

## Isaiah 9: - March 25, 2021

### *The Savior Is Coming*

JD Farag

Good evening and welcome to our midweek Bible study on Thursday nights. We're going through the Bible. We want to welcome those of you that are joining us online. We are currently going through the book of Isaiah, and what a blessing it's been. Last week we finished Chapter 8, and so tonight, Lord willing -- I should preface that -- Lord willing, we will complete Chapter 9. So, we'll invite you to turn there if you're not there already.

Before we pray and get started, I just want to mention this for the benefit of our online viewers. The shirt I'm wearing does not have syringes on it, okay? No, no, listen to this. I wore this shirt one time on a Sunday morning, and all of the comments on the Prophecy Update, which was about what all of the comments were, "Why is Pastor JD wearing a shirt with syringe needles on it?" These are outrigger canoes, not syringe needles. I just wanted to get that out of the way, all right. Are we good, is everybody okay?

All right, why don't we pray? You're saying, "We better pray." All right, let's pray. Lord, thank You so much. Lord, thank You for humor. Thank You that laughter is like medicine to the soul. Lord, thank You that we can laugh, and there is a time to laugh, and there's a time to be serious. So Lord, tonight, as we have this time together in Your Word, we would ask for Your blessing on our Bible study, especially with this chapter that we have before us tonight.

Lord, I know that many of us come to this place on a Thursday night for our midweek Bible study. It represents a sanctuary, literally a place of respite and just that break from the cares and the affairs of our busy lives, especially in this world that we're living in today, just all the stress and the pressures. Lord, we can just disconnect from that and come to this place and connect with You in and through Your Word. That's why we're here tonight, Lord. We just want for You to minister to us, speak into our lives. And Lord, thank You for Your Word and thank You for this chapter that we have here in Your Word. So speak, we pray in Jesus' name, amen, and amen.

All right, so Isaiah, Chapter 9: How many of you read ahead to stay ahead? Do you know what is in this chapter? Oh, my goodness. It is amongst the most familiar in all of Scripture, specifically related to the virgin birth of the Savior of the world. Isaiah, the prophet, is prophesying to Judah concerning what's coming.

These verses that we're going to see tonight are the most often referred to during Christmas. So it's Christmas in March if you want to see it like that. But it's important to understand that these passages and the many others like them are actually prophecies. It's been estimated that there are over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament prophesying the First Coming of Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ fulfilled every single one of those prophecies.

With Resurrection Sunday coming up, this is one of the things we like to talk about and remind ourselves. It's concerning that the statistical probabilities, the odds mathematically of one person fulfilling even 8 of over 300 of these prophecies, are astronomical. That is not hyperbole; actually, somebody figured it out.

His name is Peter Stoner, and he wrote a book in which he actually calculated the odds of one man -- forget over 300 prophecies, let's just take eight of them. And so he came up with the number statistically, mathematically. And if you're anything like me, and I suspect that many of you are, when you see numbers like that, it makes your hair hurt, not your head, your hair, whatever is left on the top of your head. He had this number, and it's something like, you know, one bajillion to the bajillionth power. He actually wrote it out, and all I can say is that with a size 12 font, I could not fit it on one slide because there's a lot of zeros in that number, and that's just eight of the prophecies.

We have one of them, actually there are a couple of them woven into the fabric of this chapter tonight. Not only was Isaiah warning Judah of what's coming very soon, speaking specifically of the Assyrian army that would come and invade and destroy the Northern Tribes chiefly, but they would

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also come to Judah. God, of course, would intervene miraculously. But this is Isaiah prophesying about what's coming but more importantly about who's coming.

There's a connection here that I hope to make with the help of the Holy Spirit, and it's this. That when you know Who's coming, it makes whatever is coming easier to get through because of Who's coming. We know what's coming, and in the world that we're living today, and we talk about it every week. It's getting rather intense, would you agree, what's coming? But when you understand Who's coming, it settles your heart, and it settles you.

That's really what Isaiah is doing here in this chapter, in this prophecy, and through this warning to Judah. It's a prophecy of the coming Savior of the world to a world that was then, even as it is now, in darkness and hopeless doom and gloom. Enter verse 1 with this first word, and I like this word in this context. "Nevertheless, the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed as when at first, He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her by way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles."

