Trusting the Lord and Savior of Nations (Isaiah 13–20)
Isaiah: Trusting the God Who Judges, Saves, and Renews
Zionsville Fellowship | November, 8, 2026 | Drew Hunter

[Read Isaiah 13:1–11; 19:18–25]

John Newton was an English pastor who wrote the hymn, *Amazing Grace*.

> I'm going to read from a letter he wrote in 1775, right as the Revolutionary war started. He saw this as a dark time, and that England and the colonies were both filled with sins. God gave these lands so much grace through Christian influence—but Newton saw a vast decline. And now so much of their world was destabilized by political unrest.
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> Maybe you feel like we're in a similar situation today.
> We see spiritual and moral decline.
> We see national and international political unrest.
> And perhaps over this past election week you've felt especially concerned about the future.

Here is the counsel Newton gave in the letter, and it's just as relevant to us today:

> It is a time of prayer. We see the beginning of trouble, but who can foresee the possible consequences?
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> I do not meddle with the disputes of party, nor concern myself with any political maxims, but such as are laid down in Scripture. There I read that righteousness exalts a nation, and that sin is the reproach, and if persisted in, the ruin of any people. Some people are startled at the enormous sum of our national debt; they who do spiritual arithmetic may well be startled if they sit down and compute the debt of national sin…
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> There is one political maxim which comforts me: "the Lord reigns." His hand guides the storm; and he knows them that are his—how to protect, support, and deliver them. He will take care of his own cause; yes, he will extend his kingdom, even by these formidable methods. Men have one thing in view; He has another, and his counsel shall stand.[i]

Did you hear his two political maxims?

> "Righteousness exalts a nation, and sin is the reproach, and if persisted in, the ruin of any people." And: "the Lord reigns." These are what we need today: to see the reality of sin and its consequences for a nation, and to trust that the Lord reigns.

This is the lesson of our text in Isaiah.

> We're looking at a long section today—Isaiah 13–20. These are difficult to understand—this is ancient poetry about ancient civilizations. But here is the central, relevant message: **God is the Lord and savior of nations, and our only hope in the midst of them.**
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> Here's why this matters: Because we respond to the problems of our nation and the world in one of three ways—and Isaiah gives the Christian alternative to all three.

1. The first response is *dread*: We dread the future of our nation or the broader world. We're afraid of the moral decline, afraid of persecution, afraid of what the future holds.
2. The second response is *disdain*: We disdain those who are different and may threaten our nation or way of life.
3. The third response is *dependence*: We depend on and put our hope in a politician or a party or an election to make it better.

> But Isaiah calls us to not dread, disdain, or depend on nations. Why? **Because God is the Lord and Savior of nations, and our hope in the midst of them.** This is what I want to convince you of from these chapters.

Now, here's how this section is organized.

> Isaiah gives God's people five messages about nations surrounding them—the nations they were tempted to dread, or disdain, or depend on.
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> And across all these messages, he drives home three key themes—and we'll walk through each of these together:
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> God *rules* the nations, so don't *dread* them.
> God *saves* the nations, so don't *disdain* them.
> God *judges* the nations, so don't *depend on* them.

1. God Rules the Nations, So Don't Dread Them (Isa. 13–14)

First, God rules the nations, so don't dread them.

> We see this especially in Isaiah 13–14. Even when it looks like the world looks unhinged, God is still in control. This is why we can trust him in terrifying times.
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> Israel was in the midst of turmoil. The nations around them were powerful and evil. But Isaiah shows us that God rules and judges them.

This answers five questions about God's judgment.

First, who does God judge?

> He judges nations. This is God's judgment on Babylon—and the next several chapters show God's judgment against Philistia, Moab, Syria, and Egypt. And he'll keep going after this section until we see that he judges every nation and every person. So these are representative examples of how God judges every nation.
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> Babylon is first because it was the greatest rising empire of the time. And it also represented all prideful nations. Babylon's roots stretch back to the tower of Babel, which is a picture of how all civilizations pridefully reject God.[ii]

Second question: how does God judge the nations?

> He uses nations to judge nations. He uses another nation to judge Babylon here. We see this in verses 4–5, "The LORD of hosts is mustering a host (an army) for battle. 5 They come from a distant land, from the end of the heavens, the LORD and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy the whole land."
>
> The judgments across chapters 13–20 show us how God uses nations to judge nations. These nations don't realize that God is the one using them for his purposes. But God is the one who makes nations rise and fall across history.

