

Spiritual Ascendency

Chapter 8 – God’s King in Zion

“I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion” (Psalm 2:6).

There were three phases of the life and history of God’s people, Israel, in the old dispensation which related in their respective ways to kingship. One was negative and two were positive.

“No king in Israel”

The first of the three is that which we have in the book the Judges, a period of some four hundred years, and the phrase which governs that whole period and state of things is, *“There was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 17:6); a kingless state, no king. As you read that book and spread it over that long period of time, remembering that, although you can read the book through in about half an hour, you are dealing with four hundred years, a long, wearisome period. As you read it and get something of the sense of how long and painful it was, you must remind yourself that it is all due to this one thing: there was no king; and the conditions which we find amongst the Lord’s people during that period are the conditions which inevitably result from an absence of authority, of what is meant by a king.

(a) Chaos

In the first place, it was chaos, there was no order, no coordination. Life was just irregular, indefinite; no one knew what would happen next. It is always like that when there is no king.

We begin right down there. I know it is a very low level on which to begin the final message of this series. Nevertheless, if it does not come to us personally as the Lord’s message, that is, if it is not applicable to us, if these things are not true about us as the Lord’s servants, it may be as well for us to keep it in store for the day when we come up against the problems and the difficulties which are to be found among many of the Lord’s people and in the Lord’s work; to be able to put our finger immediately upon the cause. There are many individual lives of children of God, as well as many expressions of corporate life or collective life where there is really no order. There is just a kind of chance going on, not knowing what is going to happen next, not being sure about anything at all. There is no regularity, no coordination, no symmetry in the life, no balance, no sense of a plan and design. It is all so fragmentary, just going on from one thing to another, and there seems to be little or no connection between experiences. It all speaks of lack of coordinating control somewhere. There is no central authority, no real head functioning, no king.

(b) Variableness

The life of Israel during that period was also full of uncertainty and variableness. One day things may be going fairly well, and you may be happy because something is happening. A Deborah, Othniel or Samson may be helping out just now, and things may seem to be going a bit better. But it does not last long, and the ‘up’ becomes a ‘down’, and that repeats itself. Good times, bad times; happy times, down times; you never know whether you are going to be up or down from one day to another, the spiritual life is all full of uncertainty. We meet a lot of people like that: on top one day and as low as they can be next time you meet them. You never know how you are going to find them. I was

in a lift in a store the other day and I said to the attendant, Well, I suppose life is just full of ups and downs. He said, Yes, more downs than ups! I said, You make sure the last one is up, not down. It is a kind of escalator life for many Christians, up and down. It was so for Israel in the days of the Judges. There was no control, no authority, no king, and therefore no certainty and no assurance as to what things were going to be like at any given time.

(c) Unrest

That, of course, brought about a state of great unrest. You read the book of Judges, and the whole atmosphere is that of unrest and anxiety. When a Gideon is challenged by the Lord with the word, "*The Lord is with thee*", the almost querulous answer is "*If the Lord is with us, why then is all this befallen us?*" (Judges 6:12-13). All is anxiety and unrest. That is not an exaggerated picture of many situations in the lives of Christians. It is a terrible thing to say, but it is true. And in the work of the Lord in many directions it is like that; and really it is all a negative state. There is nothing positive about it at all, and a negative state always opens the door to all sorts of disruptive forces and elements. Israel was in a negative state, and so a breach was made upon them from all directions. One people after another broke in and pillaged and carried off their goods, and kept them in that state of weakness, defeat, anxiety and disorder. A negative state is like that, and whether the material that I use to get at the point just seems to fit you or not, I do raise this question immediately as to whether yours is a negative or a positive state. There are many Christians who are negative, and they are marked by a big question. If you want to know why — well, there is no king, that is all. The need is for a master hand upon the life to take its reins, to govern it and hold it completely in sway. That is a phase of Israel's life which is a very tragic phase, especially as it comes after the book of Joshua. But we will not stay with that.

