

**A Proud Tyrant Brought Down and The
Suffering Servant Exalted**
A Study in Isaiah chapters 14 and 52–53

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A Proud Tyrant Brought Down and the Suffering Servant Exalted

Isaiah 14:3–23; 52:13–53:12

As we were reading these two passages from the prophecy of Isaiah, I'm sure you were comparing and contrasting them in your minds. The first passage is the story of a proud tyrant who was brought down; the second is the familiar story of the suffering servant who was exalted.

The first describes one who is to be cast out even from his grave, before whom the kings of the earth shall wonder, and whose seed shall permanently be cut off. In contrast the verses from chapter 52 tell us of this other person, before whom the kings of this earth shall shut their mouths.

I have no need to remind you, my brothers and sisters, of the serious and grave situation that faces the world tonight; the serious consequences that could follow if Saddam Hussein were able to embroil Israel completely, head over heels, into the war.¹ No need to remind you that, even if that fails and Israel remains upon the side lines, all the United Nations are agreed now, as they never were since the Cold War has come to an end—and Russia stands more or less on the same side as America, that when this war is finished they must set about dealing with the problems of the Middle East, and in particular with Israel.

In this last year-and-a-half, the world has moved with such suddenness, in a way that none of us could have anticipated, a step nearer the time that all the prophets with almost one voice proclaimed, 'when all the nations of the world shall come against Jerusalem' (see Zech 12:3). They shall be brought on the one side by the machinations of the devil in his attempt to achieve his final victory and establish forever his satanic rule on our planet, and at another level by God in his wisdom to bring down his judgment upon this Godless world. He shall destroy the wicked and yet lead multitudes to repentance and to a time, as Isaiah reminds us, when even the land of Egypt will get converted and honour the Lord (ch. 19).

He shall bring down his judgments, not only upon this Godless Gentile world, but also on his rebellious people, Israel, so that sinners may be removed from Jerusalem and his people brought back in repentance to acknowledge their Messiah, and Jerusalem shall once more function as the earthly headquarters of the King.

As I say, I have no need to remind you of all that, and no intention to concentrate your attention particularly on the current troubles. Your minds are doubtless saturated by listening to the news, and tonight you are looking for some relief from those things and not to be further immersed in them. And certainly, in appealing to the ancient Prophet Isaiah, I am not

¹ 'The Gulf War', which began with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 and concluded after the Liberation of Kuwait by Coalition forces and Iraq agreeing to United Nations' demands on 28 February 1991. On the day before Dr Gooding gave this talk, Iraq fired scud missiles at Haifa and Tel Aviv, killing twelve people.

intending to identify that prophecy with this present day affair, or to fix dates, as is the manner of some, or to deal in prophecy mongering of any kind; and certainly not to set dates for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

The first fall of Jerusalem

But it seems to me a basic principle that, in order to understand properly what shall happen yet to the great city of Jerusalem within human history, and in order that we might take a balanced view as Christians of the affairs that are going on now in the Middle East, we should first go back to the time when Jerusalem fell for the first time ever, to ponder again what God said about Jerusalem at that time through the mouths of his holy prophets. We shall try to understand what was involved in that stupendous and shocking event when God allowed Jerusalem, the city of David—God’s anointed king, prototype of Messiah—to fall, and the Davidic monarchy to be removed for the time being.

You will see at once the importance of that great event in history from observing the space that God gives to it in his holy word, if from no other source. Isaiah writes sixty-six chapters, Jeremiah has fifty-two, Ezekiel has forty-eight. These three are joined by the majority of the so-called minor prophets. All of these, except the prophets of the return (from Babylon), concentrate for the most part on the run up to, and the consequences of, the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, and the removing of David’s dynasty of Judean kings.

They analyse for us what was at stake; the implications, why God did it, and why he will do it yet again. Even Isaiah, let alone others, is clear in his prophecy that at the end time, when God gathers the nations against Jerusalem, the city shall fall. They shall speak out of the ground, like somebody who’s a ventriloquist (see 29:4). Zechariah says that the city shall fall and the third part shall be left, for the Lord at his coming removes the flood of enemies and restores his people (see 13:8–9).