Third question: What is it like when God does this?

> It's terrifying. Verses 7–8 describe hearts melting, people in agony and distress. Some of the language here is actually shocking to us because it is so brutal. It's the horror of warfare.
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> Here's what we need to recognize: When God uses one nation to judge another, he's not endorsing their methods. Ray Ortlund put it like this: "God can use bad people to punish other bad people without himself becoming bad."[iii] God will judge Nation A by using Nation B, and then he may also judge Nation B for the evil way they carried out this warfare.

Fourth question: why does God judge nations?

> He does it in response to their prideful evil and brutality. Notice verse 11 again: "I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless."[iv]
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> We've seen Babylon's pride in many nations—which is why in the New Testament it becomes a symbol for other empires. Ancient Rome was like this. Our own nation is increasingly like this. Every nation is accountable to God.

Fifth question: how should we feel about these judgments against nations?

With a mingling of affirmation and sorrow.

- We affirm that it is right and good for God to bring prideful, violent nations down. Most of chapter 14 describes how God's people will take up a taunt against the Babylonian king when he falls. They will rejoice because the judgment is just, and it vindicates the victims of oppression.

- But the rejoicing is mingled with tears. We've looked at the judgment against Babylon, but the second nation judged is Moab. Isaiah describes this in chapters 15 and 16. Moab will also be judged by God—but there's something striking here: Isaiah and the Lord are portrayed as weeping over this judgment. Look at 16:9. God says, "I weep… I drench you with my tears." And verse 11, "my inner parts moan like a lyre for Moab."

  God judges them, but with sorrow in his heart and tears in his eyes.

  So we look out over history—and see God's judgment of nations as they fall—and we say two things at once: "God, you are just and good to do this. And we also grieve for them, that their sin reached such a level to warrant this."

  Did not Jesus do this on his way to Jerusalem? He said they were going to be judged and destroyed by the Roman armies. But as he drew near, he wept over them.

What's the main point here?

Isaiah write about God's coming judgment against five nations surrounding Israel. But he's not writing these messages *to* those nations. He is writing *to* Israel *about* these nations.

Why? To teach God's people to not live in dread of them. God rules the nations and he will hold every nation accountable. We don't need to live in fear of them.

This shows us that God does not just care about churches and spiritual matters. He cares about nations and politics and judicial systems. He has moral expectations for nations.

So, what do you fear about our own nation? What are you discouraged about in light of the recent election season? What are you fearful about when you consider other nations?

Here's what God wants you to know: No matter what happens in America, or Iran, or North Korea, or China—God is in charge. *God rules the nations, so don't dread them.*

2. God Saves the Nations, So Don't Disdain Them (Isa. 15–19)

Second: God saves the nations, so don't disdain them.

If you read through all five of these messages for nations—most of air time is about why and how God will judge them. Basically, more of what we've already seen.

Picture these five messages as five dark patches sown together in a line. But there's also one bright thread of hope that weaves through each one of them.

The bright thread is God's promise to establish a global kingdom through Jesus.[v]

But this kingdom doesn't just replace all nations—it's made up of people *from* all nations.

Here are three aspects of this promise:

First, Jesus will come as the king of this new kingdom.

We see this in 16:5. In the midst of this dark patch of judgment against Moab, we see the bright thread of this promise: "then a throne will be established in steadfast love, and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to do righteousness."[vi] God will set up a faithful king from David's line, and bring in world of justice.

This has now begun in Jesus: He came as this king, and he is now enthroned as king. He is now ruling the nations, and transforming his people to live with justice.

Second, a time will come when people will turn from idols to worship the one true God.

This is 17:7–8. This bright thread weaves into the judgment against Damascus: "In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel. He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, and he will not look on what his own fingers have made."

This has also now happened through Jesus. As the gospel spread in the first centuries of the church, Paul said people "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9). In fact, there was a church in Damascus, and Paul himself was baptized there.

Third, this kingdom will be filled with people from all nations.

This is the greatest promise in this whole section—one of the most surprising promises in the whole Bible. It's in 19:18–25. This is in the midst of God's judgment against Egypt—which was one of Israel's greatest, long-term enemies.

