my princes altogether kings?* ... Even the junior officers in the Assyrian armies considered themselves invincible, and one after another they conquered the fortified cities (v.9) ... The king of Assyria was a blasphemer who compared the God of the Israelites to his own idols, ¹¹ *Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?* ... And yet, God would use these Assyrians as *the rod of mine anger ... mine indignation!* ... The enemy was **God's instrument**, but at the same time ... in their arrogance, *they* became **insolent** towards Him ... and He judged them ... God judged Assyria.

THE ENEMY IMPEACHED, accused. God warned the achievements of the enemy would end when Jerusalem would return to Him, - He was using them to chastise His people, ¹² *Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout [*proud, insolent*] heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks [*arrogancy*]. He will heal His people's backsliding, they will return to Him, and He will love them freely (Hosea 14:4).*

There is no sense whatsoever He contemplated rejecting or abandoning them. ... How alarming it would be if the people God chose, He would cast them aside, for if He could cast *them* aside, He could also cast *us* aside and His

promises would stand for nothing ... His word would be unreliable. But no, even though the children of Israel wandered from Him, they are His beloved people and He has never abrogated, abolished, annulled or revoked the covenant He made with Abraham, **Gen. 12:2** *And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing.*

The enemy was languishing in power it did not have of itself, **13** *By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: 14 And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth ... It is the way the world thinks ... But God had already determined the days of Assyria were numbered, 15 Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? ... Is the 'axe', - Assyria, - able to swing itself? Absolutely not, for Assyria and every other nation is ultimately under the Divine authority, as Job declared, **Job 12:23** *He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations, and straiteneth them again.**

... And this was a word of Divine judgement. ... **Is. 10:15** *Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood. Of course, it can't. The axe is strong, and it can do great damage ... but it is not strong on its own, and it cannot do any damage on its own. The axe, the saw, the rod, and the staff are of no consequence until someone takes them and uses them. These implements *can do nothing in themselves* ... and Assyria was merely the instrument of judgement, - at that time, - in the hands of God to judge His people.*

And God was warning Assyria, "Assyria, thus far and no further". Assyria could go no further than God allowed, and God was assuring His people He would restore them, **20** *And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. 21 The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.*

Here is the great encouragement in this whole process ... **The enemy was God's instrument, they were insolent, and they were impeached** ... And that is how history records it happened, - Assyria fell, defeated by Babylon, who were defeated by the Medes and Persians, who were defeated by the Greeks, who were defeated by the Romans, etc etc ... but God's beloved people, the nation of Israel, continues today! ... And is that not a great

encouragement for us today when it seems the enemy has the free reign to do whatever it likes. The Christian Church is being slaughtered in many places across the world, - more than you hear. The true Christian message is being integrated and subsumed within the world's agenda and it is being 'sucked dry' of the true Gospel. Confusion and error reign. ... Falsehood has polluted just about every aspect of life, and the warning for today is, **Is. 5:20** Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! **21** Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! ... Times have been bad before but not on such a scale as they are today! These are unprecedented times!

Let's turn to the New Testament, and notice John wrote about a particularly wicked time of persecution, **Rev. 11:1** And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. **2** But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and *the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months (3½ years; 1260 days [11:3; 12:6])*.

John then speaks about 'two witnesses' who will prophesy in sackcloth during the 3½ years. Their witness is described as fire proceeding out of their *mouth* (v.5). ... Notice two things here, - (i) *their mouth*, i.e. they speak one voice (singular) the same message; (ii) the *fire*, **Jer. 23:29** Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord. When their mission ends, **7** the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them. **8** And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified [*Jerusalem ... the 'time of Jacob's trouble', Jer. 30:7*]. **9** And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three *days* and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves [*utter humiliation and contempt*]. **10** And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets *tormented* them that dwelt on the earth. ... The people were glad to get rid of them because their message was in stark contrast to the world, as Paul prophesied, **II Tim. 4:3** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; **4** And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. ... It will seem as if Satan has won. ... As it was in those days when Assyria ransacked Jerusalem ... so in Rev. 11 it looks as if it is all over for God's people ... They are *finished!*

But look ... and here is the encouragement ... Just as in those days when the Assyrians thought they had consigned Jerusalem and the Jews to history ...

and just when they thought they had defeated the God of Israel ... **Rev. 11:11** after three days and an half [*cf. v.9*] the *Spirit of life from God* entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. ... They boasted they had disposed of the Church (v.10). ... The King of Assyria had a similar boast, **Is. 10:13** For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man ... but again we say, where is the greatness of Assyria today? *It* is confined to the history books, whereas God has restored His people back to their own land!

Now, here is our encouragement ... The enemy predicts the days of the Church are numbered, but here is how God answers *them*, **15** Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? ... Shall the axe [*glorify*] itself against him that [*wields it*]? ... The Word of God teaches us it doesn't and it won't for God is still in control. In Rev. 11, His 'two witnesses' continued to tell the people what they were sent to tell them. They didn't change the message. They did not make it more palatable because it wasn't their message to change and they had told what God had sent them to tell.

We are not in those times yet, but nevertheless, how we must continue to be faithful to upholding the riches of God's grace in salvation ... for "the old, old story it is ever new! And praise the Lord tis true!" ... There is coming a day when this present dispensation of grace will end ... when Jesus returns as King. He will rule and judge, and His enemies will be defeated. ... In Is. 10 He spoke wonderful words of comfort to His people, **Is. 10:24** O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. **25** For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction.

Don't worry about Brexit, - whether or not it will happen. Don't worry about who the Prime Minister is, or the President, or anything else for God is working all things out for His purpose, His own glory. The hymnwriter wrote,

*"Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still;
Wave the answer back to Heaven, "By Thy grace we will."*

See the mighty host advancing, Satan leading on;

Mighty ones around us falling, courage almost gone!

See the glorious banner waving! Hear the trumpet blow! ...

Fierce and long the battle rages, but our help is near;

Onward comes our great Commander, cheer, my comrades, cheer!

... May God encourage us to be faithful! Amen.