

A TALE OF TWO CITIES

For English class in high school we read the book. A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens. It was a fictional account of the cities of London and Paris during the late 1700's. It begins with the words.....

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epic of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way

As we think the days before Jesus returns to earth, an Isaiah 60 passage comes to mind. It is similar to the contrast of the first lines of the Dickens book.

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come. - Isaiah 60:1-5

Dickens novel was set during the **dark days** of the bloody French Revolution where the guillotine was a common instrument of punishment. Likewise, Isaiah lived during very **dark times**. When he was a young man, the Assyrians in 734 B.C carried all of Northern Israel away. In 721 they took away Samaria and the rest of Israel. A few years later they came into the Southern kingdom of Judah and destroyed 46 walled cities and took away 200,000 captives. In 701, when Isaiah was an old man, an angel of God stopped the Assyrians before the walls of Jerusalem.

All of his life, Isaiah lived during the threat of Assyrian invasion and witnessed the ruin of his entire nation except for the city of Jerusalem. The Assyrians were fiercely cruel and had the first professional standing army. They skinned their prisoners alive or cut off their hands, feet, noses, ears or put out their eyes, or pulled out their tongues and made mounds of human skulls, all to inspire terror. (Source: Halley's Bible Handbook)

Isaiah lived during the 55 year reign of Judah's most wicked king Manasseh, who erected altars to Baal and to starry hosts, made Asherah poles, consulted mediums and spiritists, practiced sorcery and divination and sacrificed his own son in the fire (Molech worship). According to the Talmud and early church fathers, Manasseh had Isaiah put on a plank and sawed in two. It is believed that Hebrews 11:37 refers to it.

God revealed many prophecies to Isaiah about the coming of a Messiah who would usher in a new kingdom upon this earth. Isaiah would never see it himself, but he was faithful to God as a Messianic prophet and is the most quoted Old Testament prophet in the New Testament. His prophetic statements are quite relevant in our day too.

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness

for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitterness. - Isaiah 5:20

They parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster on themselves. Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. - Isaiah 3:9-10

- * Why is it okay to have Bibles in prisons but not in our schools?
- * Why is it hate speech to promote marriage between a man and a woman?
- * Why is killing an unborn child considered a right and an acceptable choice? (In ancient times, child sacrifice was practiced by pagan religions. Doing something shocking and against nature was a way to get the attention of their gods. It still happens today in satanic cults and certain pagan religions which require blood sacrifice. In the Old Testament the god Molech was involved with this practice.) Abortion today is done for convenience or profit.

The Bible is a story of the conflict and choice between two kingdoms: darkness and light, wrong and right, perversion and purity, lies and truth, hate and love, pride and humility, foolishness and wisdom, self indulgence and self control, injustice and justice, the broad way and the narrow path, rebellion and submission, chaos and order, greed and generosity, death and life. God revealed two cities and their characteristics. One is **Babylon**, centered on man (Revelation 17-18); the other is the **New Jerusalem** where the focus is on **the Lamb** (Revelation 21). One leader is a **Beast** and the Prince of Darkness; the other is a Lamb and the Light. Those who want to live like animals follow the Beast. Those who want to walk in God's light will follow God's Lamb.

The people walking in darkness have seen a **great light**; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a **light** has dawned. Isaiah 9:2

Arise and shine, for your **light** has come, and the **glory of the Lord** rises upon you, his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your **light** and kings to the **brightness** of your dawn. Isaiah 60:1,3. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the **deeds of darkness** and put on the **armor of light**. / Romans 13:11-12

The path of the righteous is like the **first gleam of dawn, shining** ever **brighter** til the full **light** of day. But the way of the wicked is like **deep darkness** they do not know what makes them stumble. / Proverbs 4:18-19

PROPHETIC VISION

* Increasing darkness and division

* Increasing light and exposure of the darkness

* Increasing awareness of our need for God

* Increasing manifestations of God's glory and goodness

Jesus calls his people a light, a city on a hill. Matthew 5:14. Their power source comes from the city above. The rest of the world lives in darkness from the city below. It is a tale of two cities.

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