Why should we need to get a balanced view of these things?

Because, my brothers and sisters, it seems to me that living here in the west we could, without thinking, easily take a view that, if we were missionaries in some parts of the world, would seem grievously unfair to those to whom we preach the gospel. It moves me to say, shall we not in these days remember our good brothers and sisters who are missionaries in countries that are filled with adherents of the Muslim faith?

I remember quietly speaking to some of our Arab brothers in the assembly at Nazareth. They told me how God had helped them to love the Jews, and therefore their testimony with them was in good standing. But some of the behaviour of the Israelis was unjust, and it was difficult when starry-eyed Christians came and told them how the Israelis, now back in their land, were God’s favourite people and were doing nothing wrong.

For the gospel’s sake, for the truth of God and his character’s sake, we do need to get a balanced view of what the prophets say is happening.

The Messiah's ancestors

According to Matthew 1 there were two great ancestors of the Messiah: one was Abraham and the other was David.

Abraham

God did a unique thing when he called out Abraham, but he didn't leave the rest of the world lost and doomed to perish. In those days, the Gentile world—therefore, the whole world—had slithered down the slippery slope into idolatry. They were fast going down into the bondage and immorality that accompanies such an idolatrous interpretation of the universe. When God in his mercy raised up a protest and drew Abraham out of the Gentile world, he gave him a vision of the glory of the true God and set him and his descendants up as a witness. There was one place on earth at least where Gentiles might see the truth of the true God and be delivered from their bondage and superstitions.

We need that message still. People in the west do not generally bow down before sticks and stones of idols; but our modern world is saturated with agnosticism, if not atheism, which, as any schoolboy knows, reintroduces into people's thinking an idolatrous interpretation of the universe. It doesn't really matter whether you say the sun is a bit of stuff, or it's a god. It doesn't matter whether you call the basic forces of the universe weak atomic power or strong atomic power, gravity or electromagnetism. Call them what you will. If you hold that there is no personal Creator, then you are driven to the idolatrous view of the universe that the ancient Gentile nations had. They called these forces, as far as they understood them, gods. We don't call them gods, but the atheist proclaims what the old idolatrous Gentiles believed. These are the ultimate powers that control man: his birth, his life, his death and eventual extinction; and they leave our modern world as they left the ancient world, in the darkness of ultimate hopelessness. Slaves to the great physical forces of the universe that man cannot ultimately control, but will one day destroy him.

It was a glorious gospel message that God preached to mankind, when he led Abraham out of that Gentile morass and showed him a sight of his own true glory as the living God-Creator, and set up a relationship between himself and Abraham that should be a pattern for all men everywhere. He taught Abraham not only the truth of God, but how to be right with God, thus delivering him from the slaveries of religion, teaching Abraham and millions since that man is justified by faith without works (see Rom 4).

David

But there was another prong to God's strategy; not only to raise up Abraham, but eventually David, the anointed of the Lord, prototype of the coming Messiah. Just as God promised Abraham that in his offspring all the nations of the earth should one day be blessed (Gen 22:17-18); so now God guaranteed David that his dynasty would prevail, and from it God would raise up his Messiah (2 Sam 7:12-16). For all the kings, princes and tyrants that had ever ruled, God would substitute his own gracious Son as King of kings and Lord of lords.

It was, therefore, a very significant point in history when King David, at last accepted by all Israel as God's anointed king, went to the tiny little village of Jebus, captured it and turned

it into Jerusalem City, city of David the king (1 Chr 11:4–9). It was a city destined to play such a part in history, and destined still one day to be the centre of world trouble and world politics.

Why did God eventually allow that city to be destroyed?

Having made a covenant with David that David should never lack a man to sit upon his throne, why then would God cut off his sons after him, like he cut off Saul? When his son should be born, God himself would be a father to that son of David, and he should be to God as a son; so why did God not only allow Jerusalem City to fall, but the Davidic line to be brought low and the monarchy cease?

The godly in Israel found it a very painful problem. Listen to the psalmist: ‘God, what has happened to your covenant with David, for all our holy places are destroyed and David’s throne is no more?’ (see Ps 89:49).

