

# The God of the Nations

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Excellent. If you've got your Bibles with you, or those blue Bibles, it'd be worth keeping them open there at chapter 19 of Isaiah. But we're going to start with a question. I wonder if you were to consider this question, where does the power lie in our world?

Where does the power lie in our world? I wonder what answers would come to mind. Perhaps you'd think on international terms, you'd be thinking of the world's superpowers, whether in the East or in the West.

Or perhaps your thoughts would go towards big business, big tech, and those with influence over the media, the huge corporations, Google, Apple, Amazon, various others, and the influence, the control they have over what we see, over what we hear.

Perhaps here in Scotland, and if you've been following along in the news, or if you're on social media a lot, it can feel like a kind of this so-called secular progressive agenda, which has very little time for the Bible, a way of life that is kind of outraged over a lot of the positions that Christians hold.

Perhaps it can seem like they hold some of the levers of power at the moment. We've seen again in the last couple of weeks that kind of open hostility toward Kate Forbes in Parliament, described as unfit to have influence in a political system due to her Christian beliefs and convictions.

[ 1 : 2 9 ]     So maybe that's something, maybe there are plenty of other things that come to mind as to where the power in our world lies. But it's easy for us, whatever the answer that springs to mind is, it's easy for us, I think, as a church, to look about us and to feel slightly overwhelmed, overpowered, intimidated perhaps by the world around us.

That as God's people, as the church, we don't have that much going for us. Rather, we are kind of hanging on by our coattails, we're at the mercy of powerful people and institutions out there, and we're not quite sure what that means for us.

Well, the book of Isaiah really speaks to this state of affairs, because that is the situation in Isaiah's day as well. God's people, back then the people of Judah and Jerusalem, they feel incredibly small.

And at this point in history, actually, that's objectively true. Their kind of glory days that they'd had are long behind them. They're now overshadowed by all the big, powerful nations around them.

And yet God, in this chapter, wants to make it clear to them, and to us as well, this morning, that he is still in control. That actually God is where the power truly lies.

[ 2 : 5 2 ]     As Ewan said, we're in a fairly rapid journey through Isaiah in this series. We're into a new section this morning. This is the second major section of the book.

And here, Isaiah's focus turns from being kind of in-house, as it were, chapters 1 to 12. We've seen Isaiah warning God's covenant people, those who've been rescued by God.

He has been warning them about the dangers of turning their back on God and rebelling against him. But in this second section of Isaiah, the focus widens slightly, and we see God's reign over all the nations.

This section from chapter 13 through to chapter 27, you can kind of flick through that in your Bibles if you like. You'll see it is this whole bunch of oracles, of prophecies, of words against various nations.

I think there's 10 in total. We're not going to go all through those. That would take us a long time. We're just going to pick out this one, this oracle concerning Egypt in chapter 19.

[ 3 : 56 ] It's a bit of a sample, really, of this section. We're going to look at that this morning. And hopefully seeing that big picture here, that God is the God of the nations. That God is the God who is over absolutely everything.

That he reigns and that he is working out his purposes, however things may seem, whatever things might look like. That God is where the power truly lies.

That's what we're going to see. And also we're going to think about the difference that that makes too. Chapter 19 splits into two halves. And so we're going to look at both of those.

And the first one, the first thing that we're going to see is God's sovereign power. So this is verses 1 down to verse 19. God's sovereign power.

It begins with verse 1. An oracle concerning Egypt. Behold, the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt. And the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence.

[ 4 : 55 ] And the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them. And you can have a quick look down as well at verse 14 right near the end of this first section where it says this.

The Lord has mingled within her a spirit of confusion. That mention of God, of the Lord's activity at the start and at the end is there to show that everything that happens in between is God's doing.

So we're looking at God at work here. So what's happening in these verses? Well, basically what we have, and it's not perhaps immediately obvious as we read through it straight away. But it's a description of the structures and the organization of Egypt.

Egypt, which looks so strong and powerful, but really kind of crumbling and being exposed as God demonstrates his sovereign power.

And as I say, it's Egypt here in chapter 19. We could have picked any of these other chapters in this section relating to different nations and seen a very similar idea that this is God's sovereign power over the nations, over the world, over everything.

