

A HORN OF SALVATION

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Last Sunday the godless and brutal Chinese government detained one-hundred members of the Early Rain Covenant Church, and ransacked their homes. Those Christians wish to serve God in peace, but the Chinese state will not allow it. They suffer under tyranny, and they do not deserve it. Many people do deserve to live under oppressive government control, however, because they will not control themselves. So it was with Israel in the time of Christ.

God made a covenant with Abraham in which He promised to give him many descendants, and a land in which to dwell. God made good on His promise. The descendants of Abraham did become a great nation, and dwelt in the land of Canaan. God promised King David that one of his descendants would sit on his throne forever. God was faithful to the children of Israel, but they were unfaithful to Him, and, in the time of the Divided Monarchy, God judged them for their unfaithfulness. The prophet Isaiah warned the people of the northern kingdom of coming judgment, but he also proclaimed to them a deliverer. He said:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. (Isaiah 9:6, 7)

By God's providence, the Assyrians conquered the Kingdom of Israel in the north, and carried the people away into captivity never to return. The prophet Jeremiah warned the people of the southern kingdom that God would punish them for their sins, but he, like Isaiah, spoke of a coming savior. He said:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jeremiah 23:5, 6)

About one-hundred and fifty years after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, the Babylonians conquered the Kingdom of Judah in the south, and took the people there into captivity. Seventy years later, the Persians conquered the Babylonian Empire. Cyrus, king of Persia, issued a decree that the Jews should return to their homeland, and so they did. About two-hundred years after their return, the Greeks, led by Alexander, conquered the Persian Empire, and so the Jews were subject to them. The Jewish tribe of the Maccabees led a revolt, and the Jews enjoyed a brief period of independence, until the region came under control of the Romans.

For many generations, faithful Jews awaited the promised Messiah, who would deliver them from their pagan rulers. Zacharias was one of them. He and his wife, Elizabeth, "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." Luke 1:6) An angel appeared to him and told him that his wife would bear him a son, and to call his name John. John would be a prophet like Elijah, and would turn many in Israel back to God, and prepare them for the Lord. When the child was born, Zecharias prophesied,

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,
And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;
As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:
That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;
 The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,
 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him
 without fear,
 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.
 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord
 to prepare his ways;
 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins,
 Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us,
 To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of
 peace. (Luke 1:68-79)

John would proclaim salvation to the people. Their salvation would not begin as political, however; it would begin as moral. Their salvation would be brought on from the house of king David, just as God promised to David, and just as he promised to Abraham before him. Salvation would be brought by Jesus Christ.

At the time of Christ, the Jews were subject to oppressive rulers because they were an unruly people. Saint Paul wrote to Saint Timothy, “The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient.” (1 Timothy 1:9) The Jews would only be set free from political tyranny after they were set free from moral tyranny. Those who govern themselves need not be governed by others. John Adams, second president of the United States, understood this, as did the other founders. The colonies had won independence from Great Britain, and the people were free. Adams warned, however, that if the American people became immoral like the people of other nations, then the United States would be worst of all, because their government was designed for a godly people, not an ungodly one. If the American people became immoral, he wrote:

... this country will be the most miserable habitation in the world; because we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other. (John Adams, letter to Massachusetts militia, 11 October 1798)

The United States sacrifices many lives and much treasure to bring freedom to nations of the world that are not morally fit for it. A nation will not be free from tyrants before the people have been freed from the tyranny of the Devil, and people are only freed from the tyranny of the Devil by the “horn of salvation,” the Lord Jesus.

Let us work for righteous laws. Let us proclaim the Lord Jesus to the nations. Let us by the power of the Spirit so govern ourselves that we need not be governed by others.

Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.