

If you were to ask someone (especially this weekend), "What is the most important declaration regarding the United States of America?" you would likely hear "The Declaration of Independence," which was made 246 years ago this holiday weekend, marking the birth of the nation. Or, you might hear, "The Emancipation Proclamation"—Abraham Lincoln's executive order, which was a significant step toward the end of chattel slavery in America. You may even hear "*Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*"—the landmark Supreme Court decision stating that the Constitution does not confer the right to abortion on demand, a milestone in ending the Roe era that saw over 60 million elective abortions in 50 years (the most significant human rights crisis in history).

While each of those statements is significant in its own right, none can claim to be "the most important declaration regarding the United States of America." That status belongs to God's word. The Bible is a proclamation about and to the whole world. Our passage opens a section of Isaiah containing declarations to the nations of the earth. Though Isaiah speaks of countries in Israel's context, it becomes clear that these pronouncements apply to every nation throughout history. So we should receive these pronouncements as God's merciful word to us, his believing church, reminding us that regardless of what any government is or does, our fate is secure in Christ alone.

Isaiah 13:1–14:23 — Declaration Against Babylon and Its King. The main point here is this: **The Lord will save his people through the judgment of the world.** This far in Isaiah, the focus has been on the Assyrian invasion. So it's surprising to find two chapters of prophecy concerning Babylon. Babylon is the epitome of earthly empires. **Verse 19** reads, "**Babylon, the jewel of the kingdoms.**" The king of Babylon is described as "**the man who caused the earth to tremble, who shook the kingdoms, who turned the world into a wilderness, who destroyed its cities.**"¹

Babylon was also the epitome of earthly arrogance. **Isaiah 14:13-14** describes the haughtiness of Babylon's ambitions: "**I will ascend to the heavens; I will set up my throne above the stars of God. I will sit on the mount of the gods' assembly, in the remotest parts of the North. I will ascend above the highest clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.**" Babylon was the site of the infamous Tower of Babel, the most remarkable illustration of human arrogance.

Babylon was the obvious example of national hubris and folly in Isaiah's day. But it becomes clear that the Lord has in mind something beyond Babylon. In **13:11**, the Lord says, "**I will punish the world for its evil, and wicked people for their iniquities. I will put an end to the pride of the arrogant and humiliate the insolence of tyrants.**" God has the whole world in mind.

The Lord will punish the world for its evil—specifically, its pride, arrogance, and insolence. We're given a terrifying picture: "**Look, the day of the LORD is coming— cruel, with fury and burning anger— to make the earth a desolation and to destroy its sinners.**"² It is a day of cosmic undoing: "**Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will shake from its foundations at the wrath of the LORD of Armies, on the day of his burning anger.**"³ The Day of the Lord brings destruction, weakness, failure of courage, horror, pain, agony, anguish, fear, punishment, desolation, death, and execution without compassion or pity.

But after such a horrifying picture, **chapter 14** opens with good news: "**For the Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will choose Israel again.**" The judgment of the world and the destruction of the wicked happens *because* of God's compassion for his people. When God gave the promise of a redeemer in

Genesis 3, the world was divided into two camps: the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. They are at war, as seen in Cain murdering Able. Those who belong to the "offspring of the woman" belong to God; the serpent's offspring belong to Satan. Until the enemies of God are judged and removed, there is no peace for God's people on earth. That's why **Isaiah 14** is a "song of contempt" taunting the king of Babylon, which God's people sing when they are finally given rest. **The downfall of God's enemies signals our final salvation.**

We should remember that the spirit of Babylon has not yet been eradicated from the world. At the end of Revelation, the whole world mourns the downfall of Babylon, but the people of God rejoice over it. In a real way, the spirit of Babylon appears in all human acts of pride, hubris, inhumanity, and wickedness.⁴ Babylon will not be banished until the humble inherit the earth.⁵

So, we (God's people) must not be tempted to make alliances with Babylon in hopes of finding peace. This is why James writes: **"You adulterous people! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? So whoever wants to be the friend of the world becomes the enemy of God."**⁶ Our hope is one thing: God has saved and will save us through judgment in Christ.

Isaiah 14:24-27 — Declaration Against Assyria. Isaiah shifts his focus back to Assyria, the immediate concern of Isaiah's day. We see this: **The coming judgment is unstoppable.** The Lord could not be clearer: what he has purposed will be; what he has planned will happen. Assyria will be destroyed. The nations of the earth can't escape God's judgment for their evils.

