

# OpenTheo

## October 28th: Isaiah 10 & Mark 9:1-29

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The Lord's judgment upon the proud axe of his wrath. The Transfiguration.

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## Transcript

Isaiah chapter 10. I'm going to read this to you. I'm going to read this to you.

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I'm going to read this to you. Under King Ahaz, Judah had looked to the Assyrians to help to deliver it from Israel and the Arameans. Tiglath-Pileser III had fought against these two nations and helped to deliver Judah in the process.

However, in the process of all of this, Judah had entered into a very religiously and politically compromising relationship with Assyria. This is described in 2 Kings chapter 16 verses 7 to 11. So Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, I am your servant and your son.

Come up and rescue me from the hand of the king of Syria and from the hand of the king of Israel, who are attacking me. Ahaz also took the silver and gold that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house and sent a present to the king of Assyria. And the king of Assyria listened to him.

The king of Assyria marched up against Damascus and took it, carrying its people captive to Ker, and he killed Rezan. When king Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, he saw the altar that was at Damascus. And king Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest a model of the altar and its pattern, exact in all its details.

And Uriah the priest built the altar in accordance with all that king Ahaz had sent from Damascus. So Uriah the priest made it before king Ahaz arrived from Damascus. Tiglath-Pileser had been succeeded by Shalmaneser V, who had laid siege to Samaria, which most likely fell after his death to his successor Sargon II.

It is likely that Sargon II was on the throne of Assyria when this prophecy was made. Sargon would be succeeded by Sennacherib, who had come up against Judah in 701 BC. The chapter begins with another woe oracle in verses 1-4.

This woe oracle is punctuated by the same statement as that used in chapter 9 verse 12, 17 and 21. For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still. There were a series of woes that began in the same way as this woe back in chapter 5, in verses 8, 11, 18, 20, 21 and 22, along with the statement concerning the Lord's continuing wrath.

This has led many commentators to argue that at least some of the material of this chapter originally belonged with earlier material in the book, but was divided by intervening material in chapters 6-9. This position is by no means held by all commentators, however. The opening woe oracle of this chapter continues to be addressed to Judah, particularly focusing upon the injustice of its society and the failure of its rulers, those who had not paid any concern to the fatherless and the widows, and the poor of the people would not be heard when they appealed to the Lord for his help in the day of their trouble.

In the day when the Lord came in judgment upon them, they would realize the futility of their wealth, they would lose all of the spoils of their injustice, and merely experience the bitter wages of their iniquity. After this opening indictment of Judah and its leaders, and the systemic injustice within their society, the Lord turns in judgment to Assyria. Assyria had vaunted itself as this great, mighty power, boasting against all of the nations that it had defeated.

We might get some sense of the hubris and the pride of Assyria from the Rabshakeh's speech in chapter 36. There he argues that Judah does not have enough idols and high places to really threaten the Assyrians. The Lord had used Assyria as the means of his

judgment against Israel and Judah.

The idea of a god taking the side of the enemies of his people in such a manner might have been strange to many of the people of Isaiah's day. Yet the Lord has used Assyria as the means of his judgment. It is by the Lord's command and decree that Assyria has been successful in breaking down all of these nations, chief among them Israel and Judah.

However, Assyria, puffed up in its pride, has no realization of this. Assyria reasons that none of the nations are great enough to stand against him and his gods. The city of Samaria is little different from a city like Damascus.

It too is seen as a place of idols, a place of gods who can be overthrown with the city. The idea that the most high god claims the people of Samaria as his people would be strange to the king of Assyria. His imaginative world is only populated by idols and false gods.

He has no imaginative concept of the true god, the creator and the judge of all. Consequently, he fancies himself able to do as he pleases and vaunts himself over all others, not humbling himself before God. He speaks of himself and his mind as if he were a god himself.

To his mind, his strength and his wisdom are near divine. He is the one that sets the boundaries of the world. Yet the Lord, as he does with the proud, would humble him.

Assyria would fail to secure the sort of victory that they were looking for in Jerusalem. They would lose 185,000 people in one day. This is likely what is referred to in verse 16, the wasting sickness among the stout warriors of Assyria.

After the Lord's great defeat of Assyria, Judah would cease to depend upon Assyria as its support. Rather, it would turn to the Lord. Verse 21 seems to be an allusion back to the name Shear-Jeshub, the son of Izar, whose name meant a remnant will return.

Maybe the mighty God here also alludes back to chapter 9 verse 6. Although Israel as the descendants of Abraham were like the sand of the sea, the Lord would wipe out most of them in his judgment. Reminding his people of his great deliverances and judgments in the past, the Lord encourages his people not to be afraid of the Assyrians. He would deliver them as he had delivered them in the time of the Exodus, and also as in the miraculous victory over the Midianites in the time of Gideon.