Do you see where he's going? "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined." Do you know who this is speaking of and who this is a prophecy of? It is a prophecy about the Light of the world, Jesus, the Christ, right out of the chute. We have a prophecy of the coming Savior, so much so that the Gospel of Matthew records the fulfillment of this prophecy that we just read in these first two verses.

It's found in Matthew 4, beginning in verse 13, "And leaving Nazareth, He (speaking of Jesus) came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death, Light has dawned."

Now you have to understand that Isaiah's sort of dovetailing off of what he just got done prophesying to them and warning them about in the previous chapter, in Chapter 8, about what was coming. And what he's doing here by the Holy Spirit is he is giving them hope. Yes, this is what's coming, but there's a future hope. We're going to see that here in a very interesting way towards the end of the chapter.

Verse 3, "You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy. They rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For You have broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every warrior's sandal from the noisy battle and garments rolled in blood will be used for burning and fuel of fire."

Now I am keenly aware at first read, your response to a passage like this is, "Huh?" Well, let's work our way through it. Notice here he says in verse 4, "The rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian." This is a reference to Gideon in Judges Chapter 7 and his victory over the Midianites.

It speaks to our victory in Christ, the Coming Savior, which is what this prophecy is about. It all points to the person of Jesus Christ and the finished work on the cross of Jesus Christ. The Savior, who would come, as we're about to see here, from the line of David, according to the promise that God made to David, King David. That he would not build a temple but that God would build him a house, from his lineage would come the Savior of the world.

Now interesting: Why is it that in this prophecy concerning the coming of the Savior, would Isaiah be prompted and led and inspired by the Holy Spirit to reference, of all of the accounts in Scripture, the account of Gideon and his victory over the Midianites?

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I have a thought, and that thought is this: When you really know what and how that went down, it just changes the whole complexion of just how much of a miracle it was when God delivered the Midianites into the hands of the Israelites. I mean, to say that it was against all odds would be a gross understatement. Even to say that it was impossible would also as well be an understatement, and I'll explain why.

You know the account of Gideon, right? He's hiding out in fear because the Midianites would always wait until harvest time when they were threshing the grain, and they're doing all the work, and then they would come and steal all of that year's grain. That was a year's worth of income from the Israelites. They were greatly oppressing the Israelites.

So, where do we find Gideon when God calls him? We find him at a winepress of all places, hiding out, threshing the grain in total fear of the Midianites. That's when God comes and when God calls him, He says, "Oh, mighty warrior."

Here's Gideon, right, "Where? I mean, I would like to have a mighty warrior right about now." No," Gideon, I'm talking to you." "Me?" "Yeah, I'm calling you." "Oh, God, No, no. You pulled the wrong file on this one. I'm not your guy." "No, you are my guy, and I'm going to use you to deliver the Midianites into the hands of the Israelites."

And what is Gideon's response? He tries everything and stops at nothing to get out of it. He says to God, "God, the reason why I'm not your guy is that I'm the black sheep of my family (strike 1)." "My family is the black sheep of our tribe (strike 2)." "Our tribe is the black sheep of all of the tribes of Israel (strike 3, I'm out)."

"Nice try. No, you're not, that's exactly why, by the way, Gideon, I'm going to use you because, by the way, I choose the foolish things, the Gideons of this world, to confound the wise. I choose the weak to shame the strong, and here's why I do that, by the way. I choose guys like you, Gideon, who are the black sheep of your family, and your family is the black sheep of the tribe, and the tribe is the black sheep of all 12 tribes of Israel. I choose guys like you because then I alone get the glory.

Even if you wanted to try, nice try, it isn't going to happen, because look at you. There's no way. They're going to look and go. Did you see his resume? Did you see his credentials? He's got a lot of letters after his name; nothing wrong with that. I don't mean to be disrespectful. I've always wondered about those letters. That's why I decided to come up with a legal a.k.a. I always wanted letters, so I got two letters, JD, and it stands for Jesus' disciple. So I've got letters. It kind of rhymes with Ph.D. a little bit.

So God's like, "No, you're the guy, and that's why." Now you think Gideon's going to be okay with that and just, "Okay, God, you know, have Thine own way, have Thine own way, Thou art the potter, I am the clay." No, no way.

So now he's going to go through these gyrations, right, and we know this as well, the fleece; he's gonna put out a fleece. Never think for a second that this was an act of faith. It was the polar opposite of faith. He's still trying to get out of it.

