

36. Defining the End-Time King of Assyria (Isaiah 1–12)

Because Isaiah's literary features transform the entire Book of Isaiah into an end-time scenario, its chief actors or characters—the king of Assyria and God's servant—rely on ancient types to flush out their end-time roles. World events of Isaiah's day, in other words, in a real sense typify events at the end of the world. Just as a king of Assyria conquered the ancient world, so an end-time "king of Assyria" conquers the modern world, the name Assyria serving as a codename of a militaristic superpower. As God showed Isaiah the end of the world from the beginning, Isaiah took care to include in his prophecy only those events that he saw would repeat themselves.

Isaiah compares the end-time king of Assyria's army to the Sea in commotion and to a River in flood—to a mythological power of chaos whom God raises up to chasten his people and the nations for their wickedness:

"He raises an ensign to distant nations and summons them from beyond the horizon. Forthwith they come, swiftly and speedily. Not one of them grows weary, nor does any stumble; they do not drowse or fall asleep. Their waist-belts come not loose nor their sandal thongs undone. Their arrows are sharp; all their bows are strung. The tread of their warhorses resembles flint; their chariot wheels revolve like a whirlwind. They have the roar of a lion; they are aroused like young lions: growling, they seize the prey, and escape, and none comes to the rescue. He shall be stirred up against them in that day, even as the Sea is stirred up. And should one look to the land, there [too] shall be a distressing gloom, for the daylight shall be darkened by an overhanging mist" (Isaiah 5:25–30);

"My Lord will 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 8:7–10).

The Lord empowers the king of Assyria against God's own people, who are the cause of this worldwide calamity: "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);

"Wickedness shall be set ablaze like a fire, and briars and thorns shall it consume; it shall ignite the jungle forests, and they shall billow upward in mushrooming clouds of smoke. At the wrath

of Jehovah of Hosts the earth is scorched, and people are but fuel for the fire. Men will have no compassion for one another. They will snatch on the right, yet remain hungry; they will devour on the left, but not be satisfied: men will eat the flesh of their own offspring” (Isaiah 9:18–20).

The king of Assyria’s blitzkrieg catches the peoples unawares as he threatens even the refuge of Zion: “He advances on Aiath, passes through Migron; at Micmash he marshals his weaponry. They cross over the pass, stopping overnight at Geba. Ramah is in a state of alarm, Gibeah of Saul is fleeing. Cry out, O Daughter of Gallim! Hear her, Laishah; answer her, Anathoth! Madmenah has moved out of the way, the inhabitants of Gebim are in full flight. This same day he will but pause at Nob and signal the advance against the mountain of the Daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem” (Isaiah 10:28–32).

But few of God’s people survive as their Promised Land is overrun: “Your land is ruined, your cities burned with fire; your native soil is devoured by aliens in your presence, laid waste at its takeover by foreigners. The Daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, a hut in a melon field, a city under siege. Had not Jehovah of Hosts left us a few survivors, we should have been as Sodom, or become like Gomorrah” (Isaiah 1:7–9).

In the end, God does to the king of Assyria as he has done to others: “But when my Lord has fully accomplished his work in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, he will punish the king of Assyria for his notorious boasting and infamous conceit, because he said, I have done it by my own ability and shrewdness, for I am ingenious. I have done away with the borders of nations, I have ravaged their reserves, I have vastly reduced the inhabitants. I have impounded the wealth of peoples like a nest, and I have gathered up the whole world as one gathers abandoned eggs; not one flapped its wings, or opened its mouth to utter a peep” (Isaiah 10:12–14).

“How the tyrant has met his end and tyranny ceased! Jehovah has broken the staff of the wicked, the rod of those who ruled—him who with unerring blows struck down the nations in anger, who subdued peoples in his wrath by relentless oppression. Now the whole earth is at rest and at peace; there is jubilant celebration!