As in the deliverance from Midian, the great victory would not be achieved by strength of human arms. The reminder of the story of Gideon's defeat of Midian also should draw our minds back to Isaiah chapter 9 verse 4. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. If the most immediate figure in view is the fulfillment of this as King Hezekiah, then both of these

prophecies likely look forward to the events of 701 BC.

The Lord would strike Judah with the rod of his anger in Assyria. He would destroy most of their fortified cities, and the waters of Assyria would come up to the neck of Jerusalem. However, as at the deliverance of the Red Sea, the Lord would lift up his staff against the people of Assyria, and make a path for his people to pass through that trial.

The final verses of the chapter describe a force coming up towards Jerusalem. It does not seem to describe the course that was taken by Sennacherib in 701 BC. It is quite likely not intended to be taken literally, or perhaps it's referring to events that have not been recorded for us in the histories.

Commentators are divided about the referent of the final two verses. Is it a referent to Assyria, or is it a referent to Judah? I think it's most likely a referent to Judah, partly on the basis of the imagery, but also on the basis of verse 1 of chapter 11. The shoot that comes forth from the stump would naturally fit in with the imagery of the lopped boughs and the cut down trees.

A question to consider, what lessons can we learn about divine providence from the image of Assyria as the axe in the hands of the Lord? Mark chapter 9 verses 1 to 29 And he said to them, Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power. And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them.

And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, Rabbi, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah.

For he did not know what to say, for they were terrified. And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, This is my beloved son, listen to him. And suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them, but Jesus only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, he charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead might mean. And they asked him, Why did the scribes say that first Elijah must come? And he said to them, Elijah does come first to restore all things.

And how is it written of the Son of Man that he should suffer many things, and be treated with contempt? But I tell you that Elijah has come. They did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him. And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them.

And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, What are you arguing about with them? And someone from the crowd answered him, Teacher, I have brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute, and whenever it seizes him it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.

And he answered them, O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me. And they brought the boy to him, and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, How long has this been happening to him? And he said, From childhood, and it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him.

But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him, If you can, all things are possible for one who believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief.

And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again. And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could we not cast it out? And he said to them, This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. Mark chapter 9 is a turning point in the narrative. If the baptism of Christ initiated the first phase of Jesus' ministry, the transfiguration initiates the second.

In the first phase, Jesus announced the kingdom, and in the second phase, he announces his coming death. And a great shadow will come over the story at this point. Our passage begins with a strange statement about people not tasting death until they've seen the Son of Man coming in his glory.

In each of the synoptic gospels, the transfiguration comes after such a statement. The transfiguration seems to be an anticipation of the later coming of Christ. Daniel 7 and the glory of the Son of Man, for instance, it anticipates that.

It previews the glory of the resurrected Christ, and also the glory of his later coming. In 2 Peter chapter 1 verses 16 to 18, Peter describes this. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the majestic glory, this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

We ourselves heard this very voice, born from heaven, for we were with him on the holy

mountain. In this passage, Peter is arguing that even though people are saying that Christ may not be coming after all, that the disciples and the apostles are dying out, and Christ still hasn't shown up, that they saw his glory on the holy mountain, and they know that Christ will reveal his glory in his coming, which I believe refers in that context to the judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70, and the end of the old covenant leading to the establishment of the new covenant on a new level. It happens after six days, and this chronological detail is strange here.

I mean, what is it being dated from? Is it really something that tells us anything of any significance? Maybe it's connected to the Sabbath. After six days is the seventh day, the Sabbath. It could also, I think, more likely be associated with Exodus 24, verses 16-18.

The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.

Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. Jesus brings with him Peter, James and John. These are the three key disciples, the ones that he chooses in particular to be with him on specific occasions.

They're the ones that see Jairus' daughter being healed, raised from the dead. They're the ones that go with him to the Garden of Gethsemane, and so they have a particular close access to him. Peter will be the lead disciple in the ministry of the early church, and James and John also have pivotal roles to perform.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus is transfigured. His glory is seen. This is not just a reflected glory.

This is the glory of Christ himself, a glory from within. And he's accompanied by Moses and Elijah. Some have seen this as a reference to the law and the prophets.

They also have similarities. They're great witnesses. They're wilderness forerunners.

They go before Joshua, who enters into the land, and Elisha, who performs great miracles within the land. And both of them seem to be connected to the character of John the Baptist, who is a forerunner of Christ. John the Baptist is the one who's in the wilderness.

He's associated with Moses in some ways there. He's also one who dresses like Elijah, who has conflicts with Herod and Herodias that are similar to the conflicts that Elijah had with Ahab and Jezebel. Beyond this, both are associated with Theophanies at Horeb or Sinai.

Moses goes up on the mountain and he sees God's glory at the top of Mount Sinai. And Elijah meets with God at Mount Horeb as well and sees the glory of God. So they're both

witnesses to the glory of God and they join Christ, who is the glory of God.

