

God Our Monarch

Psalm 24, 29, 68, 93, 96, 99, 135

by Dellena Ludwig

We recently experienced the funeral of Elizabeth II, who had been Queen of England for 70 years. She was the longest reigning monarch in British history, surpassing the previous record for longevity of 63 years and 216 days, that had been set by Queen Victoria, Elizabeth's great-great-grandmother.

In England, as in most monarchies, the successor to the throne must be born into the royal family. The eldest son is usually the next king, but in Elizabeth's case, her father, King George VI who was the second son, became king when his older brother Edward VIII abdicated the throne to marry a divorcee'. That made Elizabeth the heir apparent at the age of 10 years old.

The kings we may be familiar with in Biblical times also followed this line of succession. Saul was chosen as Israel's first king and his son, Jonathan was slated to be his successor. However, it was not God's original plan for Israel to have an earthly king. Originally God was their Monarch and He led by His commandments through priests and prophets such as Samuel.

God chose the nation of Israel to be His people. He performed miracles in Egypt to convince Pharaoh to let them leave and God Himself led the people through the Red Sea to Mount Sinai and gave them His Law to guide them in setting up their government, over which He would be their God and King. He protected them and prospered them until they grew into a mighty nation, and yet Israel desired a human king to lead them.

The book of 1 Samuel recorded the events that first motivated Israel to demand an earthly king. In 1 Samuel 8, verses 4&5 it says, "So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, 'You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.'" [1 Samuel 8:4,5]

After God had helped them conquer the Promised Land, the people began to slide away from His Leadership and crave to be like the evil nations around them, with a human king. This infuriated the godly men who had led them as God's emissaries to this point. Samuel the prophet voiced his displeasure to the Lord. "But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king.'" [1 Samuel 8:6,7]

The first king God chose, was Saul. He was popular because he was tall, dark and handsome! (1 Samuel 9:2) But he and his son, his heir Jonathan, died in battle. So, God chose David to be the second king of Israel. And God blessed him and promised that his heirs would reign after him. God made this extraordinary promise to David: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever." [2 Samuel 7:16]

In this prophecy, God identified a promised heir of David that would come hundreds of years later, who was called Jesus. Scripture tells us that both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David. And when the angel Gabriel told Mary she would bear the promised Messiah, he stated, "You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; His kingdom will never end.'" [Luke 1:31-33]

David reigned as a mighty warrior-king and established Israel as a mighty nation. He was a poet and authored many of the Psalms we will study this year. But he never saw this special Monarch. In fact, history recorded Jesus as a lowly carpenter-rabbi, who never assumed his earthly throne.

Jesus began His mission teaching people about the Kingdom of God. Then, He allowed His enemies to kill Him, on a cross, so that He could take our burdens of sin with Him as He rose to sit at the right hand of the Father. By paying the penalty we owed, He redeemed and washed away our sins, so we could be His royal subjects forever, thereby establishing His throne and initiating his subjects into it at once.

Psalms 24, verses 3 and 4 describe His subjects. “Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god.” [Psalm 24:3,4] God wanted His people to worship only Him in His Kingdom. Therefore, He made a way for us to come before Him, washed free of our sins, pure in heart because He dwells there with us.

Last year in People of the Word, we studied the account in Revelation that revealed how Jesus Christ will one day reign over all the earth in His Kingdom. He will set up His Kingdom for 1,000 years and then remake a new heavens and earth where He will reign forever.

The word translated LORD in our versions of the Bible should be literally translated, Jehovah. But early scribes felt that God’s name was too holy to be commonly used. So, they wrote the word LORD rather than Jehovah in many places. The translators of our English versions indicate this by writing LORD with a capital L and smaller capital letters ORD.

The normal word lord (all lower case letters) means, “master”. I can’t type this distinction very well. So, when I use the word Lord in this lecture, I am referring to Jehovah.

Psalms 99 verse 1 says, “The Lord reigns, let the nations tremble; he sits enthroned between the cherubim, let the earth shake.” [Psalm 99:1]

When we think of the Lord as our Monarch – the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords – our mental image is somewhat like Isaiah described in chapter 6 of his book, in verses 1-5, ...”I saw the Lord seated on the throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs... and they were calling to one another: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ‘Woe is me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.’”

While that may have been Isaiah’s vision, Scripture also tells us in John 1:18, No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known. It is through Jesus that we know more about our heavenly Father. It is through His sacrifice for us that we now enjoy an intimate relationship with Almighty God. However comfortable we feel approaching the throne of grace, it should not diminish our awe and wonder of the Monarch of the universe.

Psalms 93 began, “The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty, the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength; indeed the world is established, firm and secure....Your statutes, Lord, stand firm: holiness adorns your house for endless days.” [Psalm 93:1,5] In these verses God is described as Majestic, Exalted, Holy, Sovereign and Eternal.

