

Saddam Hussein: Demise of a Dictator

***“The wicked have
drawn out the
sword, and have
bent their bow, to
cast down the poor
and needy, and to
slay such as be of
upright
conversation.
Their sword shall
enter into their
own heart, and
their bows shall be
broken.”
—Psalm 37:14,15***

IN THIS PSALM IS A PRO-phetic testimony and basic outline of the operation of truth and righteousness that will take place under the administration of the glorified church during the time of Christ’s kingdom. The psalmist begins by saying, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.” (Ps. 37:1,2) All evil, untruth, and injustice will thus be overthrown by our Lord Jesus and his faithful bride during his future kingdom rule over all the earth.—Rev. 20:6; I Cor. 15:24-26

In David’s psalm, he speaks to the ways of the righteous on one hand while contrasting them with the ways of the unrighteous on the other. Those who love righteousness have put their trust in the

Lord. They have committed their ways to him and are waiting patiently for his guidance and blessing. The psalmist then compares them with others whom he labels as the wicked, and warns, “The wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away.”—vs. 20

Although the wicked do prosper and flourish under the present-day rule of the prince of this world, Satan (II Cor. 4:4), the consecrated child of God is kept free from the pursuits of evildoers and does not have to be either concerned, or distressed, by them. The Lord’s people may put their complete trust in him, and so rest in the everlasting provisions for his people. David has assured us that in due time ‘the wicked shall perish’ under the mighty hand of our Lord Jesus during his rule of justice and peace.

DEATH OF A DESPOT

A despot is defined as someone who rules over his people by assuming absolute control, power, and authority over them. He may also exercise that power with abuse and oppression. Thus describes Saddam Hussein’s long, harsh, and brutal reign over the people of Iraq, during which time countless numbers of his own countrymen died or suffered greatly at his hand.

For many years, this despotic ruler has been the subject of the international media, especially since the United States military invasion of Iraq in 2003, during which Hussein was quickly deposed and his government abolished. Soon afterward he went into hiding, but was found some time later by American commandoes. Then, after a lengthy period of time,

a trial was conducted where the former dictator was found guilty of crimes committed against humanity. He was executed by hanging on December 30, 2006. The predawn execution took place outside of the heavily fortified United States Green Zone at Baghdad. Although his hideous crimes were numerous, he was convicted and punished for his role in the massacre of 148 of his own people at Dujail, Iraq, which occurred in 1982.

SADDAM HUSSEIN

According to official records, Saddam Hussein was born April 28, 1937, to an illiterate peasant family in the impoverished farming community of Al-Awja, which is near Tikrit, Iraq. However, it is thought by some that his actual birth date may have been altered, and backdated by perhaps two years or so in an effort to gain public stature and prestige among his countrymen. Others believe that his first wife Sajida may have been older than he was, so the date was moved back to make the marriage more socially acceptable. It was very unusual for an Iraqi man to marry a woman who was his senior.

Hussein was orphaned early in life and was raised for a time by a maternal uncle. After the death of his father that has been described as a murder by bandits, his mother Subha found a new husband, and Saddam returned to live with them. When she died in 1982, Hussein built an elaborate mausoleum for her in Tikrit, calling her the “mother of all militants.”

THE FORMATIVE YEARS

In his 19-volume official biography, which was at one time mandatory reading for all government

officials, he claims to have received his first pistol at the age of 10, and to have used it shortly afterward in a failed attempt to get even with a teacher who had treated him badly at school.

During his early youth, he was strongly influenced by his uncle Khairallah who had been a former army officer, and was a strong Iraqi nationalist. By the mid 1950s, this nationalist ideal found a voice in the Ba'th party, a socialist movement that called for a single unified Arab state to replace the fractured alliance of provinces that had existed previously. Saddam was greatly impressed by his uncle's ideology and became an ardent nationalist himself. He was determined to rid Iraq of all foreign influences and committed his first murder, directed by his uncle Khairallah, of a Communist party official. In 1955, he moved to Baghdad where he joined the Ba'th party, and a few years later took part in a coup that overthrew the monarchy, thereby making Abdul Karim Kassam the new prime minister. His unsuccessful attempt to kill Kassam a short time later forced him to flee Iraq when the conspiracy was discovered. He went first to Syria, and then later to Egypt. While in exile in Egypt, Hussein studied law and came under the powerful influence of Gamel Abdel Nasser.

RISE TO POWER

Hussein returned to Baghdad in 1963, Kassam was overthrown, and he began competing for a position of influence in the Ba'th party's newly formed government, which lasted only a few months. After the fall of the government, Hussein spent two years in prison until the party returned

to power in another coup. In 1968, he showed ruthless determination to regain support in the Ba'ath party and, as Chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, Saddam soon became the most powerful and influential individual in the government. By 1979, he had gained enough control to push the ailing President Ahmed Hassa al-Bakr out of power, and he became Iraq's new president. Hussein had finally achieved his ultimate ambition to become President of Iraq. He quickly worked to eliminate all whom he believed would oppose him, while he put his family and close friends into positions of power.