Remember, Egypt was the nation that enslaved and oppressed Israel for hundreds of years. They were an idolatrous nation opposed to God and his people. And now God promises to make Egypt an equal part of his people as Israel. He's going to make a new, global kingdom.

- Notice—verses 18–19 says Egypt will be converted to worship God.

  It says, "In that day there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and swear allegiance to the LORD of hosts." And verse 19, "In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt."

  Egypt will speak Hebrew in their cities, and swear allegiance to God, and have altars to God in their land.

  This is the language of conversion. We aren't meant to interpret this in an overly literalistic way. Isaiah is speaking of the future in the language and concepts of his time. This is poetic prophecy, making the point that many Egyptians will one day worship the one true God.

- Then verses 20–22 describe Egypt experiencing their own exodus—and God will send them a savior and deliverer—referring to Jesus.

- And then verse 23 is striking

  Picture the land of Israel in your minds. Assyria is the massive empire Northeast, and Egypt the massive empire Southwest.

  The Egyptians and Assyrians were two of the greatest ancient world powers. They were idolatrous, evil, and brutal. They hated each other. They hated God's people. They were going to be judged and destroyed as nations—and that did happen.

- But God says eventually they will join together in worshipping him. Here's the promise: "In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians."

  This is like saying, "From China to Iran, from North America to South America—the world will join together in worshipping the one true God.

- And verses 24–25 are the most surprising yet.

  Do you know what language the Old Testament used to refer to Israel? They were the ones who were blessed by God. They were called his people. They were the work of his hands. They were his inheritance.

  But now listen: "In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance."

A new people of God will be equal parts Israelites, Egyptians, and Assyrians. The greatest enemies and world powers will have equal share in the covenant blessings of Israel.
It's not a picture of Israel at the center, and other nations blessed around them. No—this is a complete intermixing of all the peoples of the world with Israelites.

Now, let's pull of these promises together:

God will send Jesus as the king from David's line.
He will establish his kingdom.
And it will include people from not only Israel, but all nations.
There will be a global, worshipping people.

Is this not what the New Testament says is happening right now?
Jesus has come.
He is now establishing his kingdom.
And he is spreading this kingdom across the globe, welcoming in people from all nations.

You may think: but what about Egypt, which is explicitly mentioned here. If you go over there now, you're going to find a Muslim nation. Well, yes. But I've been there, and I spent time with a Christian pastor. The kingdom of Jesus is there as well.

And even though most Egyptians are not Christians now—do you know that was different in the early centuries of the church. The gospel came to Egypt and transformed it.

In the fourth century—the church fathers Eusebius and Athanasius both said they witnessed this text being fulfilled before their very eyes. They saw the conversion of Egyptians and the planting of churches in Egypt as fulfilling this.

What does this mean for us?

It means the same thing for us that it did for Israel when they heard this. Israel was tempted to despise the evil nations around them. They were their enemies. They were evil nations.

But God is now telling them: Yes, they are evil and I will judge them. But I also love the world, and I will send the Messiah Jesus not just for you—but for them as well. In the future, my plan is to create a global people of Israelites and Gentiles—from all nations.

This is humbling and hopeful for all of us.

We rightly lament the spread of false and destructive ideologies in the world. We rightly want to see terrorism eliminated. We rightly want to see God bring justice to victims.

But this text reminds us that God has a plan to save people from all nations.
God is leading Christians to go into the nations, to gather worshippers for Jesus.

And to send and go as missionaries into even the most hostile lands and call them to Christ.

And we see people from other nations coming to America.
And yes, some may come as a result of foolish border policies. Or they may bring with them destructive ideologies. And we may need our nation to get wisdom in these areas.

But how should we see these people?
We should see them as those whom the Lord may yet bring to himself.
We should pray for them to receive the gospel, come to Christ, and join us in the church.

Much like how the Damascus Christians saw the pre-Christian Paul coming to arrest them.
And then God converted him, and he became part of the church.

God saves the nations, so don't despise them.

3. God Judges Nations, So Don't Depend On Them (Isa. 20)

Finally: God judges nations, so don't depend on them.

This is implied through the whole section, but especially in chapter 20.

This is a peculiar chapter. In verse 2 God tells Isaiah to take off his clothes and walk around naked and barefoot for three years—maybe it's implied that he still wears underwear.

