

The Lord Is Enraged Against All the Nations  
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“If my people who are called by my name....” You can almost *see* the Stars in the Stripes in the background of that verse, no?

Examples abound of assuming that the laws given to God’s covenant nation are universally applicable to all nations—and perhaps especially to the best nation ever, the United States of America. The offenders (and I think this is an offense) span the political spectrum. The theological left spotlights laws regarding the sojourner, charging interest, and the jubilee year:

- Leviticus 9:33–34: When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.
- Exodus 23:9: You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.
- Leviticus 25:35–38: If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.

By contrast, the American right tends to emphasize provisions in the Mosaic code that demand moral purity and—at least some of them—the laws demanding the unique worship of the one true God:

- Leviticus 20:13: If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.
- Deuteronomy 13:6–11: If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods,” which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you.

I contend that both the left and the right are misguided here. My objection is not necessarily to the substance of their desired legislation, but to the almost-always-unexamined presumption that

the laws of covenant Israel are normative for non-covenant nations. There has been only one covenant nation on earth in all history—and there are *none* on the earth right now. (I’m just going to assert that without defending it at the moment.) The detailed legislation found in the Mosaic code is explicitly intended for the “the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people” (2 Sam 7:23; 1 Chr 17:21).

Indeed, it is a claim of God that giving his laws to Israel is a *unique* blessing for them, making them distinct from the nations around them: “He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the LORD!” (Psalm 147:19–20). In Romans 9:4, Paul reiterates the uniqueness of this privilege to Israel—to them belongs the law.

Almost everyone who appeals to the national law of Old Testament Israel in support of their preferred policies would object to a wholesale adoption of the Mosaic code. Other than the thoroughgoing Theonomists/Reconstructionists, few would have a principled rubric for which laws *should* and *should not* be implemented by modern nations. As a generalization, Theonomists would wish to implement all the laws that they believe have not been typologically fulfilled by Christ. I want to propose another approach. Because of the unique status of Old Testament Israel as the covenant nation, I contend we should presumptively assume that *none of its laws* have binding applicability to other nations; the burden of proof should be shifted. If a person asserts that a provision of the Mosaic code is binding on a modern nation, he should be able to support that contention with evidence outside the Mosaic code.

This is not at all a claim that nothing said to Old Testament Israel could have relevance for a modern nation state. It is to say that it should not be *presumed* that any of Israel’s laws apply to all nations. If there are provisions of the Mosaic code that are parallel to righteous laws of modern nations (and there are), we would establish that by some means other than their existence in the Mosaic code.

How could we do this? To what kind of evidence can we appeal? Or, to use a common Theonomic question, “By what standard?” Throughout Scripture there are many passages in which God displays his standards for nations, either explicitly or more often by implication—by God announcing that a nation is going to be the object of God’s wrath for a specific reason. My claim is that we are on firmer theological grounding to look to *these* passages, rather than to the Mosaic law, as the standards of righteousness for non-covenant nations.

Before we examine some of the clearest passages, let’s address one overarching question.

### **Is This Not Just Natural Law?**

Isn’t this whole project just an exercise in discerning natural law? My answer is no, though there is certainly overlap with the natural law project. There is a bigger dispute here than I can explain and adjudicate in our appointed time. To summarize my position briefly:

- I affirm natural law because of the Solomon of Proverbs. The created world bears the moral imprint of its Creator.

- I am skeptical of natural law because of the Solomon of Ecclesiastes. That moral imprint has been marred in the fall, so that it becomes a frustrating enigma to deduce *any* lawlike consistency in this life.

I suspect some of the confusion here arises from language. To argue by close analogy: Cornelius Van Til presses the distinction between natural revelation and natural theology. Natural revelation is an indisputable fact; indeed, the more one affirms the absolute sovereignty of God, the more one must affirm the revelatory nature of every molecule and event in the universe.

Natural theology, however, is the attempt to deduce truths from natural revelation, often explicitly with the provision that this task should be pursued with no appeal to the truths of special revelation. Van Til is skeptical of this endeavor (and I join him). David Hume gives the classic combative statement of the problem:

This world, for aught he knows, is very faulty and imperfect, compared to a superior standard; and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity, who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance: it is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity; and is the object of derision to his superiors: it is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity; and ever since his death, has run on at adventures, from the first impulse and active force which it received from him.<sup>1</sup>

At base, the answer to Hume is this: from the Garden on, God never intended man to read general revelation while purposefully rejecting special revelation; the former is intended by God to be read while presupposing the latter. To read natural revelation while suppressing special revelation is to invite the very kinds of distortions that Hume so ably states.

