

Rule

“He will rule them with an iron scepter” (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:27a, 19:15b)

“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 11:15b)

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!”
(Revelation 19:6b)

Jesus holds three offices, Prophet, Priest, and King. Unfortunately this three-fold scheme dilutes or minimizes His primary and exceedingly important role of King. Let's think about ruling. It's a major theme of all Scripture. In fact it's the theme that drives all Scripture—indeed, all history—from beginning to end.

God rules His creation. He rules all the heavenly beings as well as earthly ones. He rules all life, the entire physical (natural) world and all history. He rules even the future. He is an absolute sovereign. The entire cosmos is His; He owns it and can do with it as He pleases according to His holy will. And He has purposes for His creation, so His rule makes certain that those purposes all will be fulfilled. God's rule is infinitely wise, just, and loving.

Now, when God made Adam, He gave the man the wonderful privilege of serving the invisible, spirit God by ruling the visible, created world on His behalf. To do this, Adam necessarily had the responsibility to obey God. God had (and has) the absolute right to be obeyed, and Adam had (and all men have) the absolute necessity to obey God. This is what rule means, it's what rule requires. But Adam also was given a measure of moral freedom, which he used tragically to disobey God. So the right to rule as God's vice-regent over the physical world was forfeited. But that also meant that someone had to come who would fulfill that role, and do that responsibly. Who would rule for God in Adam's place?

The sin nature that took control of humanity at the Fall revealed itself immediately as a force that seeks to rule apart from God. Cain acted as if he were a god, autonomously doing as he wanted to do without reference to God's words, ignoring His revealed will. And by hearkening to the Serpent, all humanity submitted to the rule of Satan. So, all thru O.T. history, selfishness is rule of self by self, not by God. And Satan is a usurper, ruling wickedly over the physical creation and all humanity, directly or thru other evil, supernatural beings.

When God called Abraham, He promised that in the course of time a ruler would come from him. Here and there in Torah, reference is made to that promised ruler. Until then, God revealed His will directly to Moses and to others, with the expectation of obedience. Although God expects his human creatures to know Him and to love Him, obedience is the one absolute demand that creatures owe to God, their Creator. In one form or another, He has revealed His will, yet in grace God also acknowledges failure to obey may occur, for whatever reason, and so failure may be forgiven. But refusal to obey Him is unforgivable rebellion.

At last, a king came who would rule on God's behalf. That was David, a man after God's own heart. Sadly, even he succumbed to the innate sin nature and disobeyed God. So David was not the promised One who would rule the world in righteousness on God's behalf. And it wasn't his son, Solomon. Solomon couldn't obey either. Nor was it any of the many kings who came to a throne over Israel during the Monarchy. There is much narrative text for the Monarchy for this

very reason, to show that the promised Ruler was yet to come. He *had* to come. The world was (is) filled with violence, hatred, wickedness, and especially with Gentile kings who lust for power and conquest.

During the Monarchy, a sub-theme was introduced that would in time assume great importance: the Kingdom of God. This was a community of people who worship God, who obey and trust and serve God. It's a counter-culture of people who seek to know and love God with all their heart and might. The Kingdom is characterized by people who exhibit humility, love, obedience, righteousness and worship—NOT power or conquest. At times, under certain of the kings, the monarchy instantiated that Kingdom, that is, the monarchy expressed it on earth. Mostly, though, Israel's failed monarchy anticipated a fulfilling of that Kingdom in the future.

When Ezra returned to the Land with a contingent of Jews, the monarchy wasn't re-established. A second Temple was built, but God didn't take up residence in it. Judea remained a vassal of the powerful surrounding Gentile nations. And their leadership eventually became inimical to God (see Ezekiel 34). The promised, future Kingdom of God was the Jews' only hope for any transcendence.

In time, Jesus came, announcing that it was time for the Kingdom of God. The Son Himself had to enter creation to fulfill the creational necessity of rule. And Jesus *demonstrated* that He had the right to rule. He lived out God's perfect righteousness. He honored God by obeying God even though it resulted in torture and the loss of His life. He was humble. And He showed self-sacrificing love for God's creatures. Jesus lay down His life even for His enemies! Jesus indeed has the right to rule. No one else did, or does, have that right. Jesus is the King who rules in and through the Kingdom of God. And the Church instantiates the Kingdom of God in the present inter-advent era. In the future, when Jesus returns, the Kingdom of God will be the Millennial/Messianic kingdom, with Jesus ruling the world from a throne in Jerusalem.