Both, furthermore, are associated with the last days in various ways. A prophet like Moses, who will arise according to Deuteronomy chapter 18. And then Elijah, who was to come, as spoken of by Malachi.

In Christ we see the glory of the last Adam and of the second man. He's the glorified, radiant son of man, the one who comes into God's presence, into the presence of the ancient days and inherits all kingdoms. Sinai was associated with a number of key things.

It was associated with the Theophany, as Moses saw the glory of God on the mountain, the cloud, the fire and all these other things. It was associated with the tabernacle and the formation of that realm where God would dwell with his people. It was associated also with the gift of the law.

And we see these different elements here played out in different ways. Peter wants to build tabernacles. If the purpose of the tabernacle was to be a sort of movable mountain, a portable Sinai, Peter wants to move around the reality of this transfiguration, the reality of this appearance of God's glory, and take it with them as they move throughout the land.

And so the purpose of the tabernacles is to transport this Theophany. Peter longs to retain the reality of that place. But yet God's own cloud overshadows.

God's Theophanic cloud is far more glorious and powerful than any tent would be, any tabernacle would be. And that is what will lead the way. We also see in Christ, he is the high priest with glorious garments.

He's dressed like the high priest in his glorious clothes, dazzling white. And he's the one who will perform atonement for his people, just as the high priest was called to do. Sinai was also the site where God gave the law, his word to his people.

And here we see something similar. It's the one occasion in scripture where God declares directly concerning Christ in his own words from heaven. His beloved son, listen to him.

This is the word of God to humanity. His son, who has been given to us, we must listen to him. So we see themes of tabernacles, see themes of the law, see themes of Theophany, and all these things that connect us with Sinai.

Going up after the sixth day, all of these things should remind us of what happened there. Jesus is accompanied by Moses and Elijah, but he is greater than Moses and Elijah. He alone is the one who will remain with them.

They're the forerunners. He is the one who is God's son. He is the one who will lead them

into the future.

Jesus tells his disciples to keep the vision under wraps until after the resurrection. There are things that can only properly be known in their own time. And the significance of the Transfiguration will only become apparent from the vantage point of the cross and resurrection.

However, the cross becomes clearer from the vantage point of the Transfiguration. When you see that Christ is the glorious High Priest, the one who is all-powerful, the one who is the beloved son, when he goes to the cross, it becomes clear that he's doing that willingly and intentionally. He's not someone who's overtaken by events.

He's not someone who fails and is outwitted by his enemies. He is one who's doing this purposefully to redeem and atone for his people. The disciples puzzle about the resurrection at this point.

They don't truly understand what Jesus is talking about. They also wonder about the meaning of Elijah that was to come. There seems to be conflict between the statement that Elijah will restore all things and that the Son of Man will suffer many things.

I mean, if Elijah has restored all things, how can the Son of Man suffer many things? But yet Jesus makes clear that Elijah has come, and Elijah clearly in this case is John the Baptist. But what has happened is he was rejected. He suffered himself.

The forerunner suffers the same fate as the one who comes after. He has prepared a people for the Lord, but he has been rejected by the great majority of the people. So he has prepared things, set things right, yet he is ultimately rejected by the people to whom he came.

Coming down the mountain, Jesus and his disciples come to a commotion. I think we would be justified in seeing a parallel between this and Moses and Joshua coming down the mountain to seeing the crowd and the tumult around the golden calf and Aaron. The people are awestruck when they see Jesus come down the mountain.

Again, that's an interesting detail. The fact that they're awestruck reminds us of the awestruck character of the people in chapter 34 when Moses comes down the mountain with his face shining after seeing God's glory there. Perhaps we're supposed to connect these two things together.

Jesus, like Moses, left his disciples and other people under him in control in his absence. And he comes back to find that they have failed. The disciples haven't been able to cast out this demon.

And in the same way Aaron made the golden calf for the people. Whether we're supposed to stretch the analogies further and see the similarities between the way that



the demon casts the child into the fire and into the water and the way that the golden calf was cast into the fire, came out of the fire as the form of the golden calf and was then cast into the water to be drunk, I'm not sure. My suspicion is that this would be too speculative.

Nevertheless, there do seem to be clear connections and the Mosaic themes are strong throughout. Jesus refers back to the words of Moses in places like Deuteronomy 32, verses 5 and 20 when he refers to the people as a faithless generation. They have dealt corruptly with him.

They are no longer his children because they are blemished. They are a crooked and twisted generation. And he said, I will hide my face from them.

I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. A question to consider. Within the exorcism account and its aftermath with which our passage ends, there is considerable discussion of faith and prayer.

We see the example of the boy's father. We see the example of the disciples and we see their conversation with Christ later in the house. What can we learn about the relationship between faith, prayer and deliverance from reflecting upon these details?