By analogy, I believe that God's moral character is revealed in the things that he has made. But some of our confusion here is that (unlike *natural revelation* and *natural theology*), we tend to use the phrase *natural law* to refer to both the character of God embedded in creation *and also* the attempt (often explicitly without reference to special revelation) to read that law. This is imperfect, but if we speak of the natural law as an ontological feature of reality, I am in hearty agreement; but if we speak of the natural law as a human exposition of that moral reality, I expect the results to be inconclusive and distorted.

In any case, my project here is not a natural law project, because my entire intent is to deduce *from Scripture* the standards by which God judges nations. We could have a further discussion as to the means by which God expects humanity to know these laws. To continue our earlier analogy, natural revelation is sufficient to make man culpable, even if he distorts and twists his understanding of that revelation (Rom 1:18ff).

### **Exegetical Observations**

I have no expectation that the following survey of texts is exhaustive, but I do suspect it is representative. As one might expect, certain themes recur; I considered grouping the survey by

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<sup>1</sup> Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part 5  
([en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dialogues\\_Concerning\\_Natural\\_Religion/Part\\_5](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dialogues_Concerning_Natural_Religion/Part_5))

themes rather than by passages, but I think there is value both in the unfolding revelation of these standards and in the sense of repetition, to see which receive the most emphasis.

### *Pre Mosaic Law*

Our first section of passages predate the giving of the Mosaic Law. These matter, because we already see evidence of God's dealing with nations *as nations*. (By contrast, for instance, although God clearly brings judgment during the Flood, nothing in the Flood narrative suggests a judgment on *nations* or other civic entities—unless the *sons of God* are human rulers, which they aren't.) But the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah does seem to be a judgment not just on individuals, but on the civic unit as a whole.

The grounds for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are, of course, a matter of some controversy, because of Ezekiel 16:48–51 (written in condemnation of Judah):

As I live, declares the Lord GOD, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. They were haughty and did an abomination before me. So I removed them, when I saw it. Samaria has not committed half your sins. You have committed more abominations than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the abominations that you have committed.

Some have jumped on this passage to say that the sin of Sodom has nothing to do with homosexuality and everything to do with a failure of hospitality and care for the poor. But the nature of the “abomination” (v. 50) that they committed matters. It is in line with all that Jerusalem has done—and Ezekiel 16 is among the most graphic chapters in the Bible as it describes the sexual degradation of Judah. The Sodomites were not merely homosexuals, else Lot's abhorrent suggestion of sending his daughters out to be abused by the crowd would make no sense. I do not wish to be trite nor needlessly crude, but it is not mere “inhospitality” to want to gang rape a visitor to your town. Sodom was a place of unbridled debauchery.

The accusations of “pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease” are not at all irrelevant, and we will see this language repeatedly in God's condemnation of nations. I'll save more comments for the later occurrences; as Americans, it seems to me that from the outset, we should find this condemnation unsettling.

A second significant pre-Mosaic text regarding God's evaluation of the nations is Genesis 15:16, where God tells Abram the inheritance of the land is not for him but for his future descendants, “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” While this doesn't give us a particular description of the standards that the Amorites have violated, it does give us one data point (reinforced by other texts) that the Bible has a category for continued corporate identity through time, including accumulated national guilt. The presumption of the text is that as the Amorite people continue to sin over the ensuing decades, they continue to “fill up” a measure of iniquity until God deems it just that they, as a corporate people, are due to come under this temporal expression of God's judgment.

### *The Historical Books*

To be sure, there are passages in the historical books that touch on our thesis, but in the main, they tend to reinforce one single theme: God's treatment of other nations is tied to 1) Israel's faithfulness or lack thereof and 2) their treatment of Israel. It is clear in the text that God's "attention" (to speak anthropomorphically) in the Old Testament is set on his covenant people. When they are faithful, God blesses them (among other ways) in relation to other nations: they are victorious in battle, put other nations to tribute, are prosperous in trade, etc. When they sin, other nations are used by God to chastise them militarily, politically, and economically.

This raises a question that, in full honesty, I'm not sure how to answer: *does* God still order the nations by this standard, and if so, is his concern their treatment of Israel, the church, or (perhaps) both? And if Israel, would it apply more directly to the ethnic descendants of Abraham or to the modern nation of Israel? There is no single consensus answer among dispensationalists to these questions, and there is place here for further work.

