

“THE MOST HIGH GOD RULES IN THE KINGDOMS OF MEN”

Presented by

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As had so often been the case in the past, the Israelites were once again unhappy and complaining. The nations around them were ruled by kings. But the “only” King they had was One Whom they could not see, and One Who supposedly ruled from a heavenly throne, not an earthly one. So the discontented Israelites cried out to the prophet Samuel, “**Make us a king to judge us like all the nations!**” (1 Samuel 8:5). The **real** King of Israel, the most high God, told Samuel, “Listen to their voice, and set a king over them” (1 Samuel 8:22).

I suspect that all of you who are listening to me present this sermon today know how that story ended. Samuel anointed Saul, of the house of Kish, to be Israel’s first king. Yet almost before the royal crown of state had settled comfortably on Saul’s head, he sinned grievously against God by usurping the power of the Levitical priesthood and offering a sacrifice instead of allowing Samuel to do so, as prescribed by Mosaical Law. As a result, Samuel verbally castigated the king for his flagrant disobedience, and simultaneously prophesied the imminent end of his reign over Israel. These were Samuel’s words on that occasion: “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. The Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue” (1 Samuel 13:13-14).

As a result of Saul’s disobedience and rejection by God as Israel’s king, Samuel soon thereafter anointed a young man by the name of David, from the house of Jesse, as Israel’s second king. God then sent the prophet Nathan to David with an absolutely astonishing message. Here are the words of that now-famous message: “When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... **And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever**” (2 Samuel 7:12,16).

As you know from just having heard Blake’s sermon on “The Perils of Ignoring the Warning Signs,” the United Kingdom of Israel that existed for 120 years under Saul, David, and David’s son Solomon eventually was torn asunder as a result of Solomon’s disobedience to God in his old age—thereby creating the Divided Kingdom that consisted of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. But as Blake also explained in very vivid detail, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was carried away by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and its people were never heard from again. Later, in 586 B.C., the Southern Kingdom of Judah likewise ceased to exist as its citizens were carried away into Babylonian exile by the powerful Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar.

However, that is not the end of the story. When God told David, “Your house and your kingdom shall be established **forever**,” He meant every word of His promise to the king. While several of the prophets—whom God sent to plead with His people to repent—had prophesied Judah’s future Babylonian captivity, those same prophets also had delivered another message from God. That message came in several parts. First, Jeremiah had foretold that Judah would “serve the king of Babylon **seventy years**” (Jeremiah 25:11). Second, Jeremiah then went on to state that “then it will come to pass that when seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity” (Jeremiah 25:12). The beginning of that punishment upon Babylon took place when God caused King Nebuchadnezzar—who was filled with false pride at what he viewed as his own praiseworthy accomplishments—to wander for a period of time in the fields of his kingdom like a cow, until he came to realize that, as the Bible puts it, “the Most High God rules in the kingdoms of men” (Daniel 5:21). Later, God told Nebuchadnezzar’s equally pride-filled son, Belshazzar, that the kingdom of Babylon would be “given to the Medes and Persians” (Daniel 5:28). Sure enough, in 549 B.C. King Cyrus united the Medes and the Persians into a single kingdom, which subsequently conquered the seemingly invincible empire of Babylon. One by one, the prophecies of God’s prophets were coming true.

But more such fulfilled prophecies were yet to come. The prophet Joel, speaking on God’s behalf, had promised the people of the Southern Kingdom that “in those days and at that time, I will bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem” (Joel 3:1). Exactly as Joel had prophesied, under the reign of King Cyrus a small group of Jewish captives was allowed to return to Jerusalem to begin construction of the walls of the city and the rebuilding of Solomon’s temple. Eventually, more of the people of Judah were allowed to return to their homeland, where they re-established proper worship of God and regained their previously lost sense of nationality.

Throughout what seemed like desperate—and even hopeless—circumstances, God steadfastly remembered the promise He had made so many years earlier to King David: “I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever.” The evidence that God had **not** forgotten His promise was unexpectedly provided during the Israelites’ Babylonian captivity when the prophet Daniel boldly informed King Nebuchadnezzar that “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom **which shall never be destroyed**; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, **and it shall stand forever**” (Daniel 2:44). Through a long chain of what, from a purely human perspective, would have seemed to be incredibly improbable events, a man by the name of Joseph, and a woman by the name of Mary, arose in Israel from the royal seed of David’s house during the time of the Roman Empire. As a result of a promise of God that Mary would bear a “child of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18), and would “call His name Jesus” because He would “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21), the Christ child was born in Bethlehem, in keeping with Old Testament prophecy.

That young boy—referred to in Scripture as “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us” (Matthew 1:23)—eventually “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). But, after an earthly ministry that lasted approximately thirty years, false allegations were brought against Him at the mouths of lying witnesses. As a result, He was forced to endure an illegal trial in which His enemies suborned perjury, and at the conclusion of which He was condemned to be crucified between two thieves on a hill named Golgotha outside the city walls of Jerusalem. He was buried by a Pharisee named Nicodemus, and a rich Jew from the city of Arimathea by the name of Joseph, into whose borrowed tomb the Son of God was gently and sorrowfully laid.

Three days after Jesus’ death, however, His tomb was empty—because He had been raised from the dead by the power of God Himself (Colossians 2:12). Forty days later He ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God (Acts 2:32), whence He would reign over a kingdom that “**cannot be shaken**” (Hebrews 12:28) and that “**shall stand forever**” (Daniel 2:44)—a kingdom that, when men’s time on Earth is complete, He will “deliver to God the Father, who will put an end to all authority and power...and put all enemies under His feet” (1 Corinthians 15:24-25). At that time, the whole Earth will shout,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!
Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne **forever and ever!**”
(Revelation 5:12-13).

Did you notice that last phrase referring to Christ as “Him who sits on the throne **forever and ever**”? This pivotal event will represent the final fulfillment of God’s promise to King David that “your house and your kingdom shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16), and will mark the permanent completion of God’s pledge that He would establish “a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, and dominion that has no end” (Daniel 6:26).

Throughout all of the tumult and turmoil contained within the roiling pages of human history, there were times when it seemed that God’s promises had failed and that His plan had been foiled. Yet when all is finally said and done, the time-honored cry to Heaven of the good king Jehoshaphat of Judah will still be as true as the day he first uttered it: “O Lord God of our fathers, **are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations**, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that **no one is able to withstand You?**” (2 Chronicles 20:6). On that fateful day, one thing will remain absolutely certain: “**The Most High God rules in the kingdoms of men!**”