

BLESSED BE THE KINGDOM

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When the Christian looks at the world around him, he is disturbed. Like Lot, his soul is tormented day in, and day out, by what he sees, and He knows that God is of purer eyes than to look upon evil. It is tempting to use force to achieve change. Of course, some sinful acts must be met with force; but not all. The only real hope for the world is the Lord Jesus.

After Joseph ruled over Egypt, the pharaoh made slaves of the children of Israel. God heard the cry of their suffering, and in a great Exodus He delivered them from their bondage. He promised them a land of their own, but, before He brought them there, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. In that time, they lived in temporary shelter, known as booths. Conditions in the wilderness wandering were far from ideal, yet the people did have food, clothing and shelter. God told them that, when they arrived in the Promised land, they would commemorate their shelters in the wilderness with Feast of Booths. (Leviticus 23:33-44) In this festival, each family made a small shelter, and dwelt it for one week. When the people lived in plenty in the promised land, the Feast of Tabernacles would remind them of their humble beginning, and of their dependence upon God for all things. (Deuteronomy 8)

King David, for all his faults, was a man after God's own heart. He wished to build a house for God, but God said He would build a house for David. So, God made a covenant with him in which He promised him an heir who would rule on his throne forever. He said:

And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. 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 7:12-16)

David died, and was succeeded by his son, Solomon, and after Solomon died, the kingdom was divided into two kingdoms, north and south. Assyria conquered the northern kingdom, and carried the people into exile. A few generations later, the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom, and carried the into exile. They destroyed the city of Jerusalem, including Solomon's Temple. Through the prophet, Jeremiah, God promised that, after the passing of seventy years, He would punish the king of Babylon, and cause His people to return to their homeland. (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10) It happened according to the word of God. The Persians conquered Babylon, and Cyrus, king of Persia, decreed that the Israelites should return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. They did return, and they did rebuild the temple, at the urging of prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. When the rebuilding of the temple was completed, the people celebrated the Feast of Booths. The book of Nehemiah records the commemoration after the temple was rebuilt:

And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law. And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: And that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive

branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as *it is* written. So the people went forth, and brought *them*, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. 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 8:13-17)

It may very well be that, at that time, they sang the One-hundred Eighteenth Psalm, a psalm about the temple, the house of the Lord. That Psalm begins, and ends, with words that echo those of the Davidic Covenant. It says, "O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is* good: because his mercy *endureth* for ever." (Psalm 118:1, 29) That Psalm says that God is the merciful Savior, and it tells the people to trust in Him, and not in men. It 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) It calls upon the Lord to save and to prosper, and it blesses the One who will come in His Name:

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 after the temple was rebuilt, Zechariah prophesied the coming of the king, whose reign would bring peace, not only to Jerusalem, but to the whole 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)

Later, Israel was conquered by Alexander the Great, and, after his death, it was annexed to the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucid Emperor, Antiochus, forbade the Jews to practice their religion, and he desecrated their temple by sacrificing a pig in the temple. Judah Maccabee led the Jews in revolt, and to victory against the Seleucids. The Maccabeans entered into Jerusalem, and cleansed the temple. They were received with great acclamation. 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)

Moreover, the Jews then celebrated the Feast of Booths. 2 Maccabees 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)

Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah, “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 made an alliance with Rome, and so Seleucid rule over Judea was ended. It was an uneasy alliance, and the Jews longed to be delivered from the rule of Rome.