[ 6 : 02 ] That actually what looks so powerful, these nations that seem so overwhelming, are actually completely at the mercy and under the power of the God of all creation.

Let's dig into these verses a bit more. There's a writer called Alec Matea, who's kind of an expert on the book of Isaiah. He points out three big areas of collapse that are highlighted in this first half of chapter 19.

Again, if you've got your Bibles open, do follow through with me in these. There's the collapse of society first in verses 2 to 4. We see division.

You'll see there Egyptians against Egyptians. Their spirit emptied out. A general waywardness, a lack of direction, and resulting cruel leadership over it.

A fierce king that will rule over them. So there's this kind of societal collapse, first of all. And then there's economic collapse, verses 5 to 10. The repeated emphasis on the river Nile in these verses.

[ 7 : 09 ] That the Nile was at the very heart of Egypt's wealth and economy. It was worshipped as a god in itself, this river. And yet that's described as becoming dry and parched.

And as that happens, trade grinds to a halt. And we see this is something that affects everyone. Verse 10, those who are pillars of the land will be crushed. And those who work for pay will be grieved.

It's from the kind of VIPs at the top to the laborers at the bottom. Wealth, money runs short. What so many people are relying on and the difficulties that come with that.

And then lastly, there's political collapse as well. Verses 11 down to 15. The princes and their wise men, the leaders of the nation and their advisors, we read, are utterly foolish.

Give stupid counsel. I love that bit. Perhaps you can relate to that. Verse 13, those who are the cornerstones of her tribes have made Egypt stagger. The very people who are supposed to be relied upon to bring stability, actually through their foolishness, they have brought everything crashing down.

[ 8 : 18 ] God is giving this picture of the total disintegration of Egypt. And yet, and this is really important, at the time Isaiah is writing, things would not have looked like that.

It's so important that we get that. We mentioned at the beginning that question, where does the power lie in the world? If you'd asked that in Isaiah's day, well, Egypt would have absolutely been one of the answers that you'd have got back.

They were this superpower. And yet God here is saying, even what looks so impressive, even what the world looks up to, even what you can never imagine coming to an end, what seems like it will be at the top of the tree forever and ever and ever.

God's saying, actually, I'm in charge of that. I can raise it up and I can bring it back down again. Verse 15, and there will be nothing for Egypt that head or tail, palm branch or reed may do.

That's kind of saying that from the top to the bottom and across the whole range of people who live there, there's nothing that they can do about this. Because however it may look to the untrained eye, it's God alone who has sovereign power.

[ 9 : 34 ] So the point here is that ultimately God is in total control. And so then why do God's people need to hear this? Like we said, in these sections, there's oracles against all these different nations.

But it's not that Isaiah is writing out a load of little postcards that he's going to send to these places. You know, God's in control. Judgment is coming. Wish you were here. All these kind of things. No, no.

God, through Isaiah, is speaking about all these nations. But he's still speaking to his people. And so why do his people need to know about God's sovereignty over a place like Egypt?

Well, it's so, as we've said already, it's so that God's people remember where the true power in the universe lies and that it lies with God. That they may feel vulnerable, small, insignificant, any host of other things.

But actually that if they stick with God, that they have everything that they need. That means, firstly, that they don't need to fear these nations because it is God who is in ultimate control.

[ 10 : 42 ] I mean, secondly, even more kind of significantly, even more in the foreground in this chapter, it means they shouldn't put their trust in these nations. Because, again, however things may seem, they are fragile and it is God who is in ultimate control.

In Isaiah's day, the nation of Assyria, kind of up in the northeast, is beginning to become kind of the major threat to God's people.

And so there's this real temptation for them to look to Egypt for help. Even though Egypt had been their kind of historic enemy. Back earlier on in the Bible, Egypt had been the place where they'd been slaves.

Egypt has been the place they've been warned about not going back to. Still a deal with Egypt and an alliance there. And all its apparent strength is looking fairly tempting.

And God here is writing to say, well, why would you do that? You know, I can kind of squash Egypt like a little bug. You know, don't trust in them. They can't save you. I'm the one.

[ 11 : 48 ] I'm the one that you need. You are small. You are helpless. But trust in me for deliverance. Not anything or anyone else. Because there is nothing, God says, that I can't stand against.

Don't fear them. And neither put your trust in them. Because it is God alone who is in sovereign control. And I hope we can see then how that speaks to us as well.