Why would God tell him to do this? It was a way of illustrating a message for the people.
God said: Just like Isaiah is walking around stripped down—so, too, very soon, will the Egyptians be captured by Assyria, and led into exile naked and barefoot.

That's what the Assyrians did to their captives—led them away uncovered.

Now, what is the point of this warning? It's given to Israel.
Why does Israel need to worry about Egypt being conquered like this?
Why is Isaiah a walking picture of Egypt being taken captive?

Because Israel was not trusting God, but depending on Egypt to protect them from Assyria.
They were forsaking God and putting their trust in Egypt to defend them from Assyria.
And God is saying: look at Isaiah—that's what's going to happen to the Egyptians that you're putting your trust in. And because you've forsaken God and trusted in Egypt—the same thing that happened to them will happen to you.

That's the point of verses 5–6, and notice the language of dependence: "Then they shall be dismayed and ashamed because of Cush their hope and of Egypt their boast. And the inhabitants of this coastland will say in that day, 'Behold, this is what has happened to those

in whom we hoped and to whom we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria! And we, how shall we escape?'"

The point is: don't depend on kings and nations and political rulers. They cannot be your ultimate security. Because God will judge them. And if you trust in them, you will become like them; you will be judged like them.

Put your trust in God alone. Depend on God alone. Not any nation or party or leader.

Yes, we engage in politics. I hope many Christians serve in office in the coming years. And I hope we take our responsibility to vote seriously. But, in the end, we do not put our hope in any nation or leader. We put our hope in Jesus.

Implications

Here's what we've seen:

God is the Lord and savior of nations, and our only hope in the midst of them.
God rules the nations, so we don't dread them.
God saves the nations, so we don't despise them.
God judges nations, so we don't depend on them.

Instead—we wait for God's judgment, we spread the gospel, and we put our hope in Christ.

This brings us back to John Newton's letter.

Remember he said the only political maxims he holds are those from Scripture. And he gave us two of them—and now we see how important it is to hold both of them together.

1. The first maxim was this: "Righteousness exalts a nation, and sin is the reproach, and if persisted in, the ruin of any people." We see that with these nations in Isaiah—their persistent sin led to God's judgment against them.

   We've seen righteousness exalt a nation—as the blessing of Christian wisdom influenced so much that is so good in our own nation. And we've seen persistent sin as corrupting our nation throughout its history. And we've seen this at work in many nations.

   This first maxim helps us understand what's happening in our nation and other nations.

2. But we also need the second statement as well: "the Lord reigns."

   We live in the midst of troubling times. Maybe each of us wouldn't agree what the biggest problems are—but we all agree they're there. And election weeks and global unrest highlight them and make us nervous.

But we can remember that “the Lord reigns.” Jesus is the king. He is spreading his kingdom among all nations. We can trust him and spread his grace to all nations without fear.

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[i] John Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, vol. 2 (1985, Banner of Truth Trust, repr.), 85–87.

[ii] See Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, 81.

[iii] Ray Ortlund, TGC commentary.

[iv] And then he describes the Babylonian king in 14:13–14. Some people think this is describing the fall of Satan. It uses language like “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn.” And “You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high.” But this is describing the Babylonian king—and how his pride makes him seek divinity and supremacy like Satan.

[v] This relates to the previous section of Isaiah. In Isaiah 1–12, the focus was on Judah. God was calling out their sins, hardening them, and promising to judge them with the Assyrians. But all through this, God said that eventually there would be a Davidic king who would rule with justice, and his kingdom would spread over the whole earth. For example, in 9:6–7 said he would have an eternal kingdom; chapter 11 said he would have the nations drawn to the messiah (11:10), and his people would be gathered back from these nations (11:11ff). So, that raises a question: How will this happen, if all these nations are wicked and prideful and strong and threatening to Israel and Judah? Isa 13–27 answers that question (See Motyer, Tyndale comm, 16). It says that God will judge all the nations and establish his kingdom through the Davidic king in Zion.

[vi] Isaiah 16:3 says, “Let the outcasts of Moab sojourn among you,” which may be translated, “Let my outcasts, Moab, sojourn among you.” It seems that Moab is called to give refuge to Israelite sojourners among them. And if they honor Israelites among them, then they will be welcomed by the Davidic king who brings justice