So what does he do? He says, "God, if I'm really, really, really, really, really the guy, let there be dew on the fleece, but not on the ground." And God's like, "Okay, whatever." The next day, the dew is on the fleece, not on the ground.

Here's Gideon: "Okay, thank you, Lord, so much. I don't want to anger you, and I don't want to push the envelope, as it were. Would you just, just to confirm, to just be extra, extra, extra, extra sure, would You this time have the dew be on the ground, but not on the fleece?"

Oh, God is so long-suffering, isn't He? "Whatever." There's the next morning; the dew is on the fleece and not the ground -- that was the other way around, thank you very much.

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Now here's Gideon again, and it gets actually worse from there. He reluctantly assembles the army of the Israelites, and he is able to identify a number of 32,000 men. We got a problem. The Midianites -- now it's interesting because -- and for those of you that have been to Israel with us, we've gone to the springs, what is affectionately referred to as Gideon Springs there in Israel, believed to be the exact location of where this all took place. When you're standing there, I mean, you see the springs, and you're looking out at the vast landscape, and you can just picture these numbers of Midianites that were estimated to be 135,000.

And here's Gideon with only 32,000 men. Well, now how is this going to work out? We don't have enough men. So, God says, "Gideon, here's what I want you to do. I want you to go to your 32,000 men, and I want you to tell them, 'If any of you are afraid, you can go home.' " "What?"

If I'm Gideon, here's how I'm going to do it and say it, if any (mumbling in hand) can go home. "What; I didn't hear you, what?" You don't want to go home, right? You're not afraid -- you're not afraid, are you?

Well, I don't know how he said it. I just know that he said it, and 22,000 men went home. Can you imagine his heart sinking? Now he's down to 10,000 men, and it's like, "Lord..." And the Lord's like, Gideon, I know this is going to really mess you up, but you got to trust Me here. You still have too many men." "10,000 too many up against 135,000?"

"Yeah, so what I want you to do is I want you to take these men, and I want you to take them to the springs, and you're going to separate the men of the 10,000 that stick their face in the water and drink water, you're gonna put them over here, and the ones that cup the water and bring it to their mouth, they're gonna put them over here."

Now, can you imagine? The last time we were there, I was just putting myself in Gideon's sandals as he's watching this play out because 9,700 men of the 10,000 stuck their face in the water. And I in my heart believe that Gideon knew in his heart, "I know which ones God's going to send home because only 300 cupped the water and brought it to their mouths."

I'm going somewhere with this; I know we're taking the scenic route again but just stay with me. Sure enough, He says, "I want you to take those 9,700 men that stuck their faces in the water, and I want you to send them home. I want you to take the 300 that cupped the water and brought it to their mouths, and those are the ones that I'm going to use to deliver the Midianites into your hands."

Now you've probably heard this taught, and I'm not dismissing this, but I just don't think it fits the narrative. It kind of mars and ruins the whole thing that God is doing here. You've probably heard this taught as these were the 300 Green Berets, man. These were the SEAL team; these were the top guns, man. They are keeping their eye on the battlefield and cupping the water to their hands, and the other 9,700 just stick their faces in there (blowing water sounds), and those are the "Send 'em home." They're not battle-worthy; they're battle-ready.

I can see how they can get there, but here's the problem: If those 300 men that cupped the water and brought it to their mouth to drink are the top guns and the Green Berets and the SEAL team, and the Special Unit, they could conceivably take the credit for the victory because after all, this is the best of the best. That doesn't fit.

Here's the way I heard it taught many years ago, and I cannot go back to any other interpretation of this account. The 300 men that cupped the water and brought it to their mouth to drink did so because they couldn't bend down and stick their face in there. These were the infirmed, potentially the elderly, the lame, the blind, crippled. I know, right? Doesn't that fit?

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Again, here's Gideon, right? He's like, Oh no! I see a pattern here: All these young bucks, they're sticking their face in the water. Here are these older guys: There are Grandpa and uncle, you know, they're getting up to the water and "I better get some water now."

That's who I'm going to use because there's no way -- that fits, right? Are we okay here? Are you laughing with me or at me; I just want to make sure. Both? Great, that's fine. But see, here's why. Because when God delivers the Midianites into the hands of the Israelites, there's no way those 300 men could take the credit for it.