On the church: I'm skeptical that, in the main, we should have significant expectations that in this age, a nation that treats the church kindly will be prospered by God whereas a nation that persecutes the church will suffer under his hand. As a general observation, I have come to be convinced that the covenant expectations of Israel (immediate, temporal blessing for obedience and curses for disobedience) are, if anything, inverted for the church. The church follows the pattern of her Lord, sharing in his suffering now and in his glory later.

As for Israel, because I believe in an eventual redemption and restoration, I believe in a providential preservation of the Jewish people in this age—in some cases, a providential hand that seems quite visible at points in history. I am unconvinced that the Abrahamic covenant should be understood as laying obligations on modern nations regarding the modern nation of Israel. But nations that seek to destroy the Jews (and there have been many) should expect to have their ambitions thwarted by God. That this is the "time of the Gentiles" suggests that the Gentile nations are unlikely to face the present wrath of God for their treatment of Israel.

But this requires a distinction: there are moral obligations that God lays on nations that may not result in national consequences at this time.

### *The Prophets*

The bulk of the exegetical material for my project here is found in the prophets. We have two different kinds of passages. There are a handful of scattered texts in which the prophet announces God's judgment on a particular people. And then there are large sections of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Amos in which the prophet systematically moves through an entire list of nations that have come under God's condemnation. We'll begin with some of the oracles aimed at a particular nation, and then consider the lists.

Isaiah 10:5-15

This is a fascinating passage that certainly fits the pattern of the historical books that we have already noted: Assyria is going to be judged for what it has done to Israel. But the context here is more involved: what Assyria has done to Israel was also part of God's plan for Assyria. This empire was the rod of God's anger, sent by God against Jerusalem, whom God calls "a godless nation" (vv. 5–6). The key is the distinction between God's use of Assyria and its own motivation: "But he does not so intend, and his heart does not so think; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off nations not a few"; he views the God of Judah as inconsequential as the idols of the nations he has already overthrown.

As before, we see God specifically highlight the arrogance of Assyria: "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I have understanding; I remove the boundaries of peoples, and plunder their treasures; like a bull I bring down those who sit on thrones." They are absurdly like an axe or a saw who thinks itself more impressive than the craftsman who puts it to use.

The paradox of this passage (Assyria being judged by God for the conquest of Israel that God himself ordained) should already give us a measure of caution as we attempt to read providence. This, again, is a theme.

#### Habakkuk

This is a good time to survey Habakkuk, which suggests the same caution about reading providence apart from special revelation. Habakkuk is a fascinating book, not least because it is not at all the kind of literature we come to expect of the prophets. Instead of being an open declaration of "thus says the Lord" to the people, it records Habakkuk's own wrestling with the unveiling of the purposes of God. Habakkuk opens by mourning the sins of Judah, insisting that God was overlooking the wickedness of his people. God replies, assuring Habakkuk that that was not the case: he is raising up Babylon to come to rain destruction on Jerusalem.

Far from being relieved that God is not ambivalent about Judah's evil, Habakkuk is appalled at the apparent injustice the too of God's judgment: "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, why do you idly look at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?" (Hab 1:13).

Once again, we find that in God's work among the nations, what is happening *at this very moment* is not always a sure indication of God's approval or disapproval.

#### Obadiah

Broadly, we can categorize Obadiah's condemnation of Edom in the "judged from its treatment of Israel" category: Edom rejoiced in Babylon's devastation of Jerusalem. There is an added element to the wickedness of Edom: Obadiah highlights that their gloating came against "your brother Jacob" (Obad 10). This is in keeping with other OT accounts: there are nations that, because of historical connections, should treat one another with a measure of natural affection; betrayals of those obligations are treated by God with greater punishment.

## Jonah and Nahum

The book of Jonah offers virtually no details of the grounds for the destruction that God has sent Jonah to announce. We know some of this from our background study of Assyria, but the book of Nahum also suggests some of the details. Assyria is a nation whose overthrow will cause everyone to rejoice, “For upon whom has not come your unceasing evil?” (Nah 3:19). One challenge (and again, this will recur): the evil of Assyria is described in terms of metaphorical immorality: “And all for the countless whorings of the prostitute, graceful and of deadly charms, who betrays nations with her whorings, and peoples with her charms” (Nah 3:4). I say *metaphorical* not because I wish to deny that the Ninevites participated in literal immorality, but to speak of “whorings *with nations*” demands that we’re not merely using literal language. It does seem difficult (at least to me) to identify with certainty the point of that language. Is it duplicity and unfaithfulness in national agreements? That might be suggested with the further descriptions of “graceful and deadly charms.”