About a week before Jesus died, He entered into Jerusalem. This was not the first time he entered the city, but it was the most celebrated. This time, crowds hailed Him as their Savior. This was His Triumphal Entry. Saint Mark writes:

And when they came nigh to Jerusalem, unto Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount of Olives, he sendeth forth two of his disciples, And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: and as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring *him*. And if any man say unto you, Why do ye this? say ye that the Lord hath need of him; and straightway he will send him hither. And they went their way, and found the colt tied by the door without in a place where two ways met; and they loose him. And certain of them that stood there said unto them, What do ye, loosing the colt? And they said unto them even as Jesus had commanded: and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him. And many spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees, and strawed *them* in the way. And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed *be* the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest. And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve. (Mark 11:1-11)

Saint Mark notes that Jesus sat on a colt, that is to say, on a young horse. Saint Matthew adds that the colt was with a donkey. Jesus’s riding a donkey was not sign of humility; it was customary for rulers to ride such a creature, as the judges in Israel did, as King David did. (Judges 5:10; 10:4; 12:14; 1 Kings 1:33) It is significant that Jesus did not enter on a steed, that is to say, a war horse. The prophet Isaiah says that Christ came as the Prince of Peace, not as a man of war. (Isaiah 9:6) Saint Matthew and Saint John add that Jesus’s riding on a donkey was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah. He entered Jerusalem as the king God promised. He entered as the heir to the throne of David. The people, for their part, recognized Him as such. They spread their garments across Jesus’s path, just as the officers of the army lay down their garments before Jehu After the prophet Elijah anointed him king over Israel. (2 Kings 9:13) They proclaimed the words of the One-hundred and Eighteenth Psalm, “Hosanna; (which means, Save); Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed *be* the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” Saint Luke writes that some people said, “Blessed *be* the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest.” (Luke 19:38)

In certain respects, Jesus’s entrance into Jerusalem was like that of the Maccabees. Saint Mark records that the people cut down the branches of trees, and spread them over Jesus’s path. Saint John remarks that the people laid before Jesus branches of palm, the symbol of God’s mighty provision, just as the people had done for the Maccabees. Moreover, after Jesus entered the city, He went into the temple to cleanse it. His cleansing,

however, was different from that of the Maccabees. They cleansed it from the defilement of the Greeks; He cleansed it from the defilement of the Jews. He cast out of the temple all those that bought and sold there, and said, "My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer." (Isaiah 56:7) Here He cites from the book of Isaiah, where the Lord says, "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) God desires that His house, the kingdom of the Son of David, include all people, not only Jews. In fact, right after Jesus's triumphal entry, some Greeks who came to Jerusalem to worship at the Passover expressed to Philip their desire to see Jesus. (John 12:20-22)

Some Jews, especially the leaders, rejected Jesus. They refused to recognize Him as king. He was not the liberator they were looking for. They wanted a warlord; He is the Prince of Peace. So, Jesus warned them that their city, and their temple, would once again be destroyed, this time by the Romans. He also told that He would leave them, and would not return until they were prepared to receive Him. Quoting from the prophet Zechariah, He told them, "For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Matthew 23:39) One day the Jews will repent of their rejection, and will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. (Zechariah 12:10; Romans 11:26) One day, all will pay homage to Him. Saint John writes in his Revelation:

After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9, 10)

Too often people seek to solve the world's problems by laws, that is to say, by use of force. There must be laws. However, the true reform of men only comes by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Like the One-hundred Eighteenth Psalm, the One-hundred Forty-sixth Psalm says, "Put not your trust in princes, *nor* in the son of man, in whom *there is* no help... Happy *is he* that *hath* the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God." (Psalm 146:3, 5) John Calvin, commenting on these verses, writes:

When he says that in that day all his thoughts perish, or flow away, perhaps under this expression he censures the madness of princes in setting no bounds to their hopes and desires, and scaling the very heavens in their ambition, like the insane Alexander of Macedon, who, upon hearing that there were other worlds, wept that he had not yet conquered one, although soon after the funeral urn sufficed him. Observation itself proves that the schemes of princes are deep and complicated. That we may not fall, therefore, into the error of connecting our hopes with them, David says that the life of princes also passes away swiftly and in a moment, and that with it all their plans vanish. (John Calvin on Psalm 146:3, 4)

Let us be in subjection to the governing authorities. But let us not put our trust in princes. Let us rather put our trust the Prince of Peace.

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