Could you imagine, even if they tried? You know, walking, "You should have seen us," you know, and they come back home. "Man, we were great." "You?" "No, this was God. There's no way you guys could have done this; this had to be the Lord," and it was. And the way it went, -- I would encourage you to spend some time in Judges, starting in Chapter 6, go through Chapter 7.

It's one of my favorite accounts in all of the Bible because it is a much-needed reminder for me as to why God has called me of all people to be a pastor.

I mean, come on. Are you kidding me? I'm the last of the last -- talk about three strikes: I've got, like, 12 strikes and plus more. But here's the thing, and this is why it is when I see God bless the teaching of His Word to His people, there's no way -- I'm like those 300 men.

There's no way, even if I wanted to or tried, I could ever take the credit for it. Because there's -- well, do you have an impressive resume? Are you ready for this? I don't have a resume. This is what I love, I love this, and there's nothing wrong with this, but I love getting this question: "Where did you go to seminary?" "Seminary? I barely graduated high school." (Gasping). "That's it?"

"Yeah, I mean, when I say I barely graduated high school, I mean, I barely graduated high school." I got suspended; I was going to get expelled. I was so rebellious; I wasn't saved yet. So I'm feeling judged right now. I didn't get saved till after I barely graduated at age 19. But I got suspended from high school. I was a teacher's kid, I was so rebellious, and they actually threatened me with being expelled. Oh, that would have just crushed my father and, by the grace of God, I graduated by the "hair of my chinny chin chin."

Can I use that? I mean, that's again not hyperbole. But in fact, I was talking to a friend of mine. We were just reminiscing. We had a classmate actually graduated a few years before me that went home to be with the Lord came to Christ, but went home to be with the Lord. Praise the Lord for that but after a battle with cancer. So, I called him, and I got a text, and I just called him up. And I knew that he was really close, and he was.

Actually, we were roommates together, and we did a lot of things together before I got saved first, and then he got saved after. I mean, God really moved in that -- it was a really small school, a real small town. I mean, my graduating class was only 16 people, if you can imagine. But we were just reminiscing about our lives before we came to Christ, and we were just laughing because, and he still laughs -- talk about laughing at me -- he still laughs at me like, "You know, you were the last person on the planet that we ever thought would be a pastor." I said, "I know; God's got a sense of humor." And here's the thing: God again uses the Gideons, the 300 lame, blind, crippled, infirmed, the weak, the foolish, the last, the least so that He alone gets the glory.

Now, how does that tie into this reference here, this prophecy in Isaiah? Because of the way the Savior would come. He didn't have to come that way. According to the prophecies, He did but think about it: He was born -- this is not just impossible; this is beyond impossible. The statistical odds: The way that it happened was an absolute miracle in the realm of the supernatural. And that's why I believe we have this reference. That was kind of a long way to explain a very profound point.

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Now, verse 6 is where we have our merry Christmas. "For unto us a Child is born, unto us, a Son is given." Stop right there. Now at first read, it almost seems redundant and repetitive. Why twice? And by the way, in your Bibles, depending, of course, on your translation, the word "child" is capitalized, right, and the word "son" is capitalized.

Okay, obviously, we're speaking about Jesus, the Christ. Now, why in this prophecy, a very well-known prophecy, are we told that "Unto us a Child is born and then we're also told unto us a Son is given"? Here's why, and don't miss this, this is really important.

For Isaiah, by the Holy Spirit, to prophesy and say, "For unto us a Child is born," speaks to Christ's humanity and for Isaiah, by the Holy Spirit, to prophesy concerning the Savior and say, "Unto us a Son is given" speaks to Christ's divinity, fully God, fully man wrapped up in this one verse, in this one prophecy, this well-known verse.

"For unto us a Child is born," that is Jesus as man, and "Unto us a Son is given," that is Jesus as God. And from last week, actually it was Chapter 7, His name will be Immanuel. The name Immanuel, and we're going to get into the names here next, but the name "Immanuel" means "God with us."

Jesus is God. Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Isaiah goes on in verse 6 and says, "And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called (now I want you to notice this) Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

The first thing I want you to notice is that there are five names. I do not believe that is a coincidence or happenstance. I believe that is by design because the number five in Scripture is always associated with grace. The Fifth Commandment, the only commandment with a promise. All the other nine commandments are "Thou shalt not." And in the days that thou shalt surely die.