Well, if we're here this morning as Christians, if you're here this morning as God's people, you know, we can often feel pretty small, pretty insignificant compared to the powers in the world around us.

And yet the message here is that whatever comes, we don't need to fear that, nor do we need to put our trust in that. Instead, we're to keep on looking to God who is in sovereign control over all things.

Now, let's think of that kind of in an example. Perhaps, as we mentioned earlier, it's kind of social pressures that make us feel a bit kind of cowed, small, anxious.

[ 12 : 53 ] That so-called progressive agenda that seems to hold power and sway around us. This will be highlighted even more. Next month, June, will be Pride Month, where so much of what is, I suppose, opposed to the Bible's teaching on marriage, on sexuality, on gender will be celebrated.

And it's really important to say this is a complicated topic. This is a personal topic. This is a topic where the church hasn't always done or spoken brilliantly in the past. So if you want to talk more about that, please do chat to me after if you've got any questions about that.

But I want to use that as an example, not to be kind of provocative, but because it is one of the most kind of in-your-face, one of the most politically influential movements at the moment that sets itself against what the Bible believes, and also against those who hold on to that belief.

Again, we've seen that with Kate Forbes this week. But come June, there will be kind of rainbow flags in banks and schools and coffee shops and government buildings and websites and logos will all be made to fit.

There's real power and influence there. For those of us who as a church hold to the Bible's teaching on issues around marriage, on sexuality, on what it means to be male and female, that can be a really intimidating time.

[ 14 : 18 ] You know, to be made to feel that your view isn't valid in society. To be made to feel that, you know, you're one of the bad guys. To have all sorts of kind of terms flung around.

That the church is so far out of step with the culture. You might well feel that at work. You might feel that at school. You might feel that just in conversations with friends.

The church kind of overshadowed by the vast weight of current opinion. And we can feel overwhelmed or anxious by that. And yet we're reminded in this passage that however powerful a movement might seem, that it's God who has sovereign power over all things.

And we're reminded that ultimately God is in control. That we don't need to fear things that kind of push against us. That means that we don't need to duck and hide and be ashamed.

But rather we're free to be open about our beliefs. Always to speak with kindness. Always to speak with love. But also to speak what we believe to be true. Now that doesn't mean that those opinions will be popular.

[ 15 : 23 ] It doesn't mean there won't be consequences to that. But that we can do that confident in that foundation of God's sovereign power and his control over all things.

And so we don't need to fear that which pushes back against us. There's been plenty of things kind of opposed to the Bible's teaching throughout history. And yet God in his sovereign control has maintained his people and protected his church.

And so for us, you know, we don't need to be afraid. But neither, as we said, should we put our trust in these things. That was the other part of Isaiah's message. Again, that was the temptation in his day. The people are feeling marginalized.

There's that understandable response to want to attach themselves to something bigger. To something stronger. Or at least something that looks that way. And again, we see that throughout the history of the church.

And never for the good of the church. That rather than fearing these things that come against them, the church simply accepts them whole scale. And kind of attaches itself to the social movements.

[ 16 : 28 ] To the power of the day. To perhaps a political party and the influence that they have. The church feeling vulnerable. And so tempted just to throw in its lot. With whatever seems to have momentum at that particular time.

Rather than sticking with God. Rather than trusting God's power. Instead looking to the power of the world. But again, we see in this passage. It's what it's here for.

That things that seem to hold all the sway. Are actually still under God's control. That they too will come and go. But that God alone remains forever.

One author writes that if the church marries the spirit of this age. She will be a widow in the next. That idea that we're not to trust in what looks powerful in the here and now.

But as the church we have this unique calling to keep on trusting in the only God. The only one with eternal power. Who has control and who cares for his people.

[ 17 : 31 ] And we can think of so many examples here, couldn't we? Of things that we are tempted to put our trust in other than God. Let's perhaps just think of one of them. The most obvious I suppose is perhaps money.

Money. Our society is all about money. Money is power. Money is security. Money is comfort. Money is what really matters.

Our bank balance can feel like a much more tangible support. A much more tangible way of knowing that we're going to be fine into the future. Than our prayer life might be. Than our reliance on God might be.

