

GREAT GOD, OUR KING

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SCRIPTURE: Psalm 24 selections.

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods. Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing of the Lord, and righteousness from God of his salvation. ...Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of glory.

Sing praises to God, sing praises; Sing praises unto our King, sing praises. For God is the King of all the earth; sing ye praises with understanding.

Since the world began, there have been almost innumerable kings, rulers, emperors and monarchs of various kinds -- some of them rulers over small and petty tribes, and some rulers over territories that comprised most of the known surface of the earth, Where are they now? Gone! All gone! So passes the glory of the world into dust and ashes and oblivion.

Whether these forgotten kings have acquired their kingdoms by discovery, by conquest, or by inheritance, their tenure of office has often depended on their strength of arm, on military might, on devious plotting, on ruthlessness, on cruelty, on treachery, on murder. Even good, wise, noble, generous, honorable, righteous kings frequently have to defend themselves and their kingdom against those who are not so good, or wise, or noble, or generous, or honorable, or righteous. And sooner or later of course, every reign and every king, whether good or bad -- is cut short by death.

Some kings have proclaimed that they ruled by divine right; that their power was given to them by God, the King of the whole earth, the King of Kings; and that they were answerable to God, and to God alone for the way they ruled their subjects and their realm. Under this doctrine of divine right, the king's subjects often suffered since the king had absolute power of life and death over them and was in no way obligated to respect their rights.

There are very few absolute monarchs left on earth today. The idea that kings, though they hold their authority from God, hold it as the outcome of a contract, explicit or implied, between the sovereign and the people, has developed through many centuries, and makes a most interesting study for those who have time. The rise of constitutional, parliamentary government in England, and the struggle of Englishmen to establish their rights and their freedoms, prepared the way for the freedom we know today in America; and today we accept it as a commonplace in their country at least, that rulers are amenable to God for their stewardship of government, and that perhaps the most important aspect of that stewardship is protecting, preserving, and respecting the rights of the men and citizens whose free choice has placed those rulers in positions of responsibility and authority.

Some kings, as Saul and David, were chosen by God to rule. But all kings, good or bad, ruled always by God's sufferance, by God's permission as did Nebuchadnezzar; for God is the King of the earth. "By me kings reign, and princes decree justice," God says in Proverbs 8:15. Daniel says (Chapter 2, verse 21) "He removeth kings and

and setteth up kings," and in chapter 4, verse 17, "The Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men."

Nebuchadnezzar was deposed and turned to madness when he forgot that his power was only borrowed from God. Saul, the chosen king of Israel, was deposed for his presumptuous offering of sacrifices, for assuming the office of priest as well as king; and David and his line were set up in his place. David was promised a perpetual kingdom for himself and his posterity, if they would obey the God who was King of Israel, but only a few generations later the kingdom of Israel fell, and David's line passed into oblivion, because his descendants had failed to recognize God as King.

God, the perfect, the all-wise, the all-loving, the all-powerful, the all-good, is the only Person or being who is completely worthy to rule in the affairs of men, to judge, to reward and punish. It is his right to rule. The earth is his by right of creation. Men are his by the same right. He is the author of all the laws by which his creations are governed. He rules, orders, governs. His sustaining and creative power and light and intelligence are everywhere; his law is everywhere. The laws of God and of God's kingdom permeate every square inch of the vastness of space; they govern every atom of matter. They are built into every muscle, bone, fiber, sinew, organ, and brain cell of your body; they are built into your spirit and personality. All man-made laws are but man's feeble attempts to reflect and put into tangible form the basic, inviolable, unchangeable laws of God. Against God's eternal laws, all man-made laws are tested. Not only men, but nations, if they forget or defy God's laws, must suffer the inevitable consequences of such violation. "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God," says the Psalmist. (9:17) The contrast is in Psalm 33:12: "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord."

During the coming year we plan to discuss each week one of the many aspects of the Kingdom of God. We believe that one reason why men of this generation have not realized the Kingdom of God is that men have refused or failed to recognize God as King and Ruler. It has become the fashion to recognize him as King of Heaven, as a spiritual ruler, remote far away, but to deny by our actions that he is King of this world. We are willing to let him rule heaven, if he will leave us free to rule the earth as we please. We do not recognize his right, either in theory or in practice, to rule in the practical everyday affairs of men and of nations -- to write our laws, to dictate our national policies, to sit at our peace tables, to write our treaties, to choose our candidates for office, to write the platforms of our political parties.

God is King of Heaven, but he also is the King of all the earth. It is his right to rule in the affairs of men and of nations. He is "King of Nations," and "King of Kings." "The Kingdom is the Lord's, and he is the governor among the nations." So long as we fail or refuse to accept God as King, and to obey his laws in the political, social, economic, and diplomatic fields, men and nations will continue to reap the rewards of their rebellion and folly in wasteful, corrupt, inefficient government, in war and conquest, in bankruptcy and high taxes, in misery, sorrow, and woe, and eventually in destruction and oblivion such as has overtaken so many of the other nations, kingdoms and civilizations of earth. Men under earthly kings and rulers will continue to be chattels instead of free men.

God, the greatest King of all, gives men their free moral will and agency. He does not compel obedience to his law, but woe unto the man who ignores or disobeys it. May we all soon give our willing allegiance to this great King of all the earth, that the blessings of his kingdom may come on earth in our time.