"A king like all the nations"

There is another phase which follows and that phase which lasted quite a considerable time, was introduced by a request. "*Make us a king to judge us like all the nations*" (1 Sam. 8:5). I am not sure which was worse, no king, or a false king; but in the realm of spiritual history they would signify different features. Each condition carries its own peculiar and particular features. Here was introduced a period under a king, but a false king. Saul was the embodiment of natural ideas, the sum total of man's own natural judgments, and when you have Saul, you only have the kingship of man's ideas about government. "*Like unto the nations*"; and it would be interesting to have a look into that which they wanted to copy. Right through that land and all around them there were many kings. See how many kings there were in the book of Joshua, And what were they? They were kings who had a city in which they reigned, and then they brought as much of the surrounding country under their domination as they could, and every man was a king in his own right, with as much territory as he could master. They were all rivals one of another, and only when Israel came into the land did some of them enter into a confederacy to stand against Israel. Up to then, it was division, rivalry, personal ambition, and reigning in your own little realm and being somebody yourself. "*Make us a king ... like unto the nations*". What a poor sort of thing to imitate. As other people do, as the world does it: we would like to constitute a kingdom according to this world, according to worldly ideas, natural ideas, man's judgments about government. That is where the mind of man comes in to govern; and what kind of kingship is that? What do you expect when human judgments are in control when the natural man has dominance? Well, whether you expect it or not, you get exactly what they got.

A corrupt priesthood

How did it come about, what was the cause of it? Well, in type, the cause goes right to the root of this thing: The priesthood was corrupt. Eli, the High Priest, was corrupt; his

sons were corrupt. Samuel too, that great man, that grand man, made an awful blunder, which led to this. He made his sons priests irrespective of their spiritual condition. He allowed office without spiritual fitness for it, and when the priesthood becomes corrupt, the foundations are destroyed. The priesthood has to do with the cross, the altar, and it is there at the altar that the natural man is supposed to be put on one side. The cross of our Lord Jesus leaves no room for man's judgments in the things of God, for man's ideas about things, for the natural man to come into control and dominate. No, all that goes in the cross. But if the cross has lost its place, you have opened the door to everything false, and although for a little time it seems to have been a wonderful move, it is only a matter of time before the rottenness of the thing is uncovered, as it was with Saul. Saul seems to be a great man, and you read wonderful things of him and of those who turned after him, whose hearts were knit to him, and things appear to be going very well. It usually is the case when you start to do something for God in all the strength and resource of this world's wisdom and of man's judgement. But under a fair exterior and apparent bigness, there was an infidel heart, there was something estranged from God. When it comes to the test of the altar — *"To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams"* (1 Sam. 15:22) — it was at the altar that Saul fell. That is where his kingdom passed from him, that is where his heart was exposed, that is where the real nature of this thing was uncovered. At the altar, the cross, he was found to be false.

Disillusionment

That phase ended in a most awful tragedy — disillusionment is the word for Israel. Yes, many of the best people in Israel had gone after Saul. It was not until they began to be disillusioned to realise that a big mistake had been made somewhere — This thing is not going to last, this thing is going to get us into trouble — it was not until then that they began to secede to David, and creep away to the cave of Adullam. And the secession went on. It was some of the best men who had been deceived by this great thing of man, this wonderful thing that man had made and brought in; but, alas, this false thing. There is a lot of history wrapped up in what I am saying. Disillusionment! And shall I say too much when I say there are a lot of the Lord's people slowly becoming disillusioned about the Christian system of things. "It is not standing up to it, it is not really delivering the goods, it is not getting through; there is something weak and hollow about this; we cannot just track it down, but we have a horrible feeling that before long something is going to happen, and we are going to be left high and dry". A lot of people are feeling like that today about organised religion; there is a lot of disillusionment going on. Well, that has been everything to them. It has been their king; they have been bound up with that for so long. The thing is, Did it come in from heaven, or did it come in from earth? Did God really bring it in as His first best, or was it, like Saul, merely God's permissive thing because people would not have anything else?