When David sinned by taking a military census, the nation suffered judgment—a plague that killed 70,000—even though he repented. If David's census meant the death of 70,000 citizens in Israel, how will America pay for sixty-million elective abortions? America may eventually outlaw abortion on demand, but it won't escape judgment. **The lesson is clear: if the nations cannot escape judgment for the evils they have done, then God's people should not look to them for security.**

Isaiah 14:28-31 — Declaration Against Philistia. Isaiah begins to move around the compass, starting with Philistia in the east, Moab in the west, Damascus in the north, and Egypt in the south. The effect is to show that there is nowhere God's people can turn for refuge except to God. **There is no refuge from the coming judgment except in Jesus Christ.**

Philistia had joined other nations in an anti-Assyrian conspiracy. The judgment of Assyria mentioned earlier would provide an opportunity for Philistia to boast of successfully resisting Assyria! But as soon as they celebrated, there would be a revival in Assyria's leadership that would swoop down to destroy them. Just when they tasted success, it would fail.

There is only one answer for those seeking security and safety. **Isaiah 14:32** reads, "What answer will be given to the messengers from that nation? **The LORD has founded Zion, and his oppressed people find refuge in her.**" The Lord reigns in Zion through his king, the Messiah. That's the only place God's people will find security. Only faith in the Lord's King could save them.

We may only put our hope for security in Jesus Christ, God's king—and not in any earthly nation, leader, or alliance. Why Christ alone? Because God has saved us through judgment in Christ:

But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more then, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath. For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.⁷

We are saved from God's wrath because Christ received it in our place. We are reconciled to God. We can run to our risen Savior in faith, confident that we will be saved by his life.

Jesus didn't die for geopolitical states. He died for one nation—his Kingdom. If you place your hope in a country, you cast your lot with an entity that can only atone for its sins by being destroyed forever. But if you put your hope in Jesus Christ, then you are grafted into a kingdom against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

Isaiah 15-16 — Declaration Against Moab. We see this: **Love requires us to warn the world about the judgment to come and to tell them about salvation in Christ.** Like Philistia, Moab was a wealthy nation that joined the allied nations in revolt against Assyria.⁸ Therefore, Isaiah says the Lord will bring desolation to Moab. But notice the language of **15:5**—"My heart cries out over Moab." The Lord is weeping, even as he describes the consequences of his anger. The Lord pours out destruction while shedding tears of compassion. His warning of wrath is wrapped in love.

Telling people about God's wrath and hell is not necessarily unloving. Of course, it's possible to warn people about hell without love. So how do we know if love motivates our ministry? **First, warning with tears in our eyes indicates love in our hearts.** Jesus wept over Jerusalem as he spoke of its destruction. After Jesus pronounced woes on unrepentant cities and warned of hell, he's next found inviting people to come to him "because I am lowly and humble in heart."⁹ If we're his ambassadors, the mind and love of Christ should characterize and compel us. If our evangelism and culture wars are undertaken with scoffing, ridicule, and arrogance, we should stop altogether because we're not representing Jesus.

The second indicator of love is that we're pointing them to Jesus. Look at the appeal made in **16:1-5**. When Moab refugees seek counsel and shelter, what's the answer? **"When the oppressor has gone, destruction has ended, and marauders have vanished from the land, a throne will be established in love, and one will sit on it faithfully in the tent of David, judging and pursuing what is right, quick to execute justice."** The aim is not to win a debate or boast in a culture war. The objective is to point at Jesus and say, "The Lord has established a King to reign in love! Take refuge in him!"

Isaiah 17 — Declarations Against Damascus, Israel, and the Nations. Here's the point: **The Lord calls all the earth to give total allegiance to him and to him alone.** Isaiah speaks first to Damascus, Syria's capital, which will be overthrown. Because Israel colluded with Syria, it also will be emaciated and abandoned. Why? **"For you have forgotten the God of your salvation and failed to remember the rock of your strength."**¹⁰ Because they labored without faith in God, their hard work would produce nothing but disease and pain. **Remember that when you link arms with the world, you will suffer the world's fate.** No one can trust two saviors—you'll love one and hate the other. What are you pursuing today, whether security, success, or sanctification? Where's your hope—in Christ? yourself? the world? Jesus plus _____?

