

BLESSED BE THE KING

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All people agree that not all is right with the world. They do not agree, however, on how things ought to be. Neither do they agree on how to make things right. Many people, knowing that that cannot persuade the opposition, seek to coerce them. So, they look to a political savior, and they write and speak of their political savior in religious terms. Ten years ago, liberals looked to Barack Obama. University professor Barbara A. Thompson wrote a book with the title, *The Gospel According to Apostle Barack: In Search of a More Perfect Political Union as "Heaven Here on Earth."* Actor Jamie Foxx referred to Obama as "Our Lord and Savior, Barack Obama." Editor of *Newsweek* magazine Evan Thomas said, "He's sort of GOD." After Obama's second term as president of the United States, the political fortunes changed, and conservatives elected Donald Trump. Many look to him as savior. In St. Louis, a group calling themselves "Make the Gospel Great Again," paid for a billboard with a picture of Trump, and the words, "'And the Word became flesh'... John 1:14." Retired firefighter Mark Colbert claims God spoke to him concerning Donald Trump, and he wrote of his experience in his book, *The Trump Prophecies: The Astonishing True Story of the Man Who Saw Tomorrow... and What He Says Is Coming Next*. Liberty University helped produce a motion picture based on Colbert's book. Many have compared Trump to Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, who released the Jews from their Babylonian captivity.

Of course, there is place for politics. There is place for coercion. Early in the history of the world, the violence of men was so great that God destroyed with a flood all of mankind, except for Noah and his family. (Genesis 6:1-7) After the flood, God gave men the right to execute murderers. (Genesis 9:5, 6) The law of Moses prescribes capital punishment for certain crimes. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans of civil government: "For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." (Romans 13:4) So, Saint Paul wrote, men should properly honor those in authority. (Romans (13:7) Some go beyond honor, however, and worship their political leaders. They worship them, and they put their faith in them. They should rather worship God, and put their trust in Him.

When the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt, God appointed Moses to lead them out. After the Exodus, Moses was judge among them. It was too much work for one man, so Jethro his father-in-law counseled him to delegate lesser cases to other good men, and Moses took his advice. (Exodus 18:13-27)

Before the children of Israel entered the promised land, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. It was a difficult trek, but God always provided for them food, water, clothing, and shelter. They lacked nothing. (Deuteronomy 8:4; 29:5; Nehemiah 9:21) God told them that, when they entered the promised land, they would every year with a feast commemorate the shelter God provided for them in the wilderness. He said to them:

And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the LORD seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: That your generations may

know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 23:40-43)

This would be known as Feast of booths, and it would be for Israel a regular reminder of their dependence upon God, and of God's gracious provision. (compare Deuteronomy 8)

When Israel was ready to enter the promised land, God appointed Joshua to succeed Moses after his death. (Numbers 27:15-23) After the death of Joshua, the children of Israel began a cycle of going after other gods, then God's delivering the children of Israel into the hands of their enemies, and then God's raising up a judge to deliver them. In the lifetime of Samuel the prophet, the children of Israel demanded a king to judge them like the other nations. (1 Samuel 8) Samuel was displeased that they had rejected him as judge, but they had rejected, not him, but God. So, God in his anger told Samuel to give them what they wanted. He told Samuel to give them a king. (1 Samuel 8:1-9; compare Hosea 13:11) Samuel warned the people that a king would oppress them, but they did not listen. (1 Samuel 9:10-20) So, Samuel gave them a king. God chose for them Saul. Saul began well enough, but He soon faltered. He did not have in mind the things of God. So, God replaced Saul with David, a man after His own heart. (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) God made David thrive, and David lived in a grand palace. Since the Exodus, God had met with Israel in the Tabernacle, but David wished to build for God a great temple. God told David that he would not build a temple, but his son would. Moreover, God would give David a dynasty. One of his sons would inherit his kingdom and that son's reign would have no end. God said to David:

He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever. (2 Samuel 7:13-16)

David was succeeded by his his son, Solomon, and Solomon did build the temple, but his reign was not forever. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided between north and south. The children of Israel became so wicked that God, after giving through the prophets many warnings, sent the Assyrians to conquer the northern kingdom, and carry the people away into exile, and then sent the Babylonians to conquer the southern kingdom, and carry the people away into exile. The Babylonians, in their assault, destroyed the great city of Jerusalem, and the great temple. The Persians later conquered Babylonia, and Cyrus, king of Persia, decreed that the Jews should return to their homeland and rebuild their city and their temple. (Ezra 1:1-4) At the urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the Jews did return, and they did rebuild the temple and the city. After they secured the city, they gathered in the street and called Ezra the scribe to read out the law of Moses, which they had neither read nor heard for some time. (Nehemiah 8:1-8) The second day, they learned of the feast of booths. Nehemiah records what they did next:

And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. (Nehemiah 8:17)

The people had always observed this feast, but not like this for a long time. According to tradition, it was at this time the people in their great joy sang the One-hundred and Eighteenth Psalm. That psalm begins and ends with the words, “O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever.” In it, the psalmist exhorts the people to trust, not in men, but in God. He says, “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.” (Psalm 118:8, 9) He calls upon God to save him from his enemies. He asks that the gates be opened, so that he may go in to praise the Lord. He speaks of One who will come in the name of the Lord. He says:

The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner.