Getting to the heart of that, this is what you find. There had been the theocracy in the days of Joshua; the Lord alone had been king. There was that day when there stood the man with the drawn sword. Joshua went forward, bowed to him, and said, *"Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as prince of the host of the Lord am I now come"* (Joshua 5:13-14). Joshua capitulated everything into the hands of that One, who took charge and became the unseen King from that moment; and it had been a wonderful time. But somehow Israel had come to a state where this was too abstract — This is too spiritual, and this spiritual life is such an uncertain life; you cannot see anything, you cannot get hold of anything; it eludes you all the time! Spirituality — yes, that is all right, but it is up in the air! Now, was it so, or was the trouble with the people? Well, the book of Joshua was the answer. It was quite all right when the people were all right, and there was never anything better than that the Lord should be King alone. It was not abstract at all, while the people were in a true position. While the people themselves were in the heavenlies, heavenly government was all right. When the people came down out of their spiritual, heavenly realm, then heavenly things became unreal. So they came to the place where they said, it is all very well this idea of God being King

alone, but it is very unreal, impractical, nebulous; you can never have any great certainty about it. That depends on where you live, how you view the spiritual things. If you live in close touch with the Lord, you know very well that His control is a very real thing. At any rate you know this, that if you get up against it, you are indeed up against it. If you have got out of the Lord's hands, you know all about it. To lose the sense of the Lord being near is the most awful experience you can have, once you have had it.

Yes, it is very real until you really do move into another realm, then the thing is so irksome; to live on the Lord, to live by faith, to live the spiritual life, and you look for a king like the nations, somebody you can see and hear and handle. It was a loss of spiritual position which brought about the irksomeness of a spiritual life. That is the heart of it. So, losing their heavenly position, they make something after their own image, and in the end the awful disillusionment comes and the tragedy. They had chosen a false thing. There is a lot bound up with that which we will not stay to mention. That tragedy does not stand alone, it so often carries away some of the best — O Jonathan!

God's King on His holy hill

(a) Unity

But we have to close. There was the third phase of Israel's history. "*I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion*" — God having His king in his place. Type, David; result, coordination, unity, oneness. All this dividedness, divisiveness, insularity, all gone. "*Thine are we, David*" (1 Chron. 12:18). All Israel came with one heart to make David king. They found their oneness in a Head. Their oneness was realised in one central person; the only place where oneness is found. You cannot get any real oneness until you get there, until you come not only to the Lord Jesus, but to the Lord Jesus where He is in the heavenlies. So many people have made the Lord Jesus an earthly Lord Jesus, and so you have this 'church' and that 'church' which belongs to some nation or some denomination. It is the Christ of the earthlies, and so you have disunion and division. Oh, while it is never our thought or intention to say to any one person, You must come out of your church, your denomination, your mission, or anything that you are in; we do say this, that unless you transcend all such things, and are bigger and greater and higher than all, you will never know the absolute oneness of Christ; and not to know that is to fail in the other things that I am going to mention in a moment. Oh yes, we have to be *super-national, super-denominational, super-mission, super-everything*; we have to be in ascendancy, to be on mount Zion, united with Christ in heaven. All other things must be very small in comparison with that. When David came up and was made king up there, Israel found its oneness, they found their unity; and what a mighty thing it became.

That is the secret of what happened as recorded in the book of the Acts. They were one, all of one accord. It was a marvellous oneness. What a testimony and what an influence and what a power and what an impact! But the foundation of that oneness is this: "*God gave Him (the Lord Jesus) to be head over all things to the church*" (Eph. 1:22). So it is that Paul appeals to that: "*hold fast the head*" (Col. 2:19). That is where we find our oneness, our unity; not by agreeing to anything down here, but by holding Him fast. When the Lord's King is really in His place, it is the solution to many of these problems of disruption, division, and so on. I am quite sure that whether this is a matter between individual believers or between all the bodies of believers on the earth, the principle is the same. If you will only get down before the Lord and let Him be Lord in the situation, you have the basis for clearing it up. Let two disagreeing children of God but get together and say, 'Lord, this is not for Your glory, the situation dishonours You and destroys testimony, it is earthly. Lord, You must have the place of honour and glory in this situation.' Then the Lord can do something, and you have the ground of a mighty victory. That is the only way in which it is really possible to clear up any kind of difference. Oh, crown Jesus King, not in word, not in language, not in hymns, but truly, and what a lot of division will be got rid of!

