

ISRAEL AND THE KINGDOM

Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister
 Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ
 of Latter Day Saints
 Independence, Missouri

Sunday, January 17, 1954
 8:30 a.m. KMBC and KFRM
 Kansas City, Missouri
 All Rights Reserved

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 28:1-13, with omissions.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all the nations of the earth; And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and store(9) The Lord shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the Lord thy God, and walk in his ways. And all the people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee ... And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the Lord thy God, which I command thee this day to observe and to do them.

If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. (God's promise to David: Psalm 132:12)

One fact which is often overlooked in our study of the Old Testament and of the nation whose history is contained therein, is the fact that Israel as a nation is unique among all the nations of the world, past or present. This uniqueness is shared by the Old Testament itself. And in the final analysis, the thing which makes both Israel and the Old Testament unique is the concept of government which was common to both.

Israel was chosen by God for a specific purpose -- that as a nation Israel might demonstrate to the other nations of earth the advantages of this unique form of government. It was not God's purpose simply to set up Israel to rule over all the other nations of the world in pride and glory and splendor, but to use Israel as a chosen people to demonstrate what God could do with nation which would serve him as King, and live under his laws. Although the word does not appear at all in the Bible, later writers have coined the word "theocracy" to describe this unique government of Israel. Theocracy is a government of God, government by his power, his authority. As a German writer, Kautzsch states it: "The notion of theocracy is that the constitution was so arranged that all the organs of government were without any independent power, and had simply to announce and execute the will of God as declared by priest and prophets, or reduced to writing as a code of laws."

Note for a moment the peculiar structure of Israel's government. There were twelve tribes, each more or less independent of the others, but all held together by faith in a common God. There was a remarkable amount of local freedom, self-government or home rule. There was democracy, under which the people were called upon to ratify the code of laws, and to approve the choice of king. Because of this decentralization of authority, Israel was prevented from aspiring to world conquest, as so many of her neighbors did, and was discouraged from relying too much on military prowess for protection. Israel relied very largely on God for protection, as well as for guidance in affairs of government. It was Jehovah who led Israel in Battle, or raised up and inspired the heroes who actually commanded troops. The judges administered justice in his name, being cautioned to "Take heed what ye do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in judgment." Jehovah gave the laws which were regarded as the constitution in Israel. Moses and Joshua were representatives of Jehovah, ruling

by his authority, not by their own. Under this peculiar and unique form of government God designed to build a nation which should demonstrate to the world a truly godly, righteous, benevolent, practical form of government. Israel, in other worlds, was to be the beginning of the actual kingdom of God on earth.

Another fact is worthy of special note in passing. In a theocracy, one thing is immediately seen to be necessary. That is, a special revelation of the divine will to those who rule in God's name. No man can rule in God's name or with his authority unless there does come this special revelation of the divine will through divinely chosen organs, or to divinely appointed executive agents. Many kings have claimed to rule by divine right; but Israel is unique in that her constitution was given by this process of special revelation, and in her early days at least, the government was carried on by a continuation of this special revelation to prophets, who made and unseated kings, and revealed the divine will in matters of state policy.

There came a time after the passing of Moses and Joshua, when the Priests no longer received such revelation, and resorted to the casting of the sacred lot to try to determine God's will. Heathenism infiltrated the nation; and with the destruction of the national religion, the national unity was weakened. A king was demanded to make the decisions which the people had heretofore made democratically for themselves, with the help of God and his prophets. Moses had provided for the possibility of a king, but had always shunned such an office himself. The 17th chapter of Deuteronomy makes it clear that if Israel was ever to have a king, he was to be chosen from among the people of Israel; that God would choose him but the people ratify his choice; that this king should not multiply unto himself horses, wives, silver, or gold; that he should keep the constitutional laws and statutes; and that he should not allow his heart to be lifted up above his brethren. When Samuel was forced by the people's clamor to ask God to choose a king, God said to Samuel: "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." That day the rejection of Jehovah as King of Israel was made almost complete. Yet the king was still responsible to Jehovah, and could be deposed by his prophet for malfesance in office. The king was Jehovah's servant. He did not make the law; he was under the law.

God had great plans and great expectations for Israel. To David he promised that his kingdom should be an everlasting kingdom; that his descendants should sit on the throne of Israel forever. But like all of God's promises, this promise was conditional, if the commandments of God were respected and kept. It is a sad but well-known historical fact that David's descendants did not keep the conditions of this promise, and that the kingdom of Israel disintegrated and went into captivity and dispersion throughout the world. By God's sufferance, not by his choice, dominion passed to the Gentiles under Nebuchadnezzar, where it was to remain until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled.

As we study the history of this unique kingdom -- the theocratic kingdom of Israel -- it seems apparent that the idea of God's kingdom being a completely spiritual kingdom in the far-off realms of the sky has no basis in the history of the Old Testament. God's kingdom was designed to be an earthly kingdom, over which he should rule as king, through a process of special revelation to those prophets chosen to be his authorized representatives. He was to be King, Judge, Ruler, Warrior, Counsellor, Statesman. Under this government free moral will and agency were always to be respected; the people were always to have voice and vote in such affairs as ratification of the code of laws or accepting the king or judge God had chosen. The people were to have a large degree of local freedom and autonomy. They were not to exist as a nation for the purpose of enlarging by conquest, but for the purpose of being a light before the world, showing the blessings, benefits, and advantages of living as a religiously motivated nation under God's rule.

The 28th chapter of Deuteronomy details in the first 14 verses the promises given to Israel if they would live under God's government. Then follow 54 verses listing the punishments and cursings which shall fall upon them if they reject God as King. Israel rejected God, and God rejected Israel. Never since that day have men been able to enjoy the blessings of God's government -- of the kingdom of God on earth. But that day shall yet come, when men shall recognize God as King, obey his laws, and live in peace under the reign of his Son.