The unbeliever said, ‘There’s no problem, the whole story was a myth anyway. It was just the old Hebrews, the Jews with their national pride and Judaism, imagining that they were God’s blue-eyed spoilt boys, inventing a lot of so-called promises from their God that their king one day should rule the world, thus justifying all their slaughter and oppression of the surrounding nations. And now the fall of Jerusalem has proved there was never anything in it at all.’

The problem still vexes many Israelis. How shall they square the promises given to King David of old with the facts that stare them in the face? And still to the present amongst the vast majority of the world the question is asked, ‘What about this Jerusalem and all that it stood for in the past?’ Was it true that the transcendent Lord and God of the universe set up Jerusalem as the royal seat of his divinely anointed king, David, as a prototype and placeholder for the coming royal Messiah, King of kings and Lord of lords? Or must we surrender it all as a myth that the stern realities of modern life have blown to pieces?

It was because of his people’s sin

God had deigned to presence himself in the temple of Jerusalem and the people of Israel claimed to know God as no other nation on earth knew him; but while they professed to know him their behaviour became so sickeningly evil that their rituals in the temple of Jerusalem disgusted God.

‘I cannot bear it,’ he said. ‘Your solemn feasts on the one hand, and your shady business deals on the other. I cannot put up with your so-called fasts; and you go out from your religious observances and oppress the poor, just like any old, unprincipled Gentile businessman. I’ll not put up with it’ (see Isa 1:12–15).

‘Alas,’ says God, as he breaks his heart, to and through the great Prophet Isaiah, ‘an ox, poor old beast, doesn’t have all that much sense in its head, but it knows its owner, and the donkey knows its master’s crib. They know their master by instinct, but Israel, my people, they don’t know me. They know my name, but they don’t know me’ (see Isa 1:3).

In later centuries, didn’t John address the same warning to us? ‘Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him’ (1 John 2:4).

So Israel abused their temple, and it is not Christian anti-Semitism that says so—it’s their loyal great prophet, Isaiah himself. And not only did the Jews of the time abuse their temple, but their kings, the descendants of David, many of them misbehaved themselves and acted

just like the Gentile kings did: favouring the rich and oppressing the poor, living in sin and corruption. God would not stick it and he removed the temple and he removed the line of David and allowed the city to be destroyed.

If this is the case, it seems to me that we have here one very big piece of evidence that the ancient claim made by Israel, that they were the chosen nation of the earth, is indeed true. Listen to what God said through Amos to these same people, 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities' (3:2). Ladies and gentlemen, this claim in the Old Testament that Israel are God's special people is no jingoism. It is not that Israel got the idea that they could do no wrong; they were God's favourites and he would always be on their side, whatever they did. If they did think that, God took steps in history to prove them wrong and disabused them of the idea. God certainly had known them, chosen them to be unique among the nations of the earth, and the evidence of that is its consequence—God would deal more severely with their sins than he had dealt with any other nation's sin.

And one pauses to reflect. As Christian people, we haven't much room to talk, have we? How often we have lived substandard Christian lives, professing one thing at the spiritual level and doing another in our daily living. If God had dealt with us with the severity he used in dealing with his ancient people, where should we be?

Here on the face of the history of Jerusalem these long centuries ago and what has followed, is one big piece of evidence that the story of God's choice of Israel is true. And how it would break your heart, even if half of these prophecies are true, what yet shall come upon that loved and longed for nation, as they continue in their hardness of heart against God and his Messiah.

It seems to me that the importance of noticing this, therefore, is not that we pride ourselves as believers, or foster any anti-Semitism, but we do well to guard our speech as we speak to the world at large.

For instance, God promised the land to Abraham and to his offspring, but that doesn't mean that every physical descendant of Abraham will inherit that land, does it? Paul explains in Galatians 3:16 that the *seed* meant by God in that ancient covenant was none other than the Messiah himself. And I remind you tonight, my brothers and sisters, that the title deeds to the land of Israel are vested in the Messiah, and no one can say, 'because of Genesis 15, nevertheless I have a right to the land of Israel'. The land is covenanted to Abraham and his seed. That seed is Christ, and an Israel that rejects their Messiah has no claim on the fulfilment of that covenant. Wouldn't it be a monstrous thought, and a thing to say, that Israelis who would spit in the face of their God-given Messiah, nonetheless have a right to live in the land promised to Abraham and his seed?