In this current era the Kingdom of God has no political boundaries. Its citizens are a holy, priestly people (1 Peter 2:9). It's formed by the Holy Spirit, and its citizens are empowered by that Spirit to live out the Word of God. Its citizens have love for each other regardless the ethnicity or culture from which they came. Its citizens know and love God's truths; they live truth and they share truth. Its citizens aren't merely those whose sins have been forgiven; its citizens are a transformed people.

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What does all this mean to us? God always, in justice, reveals His will to His human creatures. So the one great matter in life is, How do we respond to God's revealed will? Do we respond by acknowledging His rule and submitting to it? Or not. Refusing to acknowledge God's rule over us means we prefer to be autonomous, like little gods in pathetic competition with God. But by repenting of our sins and submitting to His rule—and we do that by lovingly trusting and obeying Jesus—God transfers us into the Kingdom of God.

The Son had to come to earth in human form to live out righteousness, humility and loving self-sacrifice, and to suffer horribly because of His obedience to God—all in order to demonstrate His right to rule. In the same way we must demonstrate our right to be citizens of the Kingdom. We do that by pursuing sanctification, Christ-likeness, and fruit-bearing. Jesus' teachings—if we obey them—enable us to express our Kingdom citizenship. Yes, in the future we'll be

transformed into the image of Christ, what's called in theology glorification. But unlike Gentile kings, who rule alone atop a pyramid of lesser officials, in the Kingdom of God, King Jesus *shares* His rule with His Christ-like followers. So in this life we have to actively demonstrate that our desire is to be like Him and to do as He did, even if it means sacrificing ourselves for God's purposes as He did.

No one ever has the right to be indifferent to God's rule by living according to one's own desires and values. No one has the right to ignore God's revealed will. No one has the right to profess faith in Christ yet live in disobedience to His teachings and commands. No one has the right to presume upon God's grace. Jesus slammed the door shut on all who live by these supposed rights by saying, **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven . . . I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you disobedient [lawless] ones'"** (Matthew 7:21-23). Why don't we get it? Salvation is being in intimate personal relationship with Jesus, and we are that by obeying Him! We either acknowledge and submit to God's rule over us, or not. And if not, suffer His fiery indignation.

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The Book of Revelation is in the canon as a warning to the Church. The Book is not a puzzle to be decoded, which is how most of us approach it. It's the most sober warning in Scripture. The cosmos is suffused with evil: evil supernatural beings, evil humanity, and evil systems. The kingdoms of the Gentile nations are all evil [that includes our own nation]. And Jesus warns us in this book that we're to have nothing—*nothing*—to do with it. As citizens of the Kingdom of God, our loyalty must be assiduously to Him, regardless what we suffer as a consequence of that loyalty. In His time, He will judge all the evil. Our concern is therefore not the evil. We don't need to study it or complain about it. Rather, we to be faithful to Him and His will—as revealed in His teachings and commands. But we must also be exceedingly careful. Our world is saturated with Kingdom counterfeits, and the deceit is cleverly cloaked. We must know the Word of truth so as not to be deceived. We must take seriously our Kingdom citizenship, which means living it in the here and now.

If we're kingdom citizens, we eschew the culture and the secular system with its pagan worldview out of which God called us. We're not here to enjoy all that the world puts on offer. Satan knows how to fascinate and distract us. To be in the Kingdom of God is to pursue instead a radically new and different kind of life. It's a life that's obsessed with God and His purposes, His will for us, His values and His truths. It's a life fully given over to Him, whatever the loss may be, in the expectation of a blessed existence in the life to come. To believe in Jesus is to love Him, to serve Him, to want more than anything to be like Him and to be with Him. And to want His Kingdom. *That* is biblical salvation. In the current era, that's how Jesus rules us. His rule over those who don't follow Him, who refuse to be in His Kingdom, is horrible to contemplate.

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Nothing in life matters but this one thing, that we glorify God. And we do that by mirroring His beauty, His goodness, His holiness, love and righteousness. We do that by obeying Him. So let's absorb the Word of God, meditate on it, apply it to our lives and then live it. There is no other way to submit to His rule. Anything else is a wasted life.