Not Commandment number 5. Commandment number 5 has grace. I have it memorized still; my parents made me memorize it. You know the commandment, right? "Honor thy father and thy mother so that the days upon the land which the Lord thy God give it the maybe long." See I have all these years I still memorize that one commandment is the Fifth Commandment, the only commandment with a promise, Paul will say to the Ephesians.

Number five, watch this; this is really interesting. I love typology, and I love the symbols of numbers in Scripture. So, God, when he changed the name/nature (this is going to come into play here in a second) He changes the name/nature of Abram and Sarai by taking the fifth letter, number five, in the Hebrew alphabet and placing it in the fifth position in both of their names, and it changes everything. Instead of Sarai, it's Sarah; instead of Abram, it's Abraham, the fifth letter in the fifth location in the name. The number five is the number of grace just like we know the number seven to be the number of completion, the number eight to be the number of new beginnings.

Now, why is that important? Because this is His nature. We have five names, and when you -- each of these names is a sermon unto itself. Wonderful. How about just Counselor alone? Mighty God. Everlasting Father -- Jesus said, "If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father." Prince of Peace. Five wonderful names starting with Wonderful. By the way, it should be noted that this prophecy, when this Child would be born when this Son would be given, would be fulfilled with 100% accuracy some 800 years later, and again, this is just one of over 300 prophecies concerning the First Coming of Jesus Christ.

Number 7, verse 7, "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, (here it is) upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever." And then Isaiah says this, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

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Okay, stay with me here, a couple of things I want to point out here. First, the reason why the Assyrian army numbered at 185,000 men would be killed by an angel at night is because God made a promise to David that the Savior of the world would come from his lineage. Do you know why the Assyrians were invading Judah? They wanted to depose the king.

Well, wait a minute, we have a problem. Yeah, you can't. Even if you, you know, wanted to, you can't because see, God made a covenant and gave David His word and promised David that the Savior of the world would come from his line.

So, if you're thinking you're going to go and invade Judah and depose the king, then well, it's just not gonna happen because I made that promise. Now, why do I emphasize that? Because God made us a promise, over 3,000. God has given us His word. The Assyrians in your life, whatever that is, you fill in the blank that are coming against you, surrounding you, I mean, it looks like this is how it ends. Oh, by the way, same thing for Gideon, too.

Same thing for Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20, I think it is. Boy, I'm really pushing my memory envelope tonight. I think it's 2 Chronicles, Chapter 20. Absolutely, in fact -- Jehoshaphat -- I love this about this king. He was a good king, one of only nine. I mean, he is looking at this situation: This invading army is coming, this alliance that have allied together to come and destroy them, and Jehoshaphat cries out to the Lord and says, "God, this great horde is coming against us and we don't know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

Wait -- ssh -- did you -- what'd you just say? What'd you just pray? Did you just say that you don't know what to do? And that your eyes are on Me, that you're looking to Me because your situation looks absolutely impossible? In fact, again impossible is an understatement with what's coming against you. And you're looking to Me? Oh, watch Me now.

And He says to Jehoshaphat and all of Israel with their families, which is really important, their children are with them too. He said, "This is what I'm gonna do. You're not gonna have to fight this battle." This is where we get that famous quote: The battle belongs to the Lord. "I'm going to take care of this for you."

Now, sometimes there are those battles -- I think about Joshua and, you know, after he succeeded Moses, many battles getting to the promised land, but this one is different. God says, "I got this one. I got this one." And boy, did He. All they had to do was just behold the deliverance and the salvation and the victory of the Lord. They just had to praise Him before He did it, by the way. Before he did it, they praised Him, they worshiped Him, they thanked Him in advance, and it was game-on, and He destroyed this great horde, this army that came against them.

I don't know what it is in your life. I know I've had some Assyrian armies and some great hordes come against me over the years. And I have to confess I'm not this great man of faith like the battle belongs to the Lord. No, I'm in the fetal position crying like a baby, well, crying like a man, but I'm just, "God, what am I gonna do?" "I got this; watch Me now, and I'll take care of this one. Just give it to Me, look to Me."

"Yeah, but God." Uhh! Like Gideon, "There's 100 -- did you count how many of them there are?" I think about King Hezekiah, 185,000 Assyrians. "Did you count them, God?" "132,000 Midianites, I've got 300 uncles? They have 132,000." "I know, watch Me now."

