

The Reign of God

by Richie Temple
Cary, North Carolina

I have been spending a lot of time reading the Psalms over the last few years and have been abundantly blessed by the simplicity, beauty and majesty of their message. In addition to simply reading them over many times I also sometimes use my *NIV Study Bible* or *The Companion Bible* and refer to the study-notes or else look-up the verses in the center reference for further study in other sections of scripture. Perhaps my greatest impression from reading the Psalms is that it is impossible to read very far at any place without being quickly confronted with clear and simple statements about the sovereign power, all encompassing wisdom and gracious love of our God. Psalm 103 is a good example:

The Lord has established his throne in the heaven, and his kingdom rules over all (Psalm 103:19).

When the Bible speaks of God's kingdom ruling over all it is speaking of God's sovereign or kingly reign (rule). The word "kingdom" in the Bible sometimes refers to the "reign" or "rule" of a king while at other times it refers to the "realm" in which the king exercises his rule. Often both meanings are inherent in the same usage as when speaking about the future kingdom of God which will be established in a new heavens and earth after Christ's second coming.

As is clear from many sections of scripture God even now "reigns over all" despite the fact that not all recognize his rulership. In fact, from Genesis to Revelation the Bible presents the story of this sovereign God working in history to bring to pass his own set purposes in accordance with his own divine will. Chief among these purposes is God's plan for the ultimate salvation for all those who love him - a plan that will culminate in the destruction of all of God's enemies and the ushering in of the final paradise of God's kingdom when his rule will be recognized and enjoyed by all who are his.

This is the goal of history and it is the reason for creation itself. The Bible teaches that the world did not come into existence accidentally or by

chance. It was created by an all-wise and all-loving God with specific purposes in mind and continues to be ruled, sustained and guided by this God. This is stated explicitly at many places in the Bible and is implicit throughout. God's purposes cannot be prevented from coming to pass - not even by all the power of the spiritual darkness of this world. The first chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians expresses these truths in a beauty which would be difficult to surpass:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will -

to the praise of his glorious grace which he has freely given us in the One he loves ...

And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,

to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment - to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will ... (Eph. 1:3-6, 9-11).

So great is this plan of salvation and God's wisdom in bringing it to pass that the apostle Paul, after establishing the certainty of God's sovereignty and the election by grace of both Jewish and Gentile believers in Romans 9-11, simply exclaims in utter amazement:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!

Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?

Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rom. 11:33-36).

It is precisely because God is the creator, ruler and sustainer of the universe that we can trust him to meet our daily needs as we "seek first his kingdom and righteousness" - because surely if he cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the fields he will care for us as well (Matt. 6:25-33).

Let there be no misunderstanding - for the Bible also clearly teaches that this "world" or this "present evil age" is in rebellion against the rulership of the one true God (Eph. 2:1-3; 6:10-12). Despite this fact, however, the Bible never once concludes that things have gotten out from under God's over-ruled control or that he is somehow no longer sovereign over all. As Jesus stated:

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows (Matt. 10:29-31).

It is this certainty that God *is* all powerful, all wise and all loving that is the bedrock of the believer's life and trust in him. It is this certainty that God is "over all" and that he is "working everything in conformity with the purpose of his will" that makes it possible for the believer to know that in the midst of all things "God works for the

good of those who love him" and to be persuaded that nothing "can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:28,38-39). This knowledge of God's sovereignty also assures us that, even in the midst of life's many difficulties, "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

This biblical perspective is absolutely essential to a proper understanding of both the Bible and of life itself. As people we see only a very small part of the complete picture. But God who reigns over all and is guiding history to his own appointed goal sees everything from the big picture of eternity. The Bible teaches that it is *only* the transformation that will take place at Christ's second coming that will enable us to understand all of the "whys" and "wherefores" of this present life we now live. Now we only see "but a poor reflection as in a mirror" but then we shall see our savior "face to face" and "know even as we are known" (I Cor. 13:12).

Since the day of Pentecost God has poured out the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:23) into the hearts of all those who believe in Christ. Thus, the sovereign God who created the heavens and the earth is now our Father. As a result, we can live in joy, peace and confident hope of the final manifestation of God's rule when all of creation will be transformed and we will enjoy forever "the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:23).

**