
INTRODUCTION

Magic: the art of producing illusions as entertainment by the use of sleight of hand, deceptive devices, etc.;

Source: <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/magic?s=t>

How many of you have seen a magician “saw” a person in half,
separate the upper part of the body and the lower part of the body,
then, connect the parts together again as one person?

Was the person really “sawn” in half?

Or, was the magician successful at creating the *illusion*
that he had sawn the person in two parts?



**Illusion can appear to be reality,
at least by a skillful magician!**

**Illusion can make for great entertainment,
but there is real danger in attempting to turn illusion into reality.**

Would any of you volunteer if I were stand here with a saw
and ask you to come forward, lay flat on your back inside a box,
and be sawn in half?

ILLUSION – & – REALITY

What if we reverse the process?

What if we would mistake **REALITY** as an **ILLUSION**?

Can something be “REAL” and we take it as an “ILLUSION”, as “UNREAL”?

There is a saying:

Coincidence is just God working anonymously.

**I wonder how many times God is at work “behind the scenes”,
and no one perceives God as the source of what happened.**

ASSYRIA

In the 8th century before Christ (i.e. the 700's B.C.),
the kings and nobles of Israel and of Judah embraced an **ILLUSION**,
that they could “get ahead”, be “better off”, by ignoring God, and
by abusing the widows and orphans, the poor and the weak,
– in some cases unjustly depriving them of their property,
or in other cases, not caring for them, not helping them.

To discipline His ungodly, selfish, greedy, loveless people, and restore **REALITY**,
God used the king of Assyria and his army
to rise up against Israel and against some of the cities of Judah.
God said of Assyria, of its king and its army:

...⁵Assyria, the rod of My anger; the staff in their hands is My fury!

⁶Against a godless nation I send him,
and against the people of My wrath I command him,
to take spoil and seize plunder,
and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. – Isaiah 10:5-6

God’s plan was to use the king of Assyria and his army
to take away the wealth unjustly gained by the powerful in Israel, in Judah
from the widows, orphans and the from the poor and weak.
God asked the nobles and the wealthy in Israel and Judah:

³What will you do on the day of punishment, in the ruin that will come from afar?
To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth?

⁴Nothing remains but to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain.
– Isaiah 10:3-4

However, the king of Assyria and his army were under the **ILLUSION**
that they had been victorious over Israel and Judah by their own power:

¹²When the LORD has finished all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem,
He will punish the speech of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria
and the boastful look in his eyes.

¹³For he [the king] says:

“By the strength of my hand I have done it...
I remove the boundaries of peoples, and plunder their treasures;
like a bull I bring down those who sit on thrones.” – Isaiah 10:12-13

In **REALITY**, Assyria was an “ax” in the hand of God
to cut down the arrogant and ungodly in Israel, in the cities of Judah.
By God’s power and plan the axe had been swung in destruction.
Therefore, God says of the Assyrian king and his army:

¹⁵Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it,
or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? – Isaiah 10:15

As the Assyrian king had cut down Israel and cut down the cities in Judah,
so the LORD would cut down the king of Assyria and his people:

¹⁸The glory of his forest and of his fruitful land
the LORD will destroy...

³³Behold, the Lord GOD of hosts will lop the boughs with terrifying power;
the great in height will be hewn down,
and the lofty will be brought low.. – Isaiah 10:18, 33

When the king of Assyria and his army were finally defeated,
Assyria never again rose to be the dominant power in the Middle East.
Once cut down by God, Assyria was a dead stump.

ISRAEL

Now we turn our eyes to Judah,
and to the line of king David that ruled over Judah.
The city of Jerusalem itself did not fall to Assyria.
In 586 B.C., Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians,
and the line of king David was deposed
and never regained rule over Judah.

NOTE: About four decades before Jesus was born
King Herod was appointed to rule over Judea by the Roman senate.
Herod was not of the line of David. Herod was Idumean [Edomite].

So, what of the line of king David?
What of God's promise to David?:

¹⁶*And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me.
Your throne shall be established forever. – 2 Samuel 7:16*

In Isaiah chapter 10, we read how God used the king of Assyria
as an axe to "cut down" the nobles of Israel.
Then, God "cut down" the king of Assyria and his people
and left them a dead stump.
Over a century later, the ungodly in the line of David were "cut down"
by the Babylonians and deposed.
Over the centuries, the lineage of king David had faded into obscurity.

God did not leave His people without Hope!
God promised through the prophet Isaiah:

¹*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. – Isaiah 11:1*

Yes, God "cut down" the ungodly among His people,
the king, the nobility, the wealthy who succumbed to greed and idolatry.
Only the "stump" of Jesse's tree remained. But there was Hope!

THE LESSON OF ISRAEL

Sometimes, people get caught up in an **ILLUSION**.

- ✗ The king of Assyria got caught up in an **ILLUSION**,
that by his power he defeated Israel and the cities in Judah.
- ✓ The **REALITY** was that God gave him victory to discipline His people, Israel.
- ✗ The kings of Israel and of Judah, and the nobles of the land,
got caught up in an **ILLUSION**,
that they could pursue idolatry and greed, abusing, neglecting
their fellow Israelites, all for their own selfish gain.
- ✓ The **REALITY** was that God gave them positions of power to serve Him,
to maintain justice for all their fellow Israelites,
and to have compassion on the poor and the weak in need.

ILLUSION is short lived!

**God brought the king of Assyria back to REALITY,
as God did the kings of Israel and Judah.**

THE PLAN FOR ISRAEL & THE NATIONS

**While God forsakes the ungodliness of man, and at times, ungodly men,
God remains steadfast in fulfilling His Plan!**

**As the line of Jesse produced David, who became king over all Israel,
so the "stump" of Jesse would produce a "second" David
to be king over His kingdom, a kingdom to rule the "nations".**

This "shoot", this King, would be endowed with the Holy Spirit...

²*And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, (know what to do)
the Spirit of counsel and might, (have the power to do it)
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. (have motivation to do it)*

... and will seek to serve the Lord, not His Own desires...

³*And His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.*

... thus, He will be the Righteous King, administering God's Rule...

³*He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide disputes by what His ears hear,
⁴but with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked.
⁵Righteousness shall be the belt of His waist,
and faithfulness the belt of His loins.*

... bringing peace to all under His rule...

⁹*They shall not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain;
for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD...*

... and through His rule, all people will be forever blessed.

¹⁰*In that day the root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a signal for the peoples
—of Him shall the nations inquire, and His resting place shall be glorious.*

CONCLUSION

The Word of God we hear during Season of Advent challenges us

- to cast off any and all **ILLUSIONS** from before us, and
- to take hold of the **REALITY** God has revealed
in His Written Word, and in the Living Word, Jesus.

Sin is not an **ILLUSION**! Sin, our sin, is a **REALITY**!

Sin is so **REAL** that the Father sent His Son into the world as a humble Servant,
to live a Righteous life as a man for all people; and
to take upon Himself the sin of the world,
and to bear the just punishment for sin in His death on the cross.

The forgiveness of sin God's offers in Christ is **REAL**,
and all those who receive forgiveness in faith become **REAL** sons of God,
and have a **REAL** inheritance in the eternal Kingdom of God's Son!

As God's "sons", God calls us to live **REAL** lives in faith and love,
loving and serving Him and our neighbor.

How foolish to turn away from the **REAL** love of God offered in Christ,
for the **ILLUSION** of a better, more fulfilling life apart from God!

**As we prepare to celebrate the REALITY of Jesus' birth as the Savior,
so let us anticipate with Joy the REALITY
of Jesus' return as the Righteous King
and of living for all eternity forever blessed under His rule! AMEN**