In any case, the book of Jonah holds out hope that judgment from God might be averted by national repentance. Jonah’s account itself does not give us details about the scope of their turning; I suspect it’s unlikely that Jonah led a kind of national revival and conversion of the Assyrians to the worship of the one true God of Israel. Rather, it is more likely that God’s temporal judgment was stayed as Nineveh pulled back from its typical brutality.

## Isaiah 13–23

The first of our length sequential announcement of judgments is found in Isaiah. For the most part, the language of these oracles focuses on the announcement of judgment, rather than the specific actions of the nations that have led to that judgment.

Obviously, both Isaiah and Ezekiel present a similar interpretive issue: whether the ruler of Babylon (in Isaiah) and Tyre (in Ezekiel) refer not just to human rulers (like, presumably, the other nations in each list) or to Satan. For my part, I have shifted positions on this question over the years: I’m now inclined to take these chiefly literally, but that especially the Babylonian ruler picks up and continues a line of symbolic usage of Babylon that culminates in Revelation.

Here, I will list some of the significant verses:

### Babylon

- 13:11: 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.
- 14:5–6: The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, that struck the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with unrelenting persecution.
- 14:13–14: You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’

- 14:17: who did not let his prisoners go home?

#### Moab

- 16:6: We have heard of the pride of Moab—how proud he is!— of his arrogance, his pride, and his insolence; in his idle boasting he is not right.

#### Tyre

- 23:8–9: Who has purposed this against Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth? The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth.

### Ezekiel 25–32

#### Ammon

- 25:3ff: Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Because you said, ‘Aha!’ over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile, therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession.... For thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within your soul against the land of Israel, therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you...

#### Moab and Seir

- 25:8: Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab and Seir said, ‘Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations,’ therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities...

#### Edom

- 25:12: “Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them....

#### Philistia

- 25:15: “Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity....

#### Tyre

- 27:12: “Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of every kind; silver, iron, tin, and lead they exchanged for your wares. 13 Javan, Tubal, and Meshech traded with you; they exchanged human beings and vessels of bronze for your merchandise...
- 27:33–34: When your wares came from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with your abundant wealth and merchandise you enriched the kings of the earth. Now you are wrecked by the seas, in the depths of the waters; your merchandise and all your crew in your midst have sunk with you.
- 28:1ff: Thus says the Lord GOD: “Because your heart is proud, and you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,’ yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god— you are indeed wiser than Daniel; no secret is hidden from you; by your wisdom and your understanding you have made wealth for yourself, and have gathered gold

and silver into your treasuries; by your great wisdom in your trade you have increased your wealth, and your heart has become proud in your wealth—therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you make your heart like the heart of a god, therefore, behold, I will bring foreigners upon you, the most ruthless of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of your wisdom and defile your splendor.

- 28:16ff: In the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned;... Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.

#### Egypt

- 29:6ff: Then all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the LORD. Because you have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel, 7 when they grasped you with the hand, you broke and tore all their shoulders; and when they leaned on you, you broke and made all their loins to shake. 8 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will bring a sword upon you, and will cut off from you man and beast, 9 and the land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste. Then they will know that I am the LORD.
- 29:9ff: “Because you said, ‘The Nile is mine, and I made it,’ 10 therefore, behold, I am against you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Cush. 11 No foot of man shall pass through it, and no foot of beast shall pass through it; it shall be uninhabited forty years. 12 And I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of desolated countries, and her cities shall be a desolation forty years among cities that are laid waste. I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them through the countries.

#### Amos 1:3–2:3

The beginning of Amos is a masterpiece of prophetic rhetoric. Amos opens with denunciations of the nations surrounding Judah and Israel; presumably, his Jewish audience would have enjoyed this section of his message. But after condemning Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, the Ammonites, and Moab, he continues by pronouncing curses on Judah and Israel.

Obviously, for our purposes we are most interested in those opening curses (though for different reasons than Amos’s Jewish audience). Here, a brief summary of the causes for God’s punishment:

- Damascus: “because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron” (1:3). The meaning is not absolutely clear, but could refer to their brutal treatment of the people of Gilead.
- Gaza: “because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom” (1:6). This is very likely the sin of *enslaving*: capturing people and selling them into slavery.
- Tyre: “because they delivered up a whole people to Edom and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood” (1:9). It is not explicit in the text which people group Tyre

betrayed; several commentaries suggest it could have been Israel, in violation of the peace between Solomon and Hiram of Tyre.

