

28. Defining the Rise of a Superpower (2 Kings 17–25)

The rise of Assyria as the first world power to conquer the ancient world by military force—on the heels of the apostasy of Israel’s Northern Kingdom—together with Babylon’s rise to world power on the heels of the Southern Kingdom of Judah’s apostasy a century and a half later, set a precedent that repeats itself at the end of the world. As Isaiah predicts, Assyria’s anciently taking captive Israel’s Ten Tribes and Babylon’s taking captive the Jews established a scriptural pattern for an end-time “Assyria’s” rise to world power. With God’s end-time people’s apostasy, a new “Assyria” would conquer the modern world. Although God had promised Israel that if it kept the terms of his covenant it would be the head of the nations, if it rebelled, it would be the tail. Other nations would subject them. The rise or fall of God’s people, in other words—and the rise and fall of their enemies—would be directly proportional to their loyalty to God.

Isaiah’s inclusion of large parts of 2 Kings 18–20 in his own book of prophecy in Isaiah 36–38, means that these chapters no longer serve as purely historical content but are transposed into types or foreshadowings of the end-time. What happened in the past, in other words, will happen again, in which events God’s end-time servant fulfills the role of King Hezekiah. The Lord’s displeasure with Israel and Judah anciently, therefore, and his “removing them from his sight” at the hands of Assyrians and Babylonians (2 Kings 17:7–23, 35–40; 24:3, 19–20), foreshadows his displeasure with his end-time people that directly precipitates his worldwide Day of Judgment.

Isaiah, however, doesn’t simply transpose the relevant parts of 2 Kings 18–19 into an integral component of his end-time prophecy—in which a latter-day “Assyria” conquers the world by military force—but he prefaces Assyria’s world conquest by enumerating an entire catalogue of God’s people’s sins and iniquities. From page one of his book, Isaiah portrays the transgressions of those who today comprise God’s people—the Latter-day Saints—using the ancient names of his people and their places as codenames of end-time ones. Thirteen chapters of Isaiah that deal mostly with the apostasy of God’s end-time people and Assyria’s conquest of the modern world, Nephi copies verbatim in 2 Nephi 12–24 to bring home to us the things he himself had seen in vision that would reoccur in our day.

Says the Lord through Isaiah, “They have despised the law of Jehovah of Hosts and reviled the words of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore the anger of Jehovah is kindled against his people: he draws back his hand against them and strikes them; the mountains quake, and their corpses lie like litter about the streets. Yet for all this his anger is not abated; his hand is upraised still” (Isaiah 5:24–25);

“Because these people have rejected the Waters of Shiloah, which flow gently, and rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah, therefore will my Lord cause to come up over them the great and mighty waters of the River—the king of Assyria in all his glory. He will rise up over all his channels and overflow all his banks. He will sweep into Judea [like] a flood and, passing through, reach the very neck; his outspread wings will span the breadth of your land, O Immanuel. Though nations form pacts, they shall be routed. Give heed, all you distant lands! You may take courage in one another, but shall be in fear; you may arm yourselves, but shall be

terrorized. Though you hold consultations, they shall come to nought; though you make proposals, they shall not prove firm: God is with us!” (Isaiah 8:6–10; 2 Nephi 18:6–10).

The Lord uses the king of Assyria in punishing the wicked of his people and the nations: “Hail the Assyrian, the rod of my anger! He is a staff—my wrath in their hand. I will commission him against a godless nation, appoint him over the people [deserving] of my vengeance, to pillage for plunder, to spoliage for spoil, to tread underfoot like mud in the streets. Nevertheless, it shall not seem so to him; this shall not be what he has in mind. His purpose shall be to annihilate and to exterminate nations not a few” (Isaiah 10:5–7; 2 Nephi 20:5–7).

In the end, however, the Lord rebukes the king of Assyria for mocking him and assuming he had conquered the world all by himself: “Whom have you mocked and ridiculed? Against whom have you raised your voice, lifting your eyes to high heaven? Against the Holy One of Israel! By your servants you have blasphemed my Lord. You thought, On account of my vast chariotry I have conquered the highest mountains, the farthest reaches of Lebanon. I have felled its tallest cedars, its choicest cypresses. I have reached its loftiest summit, its finest forest. I have dug wells and drunk of foreign waters. With the soles of my feet I have dried up all Egypt’s rivers! Have you not heard how I ordained this thing long ago, how in days of old I planned it? Now I have brought it to pass. You were destined to demolish fortified cities, [turning them] into heaps of rubble, while their timorous inhabitants shrank away in confusion, becoming as wild grass, transiently green, or like weeds on a roof that scorch before they grow up” (Isaiah 37:23–27).