Let us remind ourselves of the facts. In the first part of Isaiah, we read how that in the end, under God's judgments, God brought the Assyrians up and turned the ten tribes out of their land. Through Hosea the prophet God had said, 'you are not my people' (1:9). One day they will be reinstated. But I've never read anywhere else in Scripture, subsequent to Hosea's prophecy, that they have yet been reinstated, have you? If God meant what he said in Hosea, the ten tribes were set aside: 'Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God' (v. 9 KJV).

God has not finally rejected his people

It isn't that God has cast away the people whom he foreknew. Listen to Paul:

I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew. (Rom 11:1-2)

'There is a remnant', says Paul, 'and I'm one of them!' All down the long centuries God has left a remnant of his people. Isaiah was saying it: 'If the LORD of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah' (1:9). To this very present time there is a remnant, and one day the nation as a whole shall be restored; but we need to guard our language when we think about their present state.

Lessons from the book of Isaiah

So let us take one or two lessons from this ancient prophecy. I don't know how you find the prophecy of Isaiah; its sixty-six long chapters often make it difficult for the likes of me to get my fingers around it somehow. I have my favourite verses in it and sometimes the verses extend to nearly full chapters; but somehow getting hold of the whole book is a trifle difficult, is it not? So I look for ways to make it a little bit easier. There are three parts to this great book of Isaiah as outlined below.

Part	Chapters	Contents
I	1-35	For the most part this is all about statements that Isaiah made inspired of God. Prophecies about his nation and the nations around him.
II	36-39	Straightforward history about Hezekiah, one of the kings of Judah.
III	40-66	Once more all about prophecy.

Assyria

We might put it this way. In those three parts, the first section of prophecy is about Israel in the days when the great Gentile power was Assyria. It was the biggest empire that the world had seen up to that time. In those first thirty-five chapters, therefore, you will see Judah quaking in its shoes under the ever-growing shadow of this vast military machine. The Assyrians were set upon achieving world conquest. In the first third of the book therefore, Israel, and particularly the kings of Judah, are shown against the background of the Assyrians.

Middle section

Then comes the middle section of history.

Babylon

In the last third of the book, from chapter 40 onwards, the Assyrians have long since lapsed out of sight. Now it's a question of the Babylonians, for it was the empire of Neo-Babylonia that followed Assyria. The Assyrians never destroyed Jerusalem, its temple, or its kings. They made the kings of Judah vassal kings, but they never destroyed or took Jerusalem. What the

Assyrians didn't do, the Babylonians did under Nebuchadnezzar the Great, and Jerusalem was destroyed.

In the last third of the book, then, Isaiah prophesied of the wonderful days when Israel should be restored and delivered from the Babylonians and brought back into her land, the land should be restored, and the Messiah would come and introduce the great millennial reign of God.

History

Sometimes I think a good place to start is to think about the middle bit of history, for it begins by teaching us certain practical lessons, and then it forms a prototype of coming things. In the days of Hezekiah, when the kings of Judah who had preceded him had compromised with the great emperor of the Assyrians, eventually the emperor of the Assyrians brought up his vast military machine. It was a multinational force, for that was the way of the Assyrians. They caught the very best of all the nations and forced them into their armies. It was a multinational war machine and they came through the land of Israel, swallowing up all the little nations around, like God had said they would through the Prophet Isaiah:

The LORD spoke to me again: 'Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah that flow gently, and rejoice over Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River, mighty and many, the king of Assyria and all his glory. And it will rise over all its channels and go over all its banks, and it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass on, reaching even to the neck, and its outspread wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.' (8:5-8)

First story

I wonder, can you picture what happened in those far off days? There was little Jerusalem, stuck up on its mountain ridge, like it is to this day; and here were the vast armies of the Assyrians coming in like a flood all around the land. They took not merely the other little nations, but they took the cities of Judea. They took Lachish and they took Arad and all those southern cities, and the northern cities as well.