- Edom: “because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity” (1:11). The perpetual animosity between Israel and Edom is a violation of natural affection, and the manner in which it was pursued is a violation of standards of just war.
- The Ammonites: “because they ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border” (1:13). Obvious brutality and atrocities in unjustified war.
- Moab: “because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom” (2:1). Desecration of the dead is another clear line of a debased nation.

### *New Testament*

The New Testament speaks very little of God’s dealings with nations *as nations* (excepting, of course, the Gospel accounts of Israel). I hesitate to deduce too much from that silence, though it does suggest that the NT people of God, even when described as a holy nation (1 Peter 2:9), are not treated as a parallel entity to earthly nations (the way that Israel most certainly is). Nations continue to rise and fall, believers in general are to submit to the authority of nations, and there is spartan material in the New Testament to argue that making disciples of the nations means making nations themselves into disciples.

### *Revelation 17–19*

We will not resolve here every interpretive issue around the identity of Babylon the Great, whose fall is recorded and lamented and celebrated in Revelation 17–19. I am not opposed to understanding a religious element to Babylon, but am unconvinced that Babylon is simply (for example) the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, the language describing Babylon’s fall (both in lamentation and celebration) is more naturally read more broadly, so that Babylon points to this world order—including the political and economic order—arrayed against the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Whether eschatological Babylon is a particular nation or a reference to a *system*, it is addressed as doing things that nations do.

The opening description of Babylon is difficult: “the great prostitute who is seated on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality.” Presumably, Babylon the prostitute is a *personification*, not a literal person, which would demand that the sexual immorality that the kings of the earth commit with her is also some kind of figure.

But much of the rest of the description is a cumulative indictment of Babylon that echoes the language of condemnation of all of these nations: she is “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of the martyrs of Jesus” (17:6); “she glorified herself and lived in luxury,” saying “mourning I shall never see” (18:7), and trading in luxurious goods, including “human souls” (18:13).

### **Conclusion**

As I continued in this study, what I was most struck by is how predictable and underwhelming these conclusions are. God doesn’t want nations to be brutal, either in violence or sexual ethics.

Idoltrous glory of the nation, where the nation regards itself as omnipotent and the center of human obligation and devotion, invites God's jealous wrath. Nations that betray expected alliances are worthy of disdain and scorn. Nations that put their trust in wealth—especially wealth amassed by corrupt treatment of the poor—are evil.

My contention is that these things are obvious because they're in the text, not the other way around. This is a point that often needs to be raised to secular objectors to Christianity, who assert that Christianity is unnecessary for moral society without realizing that the moral principles they take granted have no grounding in a materialist universe.

Second, we should remain aware of a very real danger, even with a knowledge of these principles from the text: reading Providence, even when we know something of the mind of God, is quite an imperfect science absent accompanying special revelation. Consider again the case of the Assyrians, rampaging over nations, swarming to the very walls of Jerusalem. Surely, they thought that their gods were blessing them, and (in truth) the one true God was giving them success. But that success was not a blessing from the true God. Scripture itself would suggest that those giving confident assessments of the theological meaning of the rise and fall of nations are likely too confident.

A final thought of application: what we see in these passages is that God's standards for "ordinary" nations are not particularly extraordinary. (This seems in keeping with the NT hope that, in praying for our political leaders, we might be permitted to live quiet and peaceable lives.) It seems to me that in this, we want to avoid two ditches. The first is a failure to see the ways in which our current nation, with all its faults, does not seem to be at a level with those nations on whom God unleashes temporal judgment. My point is not to offer excuses or an apology for America, but rather that we avoid the perpetual inclination to see our days as uniquely evil—an inclination magnified by some eschatologies that demand that the flow of history is unbrokenly and uniformly toward greater evil until Christ returns.

The nations on whom God announces vengeance are typically characterized by state-endorsed brutality, idolatry, and immorality. It should be fairly evident that, in the past couple of decades, our nation has in some ways embraced deeper evil *while at the same time* moving away from other evils. Virtually no percentage of Americans believe that we should engage in conquest of the world for its own sake; our struggles in some wars tend to be because we refuse to use all the military might at our disposal—a kind of restraint not typical of, say, the Assyrians.

And yet the texts we've considered here don't seem entirely inapt to our nation, particularly the condemnation of nation glory in wealth and security. National expressions of thanksgiving to God and civil religion that is at least nominal Christian can be challenging to us—as Baptists, as those not given to ecumenicity—but they may serve as a buffer against the kind of nation-glory that draws God's judgment.

In summary: while we might offer different assessments of this or that passage and different evaluations of the state of our nation, I contend that we have in Scripture guidance for nations, without selectively invoking texts not directed to us.