

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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APRIL 2023

KINGDOM AND PRIESTS

God's purpose for the nation of Israel and His intention for them was stated in these words when He gave them the Law: "If you will obey My voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to me a *kingdom of priests* and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5, 6). Israel failed to live up to God's calling and became an apostate nation given over to idolatry. Isaiah said of Israel: "Alas, sinful nation, people weighed down with iniquity. Offspring of evil doers, sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned Jehovah. They have despised the Holy One of Israel; they have turned away from Him" (Isaiah 1:4).

When the Apostle Paul, by the law, condemned the leading Jews of his day, he points out what God expected Israel to be as His kingdom of Priests; they were to: "rely upon the Law and boast in God, know His will and approve things that were essential, be instructed out of the Law, a guide to the blind, a light to those in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, teach others not to steal, not commit adultery, to abhor idols, and boast in the Law" (Rom. 2:17-23). Consequently Israel became an antithesis to all God expected of them as a nation. His conclusion was "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (verse 24).

In spite of the unfaithfulness of Israel and the refusal of the nation to become a *kingdom of priests*, we may have a scriptural example of what the nation could have become had she obeyed God. When Israel was faithful to God, the world was at peace; when they disobeyed, the world was in turmoil. The Gentile world recognized this (I King 10:24, Ezra 1:1-7). In Revelation 17:18 we read: "The woman whom you saw is the *great city* (Jerusalem Rev. 11:8), which reigns over the kings of the earth" *marginal note: Lit has a kingdom. Jerusalem did have the right to reign over nations but could not use that right because of disobedience. This shows what Jerusalem could have been had it obeyed God. The ultimate judgment against Israel for their disobedience was pronounced by Jesus when he told the unbelieving Jewish leaders of his day: "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone. this came about from the Lord, and this is marvelous in our eyes, therefor I say to you *'the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation, producing the fruit of it.'*" (Matt. 21:42, 43). II Peter 2:9,10 answers this prophesy of Jesus: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own pos-session, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." The word "nation" (Gr. *ethnos*) is "a people distinct from Israel." This means the calling and purpose of Israel to be a *kingdom of priests* was transferred to all "who are sons of God, through faith in Christ Jesus (the true church) for all who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.

3:26-29). Anthony E. Buzzard in *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven* has this comment on this passage: "It is untrue to the New Testament to say that the church has permanently superseded Israel. The church is to become what ideally Israel should have been and eventually she will again become but only after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (Rom. 11:25). However, royal office and priesthood are offered to 'every tribe and people and nation, who in keeping with the now expanded call to Israel, have been constituted 'a kingdom and priest to our God, and they shall reign as kings upon the earth' (Rev. 5:10). One might expect this simple encapsulation of the purpose of the Christian faith to ring out from pulpits constantly."

These passages confirm the fact that the true believing church has become God's kingdom of priest and has the calling and obligation to be the people God intended the failed nation to be. However just as Israel failed to respond to God's call, the "holy nation" has not realized its calling and responsibility. This has been true from the beginning of the early days of the church and presently exists in today's religious system. If the church had not been so busy neglecting the scriptures and becoming so intent on self-righteousness worship of man, evil would not have triumphed, and the church might have realized its special calling to be a kingdom of priests. We will list just a few things that give us some idea of how all this came about. Their creed-o-councils trying to prove Jesus is God, and burning heretics alive that didn't agree with them (John Calvin burning Servetus at the stake). Church leaders being so engaged in the writing and publishing notorious outrageous books and edicts against the Jews (Pope's edicts, Martin Luther's atrocious book *The Jews and Their Lies*). The religious world being so engaged in military campaigns, (Crusades, sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church, lasting 200 years, trying to restore Christian access to Jerusalem). The church supporting the Scofield idea of the Zionist State of modern Israeli (as if it were actually the real descendants of Abraham). The conservative religious world equating patriotism with Christianity. Equating the Lord's work with massive, costly church buildings (as if the Lord dwelt in temples made by man). More interested in "planting churches" than they are in planting the seed of the word. The modern rise and acceptance of so many "soothsayers of the second advent" (date setting times for the return of Christ and the end of the world). So much preaching about "going to heaven" and neglecting the biblical teaching of a renewed earth as the reward of the faithful. Substituting going to heaven for the resurrection. (Kept alive by tradition and funeral sermons). Preachers defend LGBTQ more than defending the faith (especially parachurch preachers: Andy Stanley, Rick Warren, etc.). The church's embrace of radical syncretism (Instead of denying ungodliness and worldly lust, (Titus 2:12) the church embraces the practices of the worldly system...(viz. modern music).

