

16.07.06 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

The Most High Rules the Nations

Bible Readings = Isaiah 10:1-19; Daniel 4:28-37

Introduction:

- (1) Last week we gave attention to the fact that the nations are not free standing entities. We saw that there is a great power who rules over them (the City), who in turn rides on the shoulders of the beast, made in the image of the dragon.
- (2) We saw that the serpent brought humanity captive to himself in the temptation of our first parents: promising them the knowledge of good and evil, knowledge they could have according to their own estimate and on their own terms.
- (3) We saw how this is at the root of human bitterness, sin and iniquity, and how the building of the Tower was an expression of that desire: to have an outcome that is good for ourselves (e.g. wealth, security, independence from God, no scattering, immunity to his judgements and so on).
- (4) We also saw that Nimrod was in every way the opposite of Christ. Mighty, mighty, mighty Nimrod (Rebel), leading the nations in anger and rebellion against God, and establishing the City to rule over them.
- (5) But we also saw that God's plan has always been to gather the nations and to bless them through the Seed of Abraham, and how his love circumvents all the human judgements we make. He comes in his insistent love, riding in on a donkey to the very midst of the City in all its rebellion, praying for his crucifiers even as he is being crucified, so that they may be blessed.

Today, we will be considering simple reality of God's sovereignty over the nations, and see something of how in both the broad plan and the finest detail he is at work to accomplish his purposes.

1. Two Examples: Assyria and Babylon

(1) This sovereignty is asserted in terms that are absolute (e.g. Is. 40:15), and in the big picture, is responsible for the rise and fall of nations, kingdoms, empires and powerful thrones. The Bible readings for today have taken us to two specific examples of the principle of God's sovereignty over the nations. We could have chosen many examples, but these are particularly significant in the history of God's Old Testament people.

Assyria was the power by which the northern tribes were taken away, and Babylon served a similar function in the history of Judah about 150 years later.

(2) The first example comes from Isaiah 10, and we note a few points only

- The role of Assyria was to bring judgement on God's own people, who had become a 'godless' nation (Is. 10:6) i.e. in the Old Testament sense. They were completely given over to the power of the idols, and to all the political, spiritual, social, personal and moral corruption that went with that. These were in fact 'no gods', as there is only one God...they were in fact godless, though they had gods aplenty!
 - See the assessment of their state in 2 Kings 17:5ff. The general heading of vv. 7-8 is broken down into specific examples in the passage that follows (e.g. vv. 9, 10, 11, 12, etc.).

- God personally takes responsibility for sending Assyria (e.g. Is. 10:5, 6, 15), but Assyria and her king did not recognise this. Rather they saw their power as being from their own strength, and from that of their gods (e.g. Is. 10:12 cf. 13f).
 - Moreover, just as God used Assyria to judge Israel, so he would judge Assyria, in their case by the Babylonians, who were in turn judged by the Medes and Persians, etc.
- (3) The second example comes from Daniel, particularly Daniel 4.
- The understanding ascribed to Nebuchadnezzar in Dan. 4:1-3 was not his natural disposition! He had to be brought to see it!
 - The troubling dream (4:10-17)
 - The troubling interpretation (4:19-25)
 - The plea for repentance (4:26-27)
 - The vision fulfilled (4:28ff.)
 - The final understanding that the humbling has brought (4:34ff)
 - We note that Nebuchadnezzar's son, Belshazzar, did not heed the lesson of his father (5:18-22)...and he was the last king of Bablyon.
 - Taken away by a 'bird of prey' Is. 49:10-11; who in his case was Cyrus, the king of the Medes and Persians, God's anointed one! (Is. 45:1f.) his 'shepherd' (Is. 44:28).

2. No Random Action

When we consider the actions of God in his dealings with the nations, we must see that these are not random actions. This can be said to be so in at least two ways:

(1) Every action was for the preparation of the coming of the Son. Gal. 4:4 'When the time had fully come' cf. Mark 1:15 'The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is at hand'. Rome had to be Rome, the state of God's Old Testament people had to be exactly what it was, the Pharisees needed to be just who they were, Caiaphas was high priest according to the will of God etc.

- Compare with Acts 4:27f. cf. Acts 2:23; 3:18; 13:27
- And now, every action is with a view to the second coming of the Son. God has appointed the times and seasons, and at the right time, the Son will be revealed from heaven. Cf Acts 3:20-21 (and also compare with Matt. 24:36; 1 Thess. 1:10).

(2) The actions of God, particularly as we see them in judgement on the nations, are entirely in accord with the moral nature of his own being. For example, see Gen. 15:16.

- There are various sins for which the nations are judged, in accordance with the timing of God for that judgement to be brought. Examples abound in the Old Testament (for specifics see Harry Lacey, *God and the Nations*, 1942, pp 50-63) e.g. provoking a quarrel with a neighbouring nation; unprincipled means of expansion; perpetration of atrocities; merciless warfare; pride in national security; antagonism towards Israel; lack of pity for a fallen nation; pride in wealth; failure to recognise divine authority; refusal to hear the prophets; false teaching; idolatry; astrology, witchcraft, sorcery and the like; unthankfulness; indulgence and greed; unprincipled trade; immorality of various sorts; etc.!
- Comment on Lacey's comment regarding Hitler (NB, book published in 1942, and the comments written before the turning of the tide of the war) 'The rod of Europe seems to have been paid in spoil for his service upon not a few guilty

nations. But surely as this is true will he in due course be paid for his sins.' (*God and the Nations*, p. 89)

○ See this being worked out in Assyria's case in Isaiah 10, for example.

(3) We take great hope and assurance from these things. The nations are not careering out of control, and the purposes of God are not 'catch up' operations, making the best of a bad lot!

3. God's Purpose: The Blessing of the Nations

(1) We know from the covenant with Abraham that God's purpose is to bless the rebellious nations. He would gather them together, but as servants of his will, and gathered to the foot of his Son to love him and adore his name.

(2) In the Old Testament we have examples of this.

- God sends Jonah to Nineveh, for example, the capital of Assyria! Jonah 1:2 cf. Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:30-32. And how angry was Jonah that this traditional enemy of God should be blessed!
- See the remarkable statement in Is. 19:24-25 where the great oppressors (Egypt and Assyria) are named as 'God's own people!'
- The prophecies about the gathering of the nations, as in Gen. 49:10 cf. Is. 49:6, 22, 9:1ff. (cf Galilee!)

(3) In all this, we must understand the reign and rule of God over the nations as being the reign and rule of grace. God's judgements do complete their intent, they do prepare the nations for the coming of the Son, and the Son for the mission to the world.

- See the remarkable word given to Isaiah the prophet.
 - Is. 40 there is a message to proclaim! See the Shepherd coming (40:10ff.)
 - Is. 41: the nations of the coastlands (the uttermost parts) are to hear (41:1ff.)
 - All the nations are to see the Servant (42:1ff)
 - Too small a thing that Israel alone should be blessed (49:6)!
 - And only through the Cross (52:13-15), as there he intercedes for the transgressors.