They had long since taken the ten tribes away, now they came around Jerusalem. The emperor himself was down at Lachish, sacking it, and the monument to his great effort is in the British Museum to this day. Busying himself with Lachish, he sent his Rabshakeh, his second in command, to Jerusalem. Standing with his diplomats by his side, the Rabshakeh shouted over the walls of Jerusalem, and in the name of the king of Assyria he mocked Israel and he mocked their God. 'Come on out,' he said to Hezekiah. 'Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria . . .' (36:4-10).

He wasn't over bashful, the king of Assyria. In his own documents, he had himself called the King of the Universe. 'I've gobbled up all the other nations, you'll be no exception', says the great king of Assyria. 'Don't think that your god is someone special. I've taken gods galore. All these nations around had their gods; I've dismantled them and I shall do the same thing to you. What do you call your god, Jehovah or something? I'll do the same to him. You can

teach the people to rely upon their god, but I'll show you that the ultimate determinant in human affairs is sheer military might.'

'Don't let Hezekiah deceive you,' said the Rabshakeh to the common people in the language they could understand (Aramaic). 'Rise up against him and give up all this nonsense about Jehovah being different to the gods of any of the other nations' (see vv. 13–20).

Hezekiah had compromised and become a vassal to the great Assyrians. He was perched up in his little Jerusalem like a shed in a cucumber field (1:8), with the vast might of the Assyrians around him. But now, strengthened by the prophecies of Isaiah the prophet, he dared to defy this tyrant. God vindicated him and did a miracle, and the Assyrian army crept away with its tail between its legs.

What a story. It's one of the very early prototypes of what shall yet be. In the course of the centuries God-defying monarchs have from time to time appeared on the face of this earth. The pharaoh of the exodus was one of them; and God had to demonstrate who Jehovah was, to let his people go. The Assyrian was another. Antiochus Epiphanes was a third. The great, self-deifying Roman emperors were yet others. 'Be warned,' says Scripture, 'this will repeat itself at the end.'

Is this Old Testament story true? The question of what Jerusalem ultimately stands for is nothing less than this: is there is a God, the transcendent Lord Creator, who not only made our world, but he actually chose Israel to be his people and David as his anointed forerunner of Messiah? Jerusalem shall be the place on earth where the God-defying forces shall at last gather to imagine that they're going to blot out the name and claim of God from the face of the earth. God shall deal with them there and demonstrate the reality of the coming of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The prophecy of Isaiah is full of the promise that what God did for Hezekiah he will one day do on a bigger scale, when the nations come up against Jerusalem. They shall succeed so far and part of the city of Jerusalem shall fall, and then the Lord will come. He shall destroy the evil one at that end time by the brightest of his appearing (see 2 Thess 2:8).

Second story

After that, Hezekiah fell ill (Isa 38). God listened to his prayers, and the man recovered. God promised him that there should not only be recovery for him, but recovery for his people. He gave him an eloquent sign, that the sun's shadow should go back ten degrees on the sundial of Ahaz (vv. 7–8).

Well, it needed to, because Ahaz had got the nations into a terrible mess and God gave the nation a reprieve. Then there rose up one more great reformer by the name of Josiah, to add a little more years of life to the Davidic monarchy (2 Kgs 22:1).

Third story

The third story about Hezekiah is a very interesting one (ch. 39). After he got better, there came envoys from the king of Babylon. Well that's what he called himself. His name in Hebrew is given as *Merodach-Baladan*.

Now I'd better explain to you who that gentleman was. He was king of Babylon in this sense, that at that time the Assyrians ruled Babylon. The Assyrians' capital was Nineveh, not Babylon; but the Assyrians had conquered Babylon and her great city, her great temples, her religion and her commerce. In the ancient world the temple was not only a seat of religion, it was a seat of commerce and the temple in Babylon was exceedingly wealthy. Its priests acted like bankers and by their loans they controlled the agriculture and the industry of the whole area.

So the Assyrians had conquered Babylon, and it was their practice to put in a puppet king who should rule for them. But very often, as soon as the back of the Assyrian was turned, the kings of Babylon and their rulers conspired. The Babylonians were always working against the Assyrians, trying to get Egypt or the Hebrews or the Syrians or the Moabites or somebody, to work out a confederacy of nations to oust the Ninevites, the Assyrians.