But again, only God has that eternal power and control that we need. Both in this life and the next. Other things will come and go. What looks secure, just like Egypt did, can so easily crumble.

And again, that's a financial reality that has been seen many times throughout history. But God is the one who will never change. God is the one who will never let us down.

[ 18 : 35 ] And one of the big questions from this passage, where are we truly trusting? God's sovereign power. We don't need to fear the world. But also, we mustn't put our trust in the world.

Instead, even when, perhaps especially when, we feel small, we feel insignificant, we feel weak. Then we keep on looking to God. Because he's in control. So that's verses 1 to 15.

God's sovereign power. Let's now look at the second half of chapter 19. Having shown his power, God now shows that that power being used for the kind of judgment that we see on Egypt in the first half, that that won't be the final word.

But again, there's hope. As we've seen throughout Isaiah, these points of hope. That even the nations, even those who are currently opposed to God, that in his grace, he will gather them to him.

The second half of this passage, we're going to see God's gracious gathering. Again, if you do have a look down in your Bibles, just flick over the page there to verses 16 to 25.

[ 19 : 42 ] You might notice it's kind of five paragraphs in that column. Each one begins with the same words, in that day, in that day, in that day. Each one of these paragraphs is like a step through which Egypt gets closer to God.

Do have a look with them through me. It begins, verse 16, with Egypt fearing God's power over them. And at first, that doesn't look too positive, does it? But actually, the fear of the Lord, recognizing his power, is that first step in being brought back to him.

And we saw that with Isaiah himself, who wrote this book in chapter 6. Isaiah sees God, and he says, Here, Egypt too, comes to appreciate God's power and to fear it.

And then verse 18, we start to see some kind of progress here. There is a united language, an allegiance to God. And then that paragraph, starting in verse 19, there is an altar to God, where the people of Egypt cry out, and God sends a saviour.

God makes himself known, and the Egyptians know and worship him. We read, there is striking and healing, as the Lord will listen to the pleas for mercy of the Egyptians.

[ 21 : 00 ] And then the last two paragraphs, things get even more kind of shocking here. Suddenly, Assyria, remember we talked about them, one of the people's enemies, enemies of Israel, enemies of Egypt.

Suddenly, Assyria is brought into things. Egypt was kind of the old enemy. Assyria is the current threat. And yet, here they are, Assyria and Egypt both together, worshipping the Lord.

And all of this, ultimately leading to verses 24 and 25. If you're one of the people, God's people at the time, these are verses that would just blow your socks off. Unbelievable words.

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.

These kind of verses, it's kind of the equivalent of saying, in that day, Rangers and Celtic and Hibs will all just kind of merge to form one club and just be a big, happy family.

[ 22 : 00 ] There's this kind of impossible trio here. Egypt, Assyria, Israel. And yet, incredibly brought together as God's people.

As the work of his hands, as his inheritance. That they are blessed in order to be a blessing to the earth. This is God bringing the nations in to share the privileges and the purposes of being his chosen people.

God demonstrating that his power is so great that he's going to turn and gather in even those who are far away from him. And again, this is supposed to shape how God's people view the nations.

How we, as the church, are to view those who are not yet part of God's church. Perhaps especially those who seem hostile to God's people or dead against him.

Just as Egypt and Assyria did. We've already seen we're not to fear them. Neither are we to put our trust in them. Rather, we see here that we are to welcome them.

[ 23 : 06 ] Or rather, we're to celebrate as God promises in his grace that he will welcome them. That he will restore them. That he will graciously gather people in to himself.

And it's important to say here, this isn't just a kind of a nice get-together where everyone agrees to disagree. Where people reject God. And God and his people say, okay, that doesn't matter. That's not a problem.

No, it's those who reject God, as we saw, kind of running through that chapter. Those who reject God, coming to fear him. Coming to know him.

Coming to cry out to him. Trust him. Worship him. Ultimately, it's the nations recognizing God's sovereign power. And also his gracious gathering.

That he is the only one who can ultimately be trusted. And as it says right there in the center of this section, verse 20. Accepting the savior from God who will deliver them.

[ 24 : 08 ] We see that actually even those who seem farthest from God. That God in his sovereign power can still draw them in. And longs to do that and will do that. In his time and for his glory.

And as we see that. Then when that happens, we as God's people rejoice. Because again, it's only through his grace. His grace that we have first received. And it's all for his glory.