THE BUTCHER OF BAGHDAD

Hussein's vision for Iraq included the regaining of former Arab glory and setting himself up as their illustrious leader. He believed that he could lead the Arabs into battle against the ever present infidel, pointing directly toward the United States and Israel. The Iraqi people were forced to endure a continuous barrage of state-sponsored propaganda depicting their revered leader. The entrance to every village in the country was decorated with well placed oversized portraits of himself. Paintings, murals and statues in public places depicted the leader in a variety of situations from workingman to scientist. Slogans were also scattered throughout the country depicting honor and praise for himself as their triumphant leader. A government department, known as the "Very Special Projects Implementation Authority," was set up to take charge of maintaining and distributing his personal image. In 1980, the dictator made the date of his birth a national holi-

day, with each successive year marked by ever more elaborate parades, pageants, and other celebrations. Schoolchildren's notebooks had his portrait on the front cover, while the backcover displayed a collection of his sayings.

As dictator of Iraq, Hussein has earned the dubious distinction of being one of the best known, although most hated, of all Arab leaders. As a head of state, he was more feared, even by his own people, than any other leader in the turbulent Middle East in recent decades. He was often spoken of as the "butcher of Baghdad" because of his legacy of assassination attempts, torture, and death. Hussein was ready to sacrifice his own people as long as he could remain on his throne in Iraq. He sent his armed might against the Kurds in the northern part of his country, killing many innocent people. He made war with his neighbors without hesitation, and his rule is considered by many to have been one of the most brutal and warlike of any world regime during the last half of the twentieth century.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

During Hussein's reign as President of Iraq, aggressive efforts were put forth to develop weapons of mass destruction, that in turn would propel the country's military ambitions and might. New technology was used to pursue chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. Saddam often publicly acknowledged the need for Iraq to have its own nuclear weapon, which he called the "Arab bomb." In a deal he had put together with France to train 600 technicians for the development of a reactor, it is interesting to note that he stipulated that all persons of

the Jewish race and religion were to be excluded from participating in the project.

Saddam's ambition to develop nuclear weapons included not only deals with France, but with the Italians to build labs for plutonium enrichment. Other secret agreements were also made with Brazil, China, and India. Israel became alarmed about these developments and dispatched agents to sabotage Iraq's reactor cores, and launched a bombing raid that destroyed the country's nearly completed nuclear plant at Osirak.

Other efforts were put forward to develop highly toxic materials that could easily be converted to nerve gas. The Iraqi government was a major purchaser of bacterial and fungal cultures mostly supplied by West Germany and the United States. These materials were used to produce killer diseases including anthrax, typhoid, and cholera. During the Iran-Iraq war, Hussein used poison mustard gas and the nerve agent tabun against Iranian troops.

LEGACY OF BRUTALITY

After gaining power, Saddam saw an opportunity in 1980 for glory, and to put Iraq at the forefront of the Arab world. He believed that this could be accomplished by launching a surprise cross-border attack on neighboring Iran. It was meant to be a swift operation to capture the Shatt al-Arab waterway, which was formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers leading into the Persian Gulf. It also formed part of the international border between Iran and Iraq. The two countries had been in dispute over navigation rights in this area since 1935, but hostility also stemmed from a much longer

conflict between Persian and Arab interests in the region. Iranian resistance was much stronger than Hussein had anticipated, and the war ground on for eight long years, during which time countless thousands of soldiers and civilians alike were killed as a result of a very bloody conflict before he agreed upon a ceasefire.

FIRST WAR WITH IRAQ

In 1991, Hussein sent Iraqi military forces into neighboring Kuwait. He had become frustrated by his failure to achieve a price increase in oil revenues by conventional means. He allowed his long-harbored resentment against Kuwait to convince him that it could be accomplished by military means, and Kuwait was annexed to Iraq.

This action resulted in a massive United Nations coalition that was put together by former President George H. Bush. The United States led the invasion, together with 33 other countries, attacking and decisively driving Iraqi forces out of Kuwait within a very short period of time. The oil supply was thus made secure and the coalition decided to leave Hussein in power, a decision that has been debated ever since. After it was all over, Saddam described the war as the “mother of all battles” and that it had ended in victory for Iraq.

SECOND WAR WITH IRAQ

Despite opposition from governments around the world, United States armed forces under the command of current President George W. Bush were sent into Iraq in March, 2003. Repeated “decapitation strikes” were carried out in attempts to assassinate Saddam Hussein, but without success. The

American military took over the entire country in short order, but Hussein and his two sons—Uday the older and favorite son, and his younger brother Qusay—were nowhere to be found. The United States news media continued to speculate that the dictator had been killed, but he resurfaced from time to time on various tapes and broadcasts in which he urged the Iraqi people to resist the American occupation of the country.