On this occasion it was the so-called king of Babylon, Merodach-Baladan, old rascal that he was, who plotted against them. He sent envoys to Hezekiah to congratulate him on his recovery, and Hezekiah foolishly showed them all his treasures. Isaiah warned Hezekiah, 'when the Babylonians come up they'll strip you of every treasure you have' (see vv. 5-6).

Lesson number one in the history now repeats itself, and shows you an example of what the prophet is so constantly saying. Israel had a fatal tendency: instead of looking to God, the living Lord, to protect them, they would rely upon the military might of their Gentile neighbours. Now it would be Egypt, then it would be Babylon; and the prophets thundered at them for their folly. Why could they not dare to trust God? Why must they reduce their whole testimony to God to a mere military struggle, just like the Gentile nations did?

That is still the issue. There are God-fearing sections of Judaism, particularly the Hasidic Jews of New York, who will have no truck whatever with the modern state of Israel. It's not that the Hasidic Jews of New York don't believe their Old Testament; they believe every word of it, for they read it deeply, and they quote their prophet Isaiah to the modern state of Israel. 'Only Messiah can save and restore Israel', they say. The modern Israeli state is dependent upon the great Gentile powers for its salvation, 'and that', say the Hasidic Jews of New York, 'is like going down to Egypt for help'.² If it came to an argument between the Hasidic Jews of New York and the state of Israel, on which side would you come down?

Shades of things to come. One day the great political power of the beast shall arise, and on his back will be Babylon. Babylon will argue in the name of religion that, because we're all fighting the same atheist threat, we all ought to be together. Part of Israel will be deceived and seek by those means to protect its testimony for God, and shall be brought to disaster.

What ought Israel to be standing for?

I want to compare and contrast one lesson from the first third of the book with one from the second part. What ought Israel to be standing for now among the nations?

² In the sense of all that Egypt in the Bible stood for.

First lesson

Come back with me to Isaiah 7, to the time when Ahaz was reigning on the throne of Judah. He heard that the ten tribes were now confederate with the Syrians, and together they had a plan. They were going to come down to Jerusalem with their armies, depose Ahaz, the king of David's line, and put another king in his place. When Ahaz heard that, his heart 'shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind' (v. 2). What should he do to preserve the great house of David from the attacks of the apostate ten tribes who were now confederate with the Syrians in Damascus? What should he do?

Ahaz decided that the thing to do at this stage was to call in the support of the great imperial Assyrians, so that they should crush the ten tribes and Syria. God sent Isaiah to meet him in the road one day, and he pleaded with Ahaz not to call in the Assyrians. Fancy calling in the Assyrians to support him against the ten tribes and against Syria. Couldn't he see what Assyria would do? They'd come and take over.

'Why don't you trust God?' asked Isaiah. 'Isn't that what you stand for? Ask God for a sign that he will be with you and deliver you.'

Ahaz was such a politician and used to real hard headed affairs, he said he wouldn't like to put the Lord to the test and he wouldn't ask for a sign. So Isaiah said:

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. (v. 14)

With the mass might of the ten tribes and Syria coming against him, did Ahaz listen? What if he had put his faith in it? This is what Israel should still be standing for: the virgin and the baby, whose name is *Immanuel*, God with us. Ahaz has long since gone, but one day a virgin brought forth the child, and he's called 'God with us'. God's answer to the power politics of this world is the babe of Bethlehem.

Later on Israel was faced with the very babe of Bethlehem, now grown up. He stood before Pilate, and Pilate said, 'Young man, don't you know I have the power to deliver you and I have the power to crucify you?' (see John 19:10).

The last dictator and the true king

This world is obsessed with power. They preach the greatness of their kings, but mere power will solve nothing ultimately, will it? Israel should have been witnessing to God, its true king. The answer to the tyrannies of this earth is God incarnate.

I like that vision given to us in Revelation 12. The chapter comes as an introduction before the prophecies of the time when our world will see the ultimate dictator prancing around earth with all his embattled might.