That more and more people would come to recognize his greatness. And trust in him and him alone. In some ways, this passage reflects the whole of the Bible story.

The whole of the gospel. It is at a great leveler here. We've seen that just in the same way that God will judge his people. If they turn their backs on him. We've seen that in chapters 1 to 12.

What we see here in this chapter. So God will judge the nations. But we also see in just the same way. As God will rescue his people. As they turn back to him.

[ 25 : 08 ] So God will rescue the nations. As they come to him as well. That invitation is open to everyone. Who repents. Who turns to Jesus.

Who accepts. That saviour and defender. That God promises. That saviour and defender is the same for all of us. That nobody. No one in this room.

No one outside of this room. Is able to be brought back to God. Except through his gracious gathering. And that that gathering is available to all those. Who cry out to him.

And of course. As we said at the beginning. Ultimately this passage. As the whole Bible does. It finds its fulfillment in Jesus. It is Jesus who came. To seek and save the lost. It is Jesus who came.

And kind of flings open the doors. To say that whoever would trust in him. Would be graciously brought back. To God's people. It doesn't matter about their background. It doesn't matter about the opposition.

[ 26 : 07 ] They might have held against him previously. That invitation to be gathered in. It is for everyone. It is Jesus who comes. And demonstrates the sovereign power of God.

As he wins victory even over death. That ultimate enemy. That ultimate thing we fear. And yet through that offers that gracious invitation. Gathering people in from near and far.

To come and worship him. To be part of God's people. And enjoy that relationship. That we were designed for. Maybe that is something that you.

Particularly need to hear for yourself. This morning. Maybe your kind of default position. Walking in this morning. Is to think. Well God would never want me in.

You know. I am just not that sort of person. Or this is going to be great for other people. But not for me. I have kind of strayed too far away. For God to have any interest in me. And yet actually God.

[ 27 : 03 ] Here we see. Is bigger than anything. That you have done wrong. That he invites even those dead against him. To come and put their trust in Jesus.

And enjoy that relationship with him. In fact. The apostle Paul. One of the key figures. In the early church. Writes that he was the chief of sinners. That God graciously gathered him in.

Egypt and Assyria. The biggest opponents of God's people. And yet graciously gathered in. With them. To worship God together. Perhaps you need to hear that.

For yourself this morning. That that invitation is for you. But also for all of us. We need to be reminded constantly. Of God's heart for the nations.

God's heart for those. Whether geographically near. Or far. But those who don't yet know him. Don't yet know the comfort. Of trusting in him. And it says we recognize.

[ 28 : 01 ] That we are only saved. Because of his grace. It's not what we've done. It's only what God's done for us. And it says we grasp that. That we're then able to welcome others in too.

No matter how different they are. No matter what pain. They might have caused in the past. No matter how their lives. Might have previously been lived. But that we rejoice. As they turn to God.

And follow him. And that is something. That is really easy. To kind of sit and nod along to. It's something that's actually harder. To live out in practice. When church includes. Kind of awkward people.

Or when church. That means we end up sitting next to people. We just don't kind of get them. We don't understand them. Or we end up in church. With people who've hurt us in the past. Or people come to church. And that doesn't suddenly mean.

They have everything sorted. And they're just like us. But people who are welcomed. People who are graciously gathered. Through Jesus. And so we celebrate.

[ 28 : 57 ] Them coming to know him. And ultimately. It's back again. To this big theme of Isaiah. That the God of the Bible. Is a big God. He is the holy God. He is the universal God. He's the God who can be trusted.

Because he's in control. He's the only one who can rescue. And he's done that for us. Through Jesus. But he's also the God. Whose plans are bigger. Than our plans.

And whose glory. Is more significant. Than our comfort or preferences. That knowing his glory and grace. We would want to be used by him. In his plans.

To welcome in those. Far from him. That we would as his people. Recognizing we've been blessed by him. Seek to be a blessing. By holding him out to the world.

Around us. We do that. Not by fearing people. And hiding away. Nor by trusting in the world. And losing our distinctiveness. But rather by lovingly sharing.

[ 29 : 54 ] That God is the one. Who graciously gathers people. To himself. That we might welcome them. Into his people. For his glory. In the name of Jesus.

Let's pray together. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.