(b) Power

Well, out of that unity and oneness in His absolute Kingship, there will come power. We have said before that, right to this time when all Israel with one heart came to make David king, even from the days of entering the land under Joshua, there still remained peoples and nations in the land which they did not and could not cast out. They remained, and, what is more, as time went on, fresh ones came and set up their place in the land. They were there, and they were mighty people. The Canaanites were a mighty people. Apart from the Japanese and Chinese languages, every other language in this world, takes its script from the Canaanites. They were a mighty people, a great civilisation. While so highly developed, they were deeply debased. It is extraordinary how those two things have gone together. Marvellous heights of civilisation, education, culture, and awful depths of iniquity in the same people. That is why they had to be exterminated. They stood their ground, and others there were who held on through all the days of Joshua and the Judges, until David came; and when he came to Zion, not one of those powers remained unsubjected. Oh, Paul's words concerning the Lord Jesus are wonderfully illustrated by David's reign — "*Whereby He is able to subject all things unto Himself*" (Phil. 3:21). David did it. The kingdom had never been so far-reaching and absolute in dominion as it was when David came to the throne. Power, yes; and David's, after all, is only a mere illustration, spread over a few hundred miles; but Christ's kingdom, oh, how vast, how absolute; far above all rule and authority and dominion and name (Eph. 1:21).

Power; but you have got to come up where He is to know it. The church will not know the power of Christ's kingdom while it remains an earthly church. Spiritually, it must know its place now.

(c) Fulness

And, finally, fulness. Not only extensive, but how full it was. You see, a new age came in with David and Solomon. You have heard of the different ages; you have heard of the Bronze Age and the Stone Age. You know that with David and Solomon there came in the Iron Age. They captured the secrets of iron which had been in the hands of those enemies whom they had never been able to subdue. The secrets of iron; that is something for you to study. It became a tremendous factor in building that kingdom; all the things you can make of iron. Imagine if you had to be without iron in any form, where would you begin? It came in with David and Solomon; that is, into Israel. I mean, it was there in the hands of the other forces, but they had kept it. It was one of their secrets; and many other secrets they held which are not our subject just now. So a new age came in, an age of fulness, and you read of Solomon's glory as the outcome of David's dominion; how full! Wealth, riches, abundance, almost redundance, because "*I have set my king*".

This is not just a beautiful story, this is true. Some of you know that spiritual fulness has become very much more your experience since you came under the absolute Lordship of Christ, and you are learning, as we are all learning more and more, that the Lordship of Christ, the Kingship of Christ, is not just a great idea. It is a thing which presses all the time. It gets right down into our very being. It touches our ways of doing things, our thoughts about things, our traditions, our inheritance, our upbringing, our associations; and before we are finished with this absolute Lordship of Christ, it will have touched everything in our natural and religious life, and an issue will be raised — is the Lord going to be Lord here? What is it you are putting up as the governing factor? I was brought up to believe this, and not that. Are you putting that up against further revelation from the Lord as to what He may want? Oh, yes; but — And that 'Oh, yes; but' — is really another Lord governing. The Lordship of Christ is such an utter thing that we shall find nothing that is not challenged by it. It is something that is both to increase and endure. "*His*

kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and his dominion is from generation to generation" (Daniel 4:3), and in all realms. But that must be interpreted spiritually as well. It gets down to everything. Can the Lord do as He wants and likes with us, or have we got the 'Yes, but'. As a new situation arises, something different from what has been, is your reaction, Oh, but the Lord led me into that! The Lord may have meant that to lead to something else. You must have no, 'Yes, but' about anything. Our attitude must be, I am ready for the Lord to do what He wants, I have no other idea, the Lord shall have His complete way: whatever the past has held, I am quite open to the Lord; I trust Him to safeguard and see that I make no mistake, but I am open to Him! That is the only way, with a perfect heart, to make David king — not a divided heart, or a little part of the heart, there must be no reserves; a perfect heart to make David king. When He is Lord all come in there: rest, certainty, coordination, power and fulness.