You might feel like, and it might seem like you've got this Assyrian army, this Midianite army coming against you, and it looks like this is how it's gonna end. But I want you to notice the last part here of verse 7, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this."

In other words, you'll forgive my crass paraphrase but simply put: Done Deal. God said it. That settles it. I made a promise to David. I'm going to do it. I'm going to deliver you. I promised you

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this. I will perform this. I promised you a Savior and I will do it. When God makes a promise to you, He will do it. He will do it. He can't not -- I know that's not proper sentence structure, but He cannot break a promise.

Now and beginning in verse 8 and actually on through to Chapter 10:4 we're going to turn a corner of sorts with Isaiah's prophecy concerning the coming judgment on particularly chiefly the Northern Kingdom of Israel when this is Assyrian army invades.

"The Lord (verse 8) sent a word against Jacob, and it has fallen on Israel. All the people will know— Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria— who say in pride and arrogance of heart: "The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with hewn stones. The sycamores are cut down, but we will replace them with cedars."

Oh, you will, will you? Oh, but that's a smack in the face of Almighty God. Because this is what God did, and you're saying, "Yeah, I know God brought these down. They've fallen down, but we're going to rebuild them; we don't need God."

How about this? Are you ready for it? Wait for it. We're going to build back better. Oh, you are, are you? "We're going to rebuild with hewn stone." "Yeah, but God is the one who made those bricks fall down." "Yeah, but we're going to replace with cedars." "Yeah, but God is the one that allowed the sycamores to be cut down." This is the height of arrogance, haughtiness, and pride. And as we're about to see, it won't go unanswered by the Lord. It never will. It never will.

Verse 11, it's gonna get ugly. "Therefore, the Lord shall set up the adversaries of Rezin against him and spur his enemies on. The Syrians (verse 12) before and the Philistines behind; and they shall devour Israel with an open mouth. For all this, His anger is not turned away but (listen very carefully to this) His hand is stretched out still." Wow.

Now, this is the first of four parts, all of which conclude with the mercy of God, whose hand is stretched out still. It's almost like this: You have rejected Me in your pride, in your arrogance. You have not turned to Me, you've turned against Me, and for that, judgment will come, and the adversaries will come against you, but My hand is stretched out still.

We're gonna talk more about that in a moment. Verse 13, "For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them." Did you catch that? God is the one that is striking them, judging them, allowing this to happen to them to come upon them, and they still do not turn to Him. "Nor do they seek the Lord of hosts." That's what pride does. Humility repents, but not pride.

Verse 14, "Therefore the Lord will cut off the head and tail from Israel, palm branch and bulrush in one day." The elder and honorable (verse 15) he is the head; the prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail. For the leaders of this people cause them to err, and those who are led by them are destroyed."

Therefore (verse 17) the Lord will have no joy in their young men, nor have mercy on their fatherless and widows. For everyone is a hypocrite and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly." And here we have it again, "For all this His anger is not turned away."

In other words, His anger has not been satisfied. It has not been dissipated, it has not been dealt with, it has not been resolved, it is not turned away. He's still angry, in other words, "But His hand is stretched out still."

I want to draw your attention to something here that I think should make every leader and every teacher, and especially every pastor like myself, stand to attention. This mention of these teachers who lie, false prophets, and they lead the people astray. And then the people are destroyed because of them. Wait. That means that the people's blood is on their hands. Yes, it is. That's Ezekiel, 33, concerning the watchman.



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But it's also James Chapter 3:1-2. Listen to what James writes. "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers," and here's why. "Because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check."

In other words, those who are teachers are going to stand before God, and they will be judged by a much higher standard, a much stricter measure. Why? Because they have the propensity to lead people into truth or lead people into error. We're not talking about life and death. We're talking about eternal life and eternal death. We're talking about heaven and hell. And that is the reality and the intensity and the enormity of the calling on those who are teachers of the Word of God. We're going to be judged more strictly.

I will have to give an account one day before God. And when I stand before Him, I want the blood of no one on my hands, like the Apostle Paul, would write and it's recorded in the Book of Acts that he has the blood of no one, no person on his hands because he taught the whole counsel of God. He spoke and taught the truth.

The watchman in Ezekiel, the one who warns the people, the blood is not on his hands; it's on them. When is the blood on the hands of the watchman? When he sees what's coming and doesn't warn them, then it's on him.