Psalms 110:2, 4 reveals the true function of the nation of Israel, expressed in their hope of a Messiah. We read: "The Lord will stretch forth your strong scepter from Zion saying, 'Rule in the midst of your enemies'" and "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, you are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek." Christ as Ruler and Priest shares his position with

his people: Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6: "He has made us to be a kingdom, priest to his God and Father... You have made them to be a kingdom and priest to our God, and they will reign upon the earth... They shall be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." Consider the following scriptures and keep in mind Romans 8:17 which states that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ". A joint heir shares everything the heir inherits. If Christ rules the nations of the earth, then we will rule the earth with him. "He who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces as I also have received authority from my Father" (Rev. 2:26). It is no wonder John wrote "the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ; and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15) In Luke 19:17, 19 Jesus declared: "'well done good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities...' and he said to (another one) also, 'you are to be over five cities.'" In a prophesy concerning the coming kingdom of the Son of Man, after stating he would be given dominion and glory and a kingdom it goes further and says: "the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come... the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him" (Dan. 7:18, 27).

The gospel is not a message telling us how to get to heaven, rather it is a message concerning the kingdom of God and the part we will play in it. Paul asked the Corinthians: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" and "Do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (I Cor. 6:1-3). The word "judge" when seen in the light of the book of Judges means "to rule" (that's what the judges did when they judged Israel). He further states: "I say this to your shame, is it not so, that there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren?" (ver. 5). He is saying if they are destined to rule the world, they should get some practice now. Not only did the Corinthians not know this, but the church today does not know it also. Most preachers would pass it off as "making no difference to us."

When we pray "Thy kingdom come" we are asking God to manifest Himself through us. When God began to manifest himself in Christ He was beginning to fulfill the prophecy of Daniel when he interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar as being four kingdoms: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece and Rome (the first three are mentioned by name in chapter 8 and we know Rome followed Greece), and stated "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and the kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will endure forever" (Dan. 2:44). This says there is a future reign of Christ upon the earth when he returns and "the kingdoms of this world (will become) the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ and he will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). There is a popular hymn that states, "We shall reign with him on high." This is an illustration of false doctrine being taught by our hymns. The Scriptures teach the opposite: "...thou didst purchase for God with thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:9, 10). This is portrayed symbolically in Revelation 20:6 in the words: "and they came to life (those who have part in the first resurrection, (Christ's), and will reign with him for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:4, 5). They will reign in a redeemed earth set free from slavery (Rom. 8:21)

Our emphasis up to this point has been upon the fact of the reign of Christ and his saints in a future redeemed earth. Let's not miss the fact that God has made us to be "a kingdom of priests." God's intention in the beginning was for Israel to be "a kingdom of priests to Me and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) and of the church it is stated: "you are a holy nation, a royal priesthood..." (I Pet. 2:9). Psalm 110 is a great prophesy of the reign of Christ over the nations, in the middle of the psalm it is declared: "The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek'" (ver. 4). Reigning (the kingdom) is definitely connected with the priesthood. Believers are now priests to God and *proleptically* a kingdom (Rev. 1:6).

The basic function of the priesthood is to offer sacrifices. The Hebrew writer brings his book to a conclusion by saying: "Through him then, let us continually offer up a *sacrifice of praise* to God that is *the fruit of our lips* that gives thanks to His name, and do not neglect doing good and *sharing*, for with such *sacrifices* God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:15, 16). Add to these two sacrifices Romans 12:1 "I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy *sacrifice*, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." We name these three sacrifices as a summary of the work of priests (believers) now in preparing them to reign in the future.

THE SACRIFICE OF PRAISE, THE FRUIT OF OUR LIPS: The book of Psalms is the praise book of the Bible, and it gives us hundreds of reasons why praise is important. Psalm 92:1: "It is good to give thanks to the Lord and sing praises to Your name, O most high." Psalm 147:1: "Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God. For it is pleasant, praise is becoming." The book of psalms concludes with six Psalms of Praise: Psalm 145- Psalm 150, with every verse in Psalm 150 saying: "Praise the Lord." Since most "praise" today is limited to the Sunday morning "worship service" the sacrifice of praise is expressed to God, not only in our speech but in our songs.

THE SACRIFICE OF SHARING FOR WHICH GOD IS WELL PLEASED: Christ's ministry was not confined to evangelism, as important as that was, he goes beyond that when he applies the words of Isaiah to his ministry: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight for the blind, to set free those that are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18,19). Hospitality and caring for the needy is a common theme throughout the Scriptures, both in the Old and New Testaments. The law made provision for the needy: Leviticus 19:9, 10: "Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God."

THE SACRIFICE OF OUR BODIES, LIVING AND HOLY: Romans 12:1: "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual *service*," (some translations read "your spiritual service of worship)," but the phrase "of worship" is not in the original text). This means that true worship is not ritual performed on Sunday morning at 8:30 or 11:00 a.m. but rather worship is sacrificing one's body a living and holy sacrifice to God in a daily walk with God, twenty-four hours a day. Our bodies are instruments of service to Christ. They must therefore be subservient to Christ.