Israel's desolation will serve a purpose, seen in **verses 7-8**: **"On that day people will look to their Maker and will turn their eyes to the Holy One of Israel. They will not look to the altars they made with their hands or to the Asherahs and shrines, they made with their fingers."** On the day of desolation, they'll look to their Maker, "the Holy One of Israel." Through judgment, God will bring his people to saving faith. God is *not* devoted to preserving geopolitical states, but he is committed to saving his people. God will do everything necessary to secure the unadulterated allegiance of his people, even if it means destroying anything else they trust in.

Anything we trust in for success and security that isn't Jesus Christ is an idol. That includes politics, wisdom, military might, wealth, reputation, and networking with people and governments. **Verses 12-14** describe the fate of those who refuse to hope in the Lord alone. Though the nations combine their forces and roar like the sea, the Lord's rebuke will bring them to nothing overnight. All the power of the world combined is like a tumbleweed in the hurricane winds of God's wrath.

Will we turn our eyes on Jesus—our Creator and Redeemer—or will we continue to hope in our idols? We're called to pray for those in authority but never to give them our faith or allegiance. Our citizenship is in heaven; from it, we await a Savior and a homeland.

Isaiah 18-19 — Declaration Against Cush and Egypt. The main point is this: **God will bless the nations of the earth through one nation—the Kingdom of Christ. God's people are to have no part in alliances bound to fail.** Chapter 18 concerns Cush, "a large region...embracing modern Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somaliland" that would later merge with Egypt.¹¹ So, this connects to chapter 19, as Cush and Egypt would soon be one.

Assyria was a superpower in the north; Egypt was a superpower in the south. They were rivals who warred over control of Palestine, the highway between them. The small countries in that region could never hope to defend themselves. Egypt took advantage of this by offering protection in exchange for power. What choice did the smaller states have but to look to Egypt for security? But God's people are to have no part in such conspiracies, which are bound to fail. So when messengers arrive to practice diplomacy, they receive a message for everyone who lives on earth. The Lord will quietly watch as Cush and Egypt become nothing. Then, the nations will come to worship him in Zion. All of Egypt will know and worship the Lord.

It would have been tempting for Israel to join the alliance with Cush and Egypt. But that would have been foolish. Everything that made Egypt appealing—its religions, the fertility of the Nile, its wisdom—would be reduced to nothing. Those who depended on Egypt would become like it. Opposite this, we have this picture of God quietly looking out his window until the strength of the nations is reduced to nothing and people come to worship him.

What stance should typify the church as we seek to see God's work done in our nations? Are we anxious people, constantly fretting about what the government is up to? Do we think the world's wealth, wisdom, and resources are necessary for the growth of the Kingdom? Or do we live peaceful and quiet lives bearing witness to Jesus and watching the tiny seed of the gospel overtake the earth?

The church should be a non-anxious presence in the world. We know God's promise to bless the nations through the offspring of Abraham. We know how God will bring harmony to the earth. We understand how the world will be reformed. **It happens through—and only through—faith in Jesus Christ. The spread of the gospel is God's plan for blessing the nations—and that's our task until Christ returns.** We don't need to conspire with the world because we know that one day every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. So, we quietly and confidently trust in Jesus and watch the gospel do its work.

Chapter 20 — Sign Against Those Who Hope in Cush and Egypt. What happens to the people who put their hope in the world? What will happen to those who put their hope in the Lord? We see here: **Those who put their hope in earthly nations will be publicly humiliated.**

This is an odd but poignant vignette. The Lord tells Isaiah to walk about naked and barefoot for three years (the time of the Egyptian-backed revolt against Assyria). It symbolized how Assyria would crush the uprising and make the captives of Egypt and Cush, leading them naked and ashamed. This is the sign's

meaning: **“Those who made Cush their hope and Egypt their boast will be dismayed and ashamed.”**¹² Those who hope in the world will always be put to shame.

The world's problems and the crises of our lives cannot be solved by putting our hope in the world and its ways. We will be put to shame if we hope in the world, its nations, leaders, and powers. But the good news is clear throughout Isaiah: **Those who hope in the Lord will never be put to shame.** This is the hope we have in Jesus. As Paul writes:

This is the message of faith that we proclaim: If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, Everyone who believes on him will not be put to shame, since there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, because the same Lord of all richly blesses all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

¹ Isaiah 14:16-17

² Isaiah 13:9

³ Isaiah 13:13

⁴ see Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*

⁵ Matthew 5:5

⁶ James 4:4

⁷ Romans 5:8-10

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Matthew 11:20-30

¹⁰ Isaiah 17:10

¹¹ Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*

¹² Isaiah 20:3–5