Verse 18, it gets worse. "For wickedness burns as the fire; it shall devour the briars and thorns and kindle in the thickets of the forest; they shall mount up like rising smoke." "Through the wrath (verse 19) of the Lord of hosts the land is burned up, and the people shall be as fuel for the fire." That's interesting; hang onto that for a second.

"No man shall spare his brother. And he shall snatch on the right hand and be hungry. He shall devour on the left hand and not be satisfied. Every man shall eat the flesh of his own arm. Manasseh shall devour Ephraim and Ephraim, Manasseh. Together they shall be against Judah." And then here it is again: "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still." Wow! What graphic detail of the utter horror that always ensues when God removes His hand of blessing. But God has His hand stretched out still.

One last thing before we bring the Bible study to an end: Did you notice the way that Isaiah phrased this and worded this? He's saying that you are going to do this to yourselves. You're gonna devour each other, and I'm going to allow it to happen because you turned away from Me. I stretched my hand out, My hand is still stretched out, but you slapped it away. I'm still stretching out My hand because I am long-suffering and kind and loving and merciful.

My hand is stretched out still, but you left Me with no other alternative, and you're rejecting Me and turning from Me. But to remove My hand -- I'm not going to force Myself on you. I'm just going to lift My hand of protection. I'm going to lift My hand of blessing. I mean, it's still stretched out at the ready, but this is what happens when God just says, "Okay, you've made your choice."

You know, we've referred to it often, and I'll just mention this. I want to end on an encouraging note certainly, but this is as raw as it is real. Romans 1 where God just basically says, "You know, I'm just going to give you over. It's like, okay, hands-off. I'm going to give you over to those burning passions, woman for woman, man for man. I mean, you've already -- you slapped My hand away, you've turned away from Me. I've stretched My hand out to you, and you said, "Get away, we want nothing to do with You." Okay, I'm not going to force Myself on you. "So He removes His hand of protection and blessing, and this is what ensues, that's what ensues. It's unthinkable.

Okay, this will be the last, last thing. In fact, can I have the worship team come up, and I'll have you stand up, and I'll just share this one last thought that I've been sort of inquiring of the Lord about recently, thinking a lot about as of late. Think about this with me: How many times do you think in

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your life, unbeknownst to you, God delivered you and protected you miraculously in the spiritual realm, and you had no idea that He did it? Do you know what I'm talking about? How many car accidents did...? I know my list is really long. I mean, how many car accidents God saved me from unbeknownst to me? That's the hand of God's protection.

Think about it as an earthly parent. How, especially when your kids are young, you will do everything. I mean, you're so protective of them, yeah, okay, maybe sometimes overprotective, but I don't know anything about that. Okay, I'm very overprotective, especially with my daughter. But, I mean, we are ferociously protective of them. We will not let any harm come to them. How much more our heavenly Father who is able and protects us because His hand of blessing and protection is on us and over our lives?

I wonder when we're in heaven, if there's going to be, you know, maybe the first trillion years we're going to, you know, be taken into our own, you know, theater in our mansion. Am I taking it too far? Just indulge me. And we're going to have an afternoon; we're going to have, you know, heavenly popcorn, no cholesterol, no carbs, no nothing. And the butter is just delicious and fresh, and oh, wow! Are we drooling yet? And so, we're going to, you know, it's going to popped for us.

And we're going to sit down in our mansion theater, and we get to watch all of those times where God intervened in our lives and miraculously protected us from the unthinkable. And we're just going to be like, "Whoa! I remember that! Wow, God, You did that?" "Yeah." "You protected?" "Yeah."

Now let's flip it around; I don't want to end this way, but just contrast that with when God says, "Okay, you don't want My protection? You don't want My hand stretched out still? You slap it away." This is how that movie ends. It's pretty, pretty sobering, isn't it?

Let's pray. Father, thank You so much. Lord, Your Word is alive, active, sharper than any two-edged sword, able to cut, divide between bone and marrow, soul and spirit. It's a surgical cutting, a needful cutting. Lord, I pray that Your Word tonight will do its work in our hearts and our lives so that we'll take this word from You to us home with us tonight and into the rest of our week and weekend so that the Holy Spirit would be given unfettered access to that recess in our hearts which need heart surgery in this realm of the spirit.

Lord, thank You for Your Word in Jesus' name, amen.