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

President Bush's victory speech was broadcast on national television, May 2, 2003. It was intended to serve as a dramatic conclusion of the war in Iraq, and as a premier presidential photo opportunity. Every detail had been carefully planned to take political advantage of the situation. After making two flybys in the copilot's seat of a United States Navy Viking plane over the United States aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln, President Bush made his landing to declare an end of major combat operations in Iraq. His speech was given under a huge banner that read "Mission Accomplished." The debate concerning whether or not the event was premature gives a sense of just how unclear the whole situation is in the Middle East, especially at the present time four years later.

GUERRILLA WARFARE

Since that time, organized resistance has been waging a guerilla war against the occupying United States forces, while the country continues to slide into an even more serious civil war between two of the major religious factions in Iraq—the Shiites and the Sunnis. This has raised the prospect that

American troops may have to stay in the country for several more years, hardly the prospect that was once considered when they went to war without international approval, or under the direction of the United Nations.

Furthermore, there has also been no real evidence that Iraq was hoarding weapons of mass destruction—the primary justification that was made to go to war in the first place.

At the time of this writing, the casualty count has surpassed three thousand American servicemen and women killed, many thousands more injured, billions of dollars spent, and the country in total chaos. The situation continues to worsen and there is difficulty agreeing on a method to withdraw. The necessity to escalate the war is also being debated at the present time, which would require sending additional American troops into Iraq to bring the situation under control.

SOBERING REALITY

The reality of everyday life in Iraq during Saddam Hussein's regime, however, was very much different from his original vision for the country. Iraq has been in a state of fear and chaos ever since he took control of the government. Widespread violence and murder have become the daily routine. The country is nearly bankrupt and its economy in ruins after years of war. It has also suffered economic sanctions that were imposed upon it by the United Nations following the invasion of Kuwait after the first Iraqi War.

For the most part, Hussein had been largely isolated from his people since assuming power, while

keeping company with an ever smaller group of so-called trusted advisers that were drawn into his realm, mostly from his own family, or from members of his extended clan, which was based near the town of Tikrit.

THE DIVINE PERMISSION OF EVIL

The eternal wisdom and power of our all-wise and loving Heavenly Father gives us great hope, and this sense of trust has been summed up by the expression “the Divine permission of evil.” This term has become familiar to many students of the Bible, and the Prophet Malachi has captured the true meaning of this far-reaching expression. “Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” (Mal. 3:15) Malachi’s prophetic words further emphasize God’s will concerning the present situation. He writes, “Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”—chap. 4:1

The terrible results of sin and evil, and the carrying out of the death penalty toward our first parents Adam and Eve, and subsequently upon the whole human creation, will serve as an eternal monument to the disobedience of the Divine law of God. The permission of evil will never need to be repeated again in the timeless ages of the future, because mankind will have learned firsthand the ultimate results of sin. Not only will the human creation be benefited by their experience with sin, but they will

have become acquainted with the wonderful and eternal character of God. They will come to appreciate his justice, wisdom, love, and power in a way that they perhaps would not have otherwise.

Having briefly looked at some of the peculiarities that fashioned Saddam Hussein's character, and that contributed toward his becoming a ruthless head of state, is a very strong reminder of the Divine permission of evil. Even during his lengthy trial, and death by hanging, is suggested the degree of suspicion, mistrust, and intrigue that surrounded him.

Yet, Hussein is only one of many tyrants that have become familiar to us, and whose lives and selfish pursuits have filled the pages of history during recent decades of our own time. Many will remember, and perhaps others will have heard about, the selfish and despotic endeavors of other tyrants such as Adolph Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Joseph Stalin, and many others. God has permitted these despicable men to obtain tremendous power over their fellow man and to carry out their malicious wills uninterrupted. Many lives have indeed been devastated, not only among their own subjects, but also with the countless others with whom they have made war.

THE PROMISES OF GOD

The Prophet Isaiah points forward to the time when all evil, wickedness, and unrighteousness will be destroyed under the powerful hand of God. Mankind will have learned well the lessons of disobedience, and will readily turn to the ways of righteousness. "Lift ye up a banner upon the high mountain, exalt the voice unto them, shake the hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles. I have commanded

my sanctified ones, I have also called my mighty ones for mine anger, even them that rejoice in my highness.” (Isa. 13:2,3) The prophet describes the manner in which God will carry out the great work of destroying sin, the present selfish social order, and all that has been built upon selfishness and pride.—vss. 4-10

Isaiah reveals the will of Almighty God who will oversee the destruction of all unrighteousness. “I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.”—vs. 11

CONCLUSION

We look forward, with much anticipation, to the time when all evil is destroyed, and all evildoers are given opportunity to walk on the highway of holiness under the mighty hand of God. (Isa. 35:8) We rejoice also in the prophetic words of David who said, “Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him [from his face, *Marginal Translation*]. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.” (Ps. 68:1-3) Let us renew our vows of consecration and press forward in full confidence that the kingdom rule of our dear Lord Jesus is near at hand. ■

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”—Isaiah 8:20