This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.

Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.

Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.

(Psalm 118:22-26)

Sometime later, Zechariah the prophet prophesied of the coming king, the savior, who would bring peace to the entire world. He said:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth. (Zechariah 9:9, 10)

About two centuries after the temple was rebuilt, Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire, and Judea came under Greek control. After the death of Alexander, the Macedonian Empire broke apart, and Judea became part of the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucid emperor, Antiochus, would not allow the Jews to practice their religion, and he sacrificed a pig in their temple, thereby desecrating it, and drawing the ire of the Jews. Judah Maccabee, a priest, led the Jews in a successful revolt against the Seleucids. Judah and his forces then entered triumphantly into Jerusalem, where the people received them with great acclamation, and Judah ordered that the temple be cleansed. In 1 Maccabees, it says of Simon Maccabee:

He cleansed the tower from pollutions: And entered into it the three and twentieth day of the second month in the hundred seventy and first year, with thanksgiving, and branches of palm trees, and with harps, and cymbals, and with viols, and hymns, and songs: because there was destroyed a great enemy out of Israel. (1 Maccabees 13:50, 51)

The Jews then celebrated the Feast of Booths. In 2 Maccabees it says:

And they kept the eight days with gladness, as in the feast of the tabernacles, remembering that not long afore they had held the feast of the tabernacles, when as they wandered in the mountains and dens like beasts. Therefore they bare branches, and fair boughs, and palms also, and sang psalms unto him that had given them good success in cleansing his place. (2 Maccabees 10:5, 6)

So was fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah who said, “When I have bent Judah for me, filled the bow with Ephraim, and raised up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and made thee as the sword of a mighty man.” (Zechariah 9:13) Judah Maccabee then made an alliance with Rome, and so Seleucid control over Judea came to an end. However, the Jews would long to be delivered from the heavy hand of pagan Rome.

About a week before Jesus died, Jesus He entered into Jerusalem for what would be the last time. Before He entered, He told two disciples, “Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither. And if any man ask you, Why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him.” (Luke 19:30-31) They went, and they found the colt, just as Jesus had said they would, and they untied him. A man did ask them why they were untying him, and they answered him as the Lord had instructed them. They brought the creature to Jesus, and they laid their garments upon it, and then set Jesus upon it, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah. Then Jesus, like Judah Maccabee, made his Triumphal Entry into the city of Jerusalem to the acclamation of the people. Judah had entered as a man of war; Jesus entered as a man of peace. The people lay their garments on his path, just as the officers of the army of Israel had lain down their garments before Jehu after the prophet Elijah anointed him king over Israel. (2 Kings 9:13) Saint Matthew and Saint Mark relate that the people cut down branches of trees, and lay them across Jesus’s path, just as the people had done for the Maccabees. (Matthew 21:8; Mark 11:8) Saint John tells that they lay before Him branches of the palm tree. (John 12:13) Saint Luke records:

And when he was come nigh, even now at the descent of the mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen; Saying, Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. (Luke 19:37, 38)

According to the other evangelists, the people cried out, “Hosanna,” a word which is found in the One-hundred and Eighteenth Psalm and which means, “Save, I pray.” (Psalm 118:25)

After Jesus entered Jerusalem, He, like Judah Maccabee, cleansed the temple. However, Judah cleansed the temple from the defilement of the Greeks; Jesus cleansed it from the defilement of the Jews, and would open it to Greeks. He said to the Jews in temple, “It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.” (Luke 19:46) Here Jesus cites a line from the prophecy of Isaiah, which reads:

Also the sons of the stranger, that join themselves to the LORD, to serve him, and to love the name of the LORD, to be his servants, every one that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and taketh hold of my covenant; Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people. (Isaiah 56:6, 7)

David would have built for God a temple, but God is building a spiritual temple, a temple that comprises people of all nations, and of which Jesus, although rejected by the Jews, is the chief cornerstone. Immediately after Jesus's Triumphal Entry, some Greeks who were in Jerusalem to worship at the passover feast said to Philip, Jesus's disciple, "Sir, we would see Jesus." (John 12:20, 21) Philip told Andrew, and the two of them told Jesus. Jesus knew that it was time for Him to die, so that the world might be saved. He said:

The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. (John 12:23-26)

Jesus is not a warlord. He came not to kill, but to give life. He said, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10) Jesus came not to kill, but to give His own life. He said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:28) Jesus came not to condemn the world, but to save it, and it is in Him that everyone ought to put their trust. (John 3:16, 17)

Let us be subject to the governing authorities as Scripture commands. Let us pray and work for righteous rule in the land. However, let us always put our faith in the Lord, and never in men.

Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.