[He] opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (2 Thess 2:4)

He is Satan's great masterpiece, the Satan who first put the lie into the human heart in the garden of Eden, 'Eat of the tree and you shall be as God.' The ultimate end of Gentile power

politics is when, under the influence of Satan, this great dictator will try to be God, raising himself to the level of God.

God paints the background to it all. In heaven there is a woman and she's pregnant. Who is this child? Well, wonder of wonders, when a man on earth is trying to ape God, what's God doing? God is becoming man (Rev 12:5). Which one would you like to be governed by? Which king?

God is omnipotent

'As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God' (Rom 14:11). But when God demands that all bow down and confess, it shall not be the command of a tyrant. It will be in the name of Christ Jesus, 'who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross' (Phil 2:5-8).

What a marvellous story. Thank God that ultimate history rests with him. It's not a question of who has the biggest power. By definition, God Almighty has the biggest power, but the question is, what kind of a ruler shall have ultimate dominion?

And I know which one you've chosen. You sit here tonight, obedient subjects of the Lord Jesus Christ. What was it that subdued you? Was it the fear of his fork lightning or his divine missiles directed at your heart with his laser beams?

'No,' you say, 'my rebel heart would have withstood all the threatening of God's almighty power and hell combined.'

Then what subdued you?

'I discovered what God is like. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob humbled himself and became a man. For my sake he was obedient to death, even the death of the cross.' Marvellous story.

That's what Israel should be standing for, but they have missed their way.

Second lesson

We come back to the two chapters that we read. Once more you may take your pick, for in Isaiah 13 and 14 God begins to talk not just to Israel but to the nations. The godless nations, warning them where their time will end up.

In chapter 14 it is the story of the 'King of Babylon', the name that the kings of Assyria sometimes took. He is an Assyrian really, though he's technically the king of Babylon. It's the story of that kind of king who exalted himself above all that is called God.

That great luminous tyrant fell, and as he fell all the kings of the earth came out of their graves and had a look (v. 9). 'Are you the great tyrant that caused the whole earth to tremble? Just look at you, you don't even have a decent grave', they say. 'All the kings of the earth are in their graves, but you fell on the land like an unwanted branch, covered with dead bodies of the slain, and your offspring shall perish' (see vv. 182-1).

Yes, there's coming a day when man's excessive pride shall meet its proper end. Who now applauds at the remembrance of Alexander the Great, I wonder, or Antiochus Epiphanes, or Nero Caesar? Who worships the memory of Adolf Hitler or Stalin?

One day the great Satan-inspired dictator will be brought to the ashes, his name cast out forever, and his offspring no more. Look what destruction he has made in the earth. Can you count the millions? How many millions did Adolf Hitler do away with, or Stalin, or Alexander the Great, or Napoleon, and what for? To what end? To what good?

What a cursed world it's been, and what should Israel be standing for, trying to match dictators like that? As yet they will not have it, will they? One day the Messiah will come, and with almighty power he will destroy the wicked.

'There you are,' you say, 'he's going to use power one day and obliterate the wicked. What's the difference between him and them?'

I can tell you the difference. Listen to Messiah as now he calls on the Gentiles, 'The Lord has anointed me not only to bring Israel back, but to bring you Gentiles home to God.' How? Oh, listen to the story again,

So shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand. (52:15)

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. (53:5)

The story is true. Before this world can be put right it will have to be deluged with judgment, but mark who it is that will do it, and mark his qualifications to do it. Who is worthy to open the scroll and break the seals that should deluge our world with judgment, remove the wicked, and set up the paradise of God? Who is worthy? And the answer is, 'the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals' (Rev 5:5).

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth. (Rev 5:9-10)

My brothers, my sisters, how sad is Israel? They should have been witnessing to that Messiah, but for the most part their eyes are blinded by calling on the Assyrians, and anyone else, to help them maintain their vision of a restored state of Israel, and it will not do. The only answer is the Messiah they rejected. But God be praised, one day they will be reconciled to him.

May God give us wisdom in all our Christian testimony to remember what God's answer is and not allow ourselves or our message to become compromised with other messages that are not the true gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

About the Author

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