When we think of people as kings or queens, we wait and watch to see if they are worthy of our respect. Some have demonstrated their worthiness by leading their people with wisdom, virtue and strength when their kingdom has been threatened. But others have shirked their responsibilities and sought only luxury and opulence during their reign, to the detriment of their people.

God as our Monarch, is worthy by His very nature. Psalms 24 calls Him, the King of Glory; Psalms 29 speaks of the splendor of His holiness; Psalms 68 calls Him the Lord Almighty who scattered Israel’s foes, and crushed the heads of their enemies. It commands in verse 34, “Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the heavens.” [Psalm 68:34]

How can we describe God as our Monarch? The Psalms help us. Psalms 24:8 describes Him, “Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord is mighty in battle.” [Psalm 24:8] Psalms 29 says, “Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.” [Psalm 29:1,2]

Let’s begin with His attribute of holiness. Psalms 96, verse 9 admonishes people to worship Him. “Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.” [Psalm 96:9] Psalms 93:5 says, “Your statutes, Lord, stand firm; holiness adorns your house for endless days.” [Psalm 93:5] The Lord God is mighty and with a word can destroy huge armies gathered against Him. But even this is merely an outward demonstration of his most powerful trait – his holiness.

We’re cautioned in Hebrews 12:14, “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.” How do we do that you may ask? We commit ourselves

to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell with us and conform us to the likeness of the Son.” [Romans 8:29]

When the Lord God spoke to the people of Israel from Mount Sinai, they cowered in fear. He warned them not to climb up the mountain in His presence, or they would die. God is holy. He is perfection and altogether the epitome of righteousness. People who approach Him in their own blemished merit will be utterly destroyed before Him. That is why our King came first as our Savior; to make a way for us to come before Him.

Sometimes we forget God’s holiness because He has granted us forgiveness of our sins and given us a relationship as His children. We are so loved we have lost the awe of His presence. But as the mighty King of kings, we will one day see Him as He is and will finally behold the holiness of our Monarch, the Lord God Almighty in the reverential fear of He deserves.

Our Lord is worthy to be King of kings. Psalm 24:1 and 2 state, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.” [Psalm 24:1,2] Since God made all of the earth, as we learned in last week’s lesson, He is worthy to be King of all the world.

David was very aware that the God he worshiped was the Creator of the universe. Because the Lord God created the earth, He rules as sovereign over it all; from spring rain to terrible storms. In verse 10 of Psalm 29 David stated, “The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King forever.” [Psalm 29:10]

As the Creator, the Lord God is worthy to rule His creation. He can awe us with nature’s display of His power. Psalm 93 describes God as mighty. “Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea – the Lord on high is mighty.” [Psalm 93:4] Since He is the God who created all things and in Him all things keep together, shouldn’t we ascribe glory to Him for the majesty and awesome beauty of His realm?

Earthly kings surround themselves with beautiful palaces. Our King made the oceans, lakes and waterfalls to show His glory and might. He made the mountains, valleys and magnificent canyons to show His creativity. He sprinkled the stars and galaxies across the universe to show His infinite power and sovereignty. He gives the rain to provide food and health to people. He pushes the wind in storms to reveal His power and might.

God our Monarch is worthy of all our worship as His subjects. Psalm 69 begins with praise. “Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, to him who rides across the highest heavens, the ancient heavens, who thunders with mighty voice.” [Psalm 68:32,33]

His reign is universal, over all the earth. And someday, every knee shall bow to Him as our Lord Almighty. He dominates nations, causing earthly kings and queens to rise and fall. He places people in nations to lead their people to accomplish His will. He promises His leadership and faithfully stands to guide lesser kings and presidents to move what we view as history, until His rightful Kingdom will come on earth.

Yet he chose among those nations a people, the Israelites, to hold the banner of faith so that His Son would be born to provide salvation through grace, so not all sinful people would perish.

In the same power that establishes hurricanes, He calmed the waves of a local storm, when he sojourned the first time on this earth. With the power of His mighty Hand, the Son of God broke bread and fed 5,000 hungry people who had come to listen to Him preach. And with this same power, God raised His Son, the Heir of His Kingdom from the grave and offered salvation to all people, and the Son ascended to sit at the right hand of God the Father, ready to govern His people.

His holiness is demonstrated in His righteousness and faithfulness. Psalm 96 ends with this statement: “Let all creation rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.” [Psalm 96:13] He will rule as a righteous judge forever.

Psalm 96 describes His judicial sovereignty. “Say among the nations, ‘The Lord reigns.’ The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity... Let all creation

rejoice before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.” [Psalm 96:10,13]

God our Monarch will not just reveal Himself in majesty and splendor, but He will reign and govern all the people of the earth. He will judge with equity. Equity is defined as: “The quality of being fair and impartial.”

As Judge of humanity, God is impartial: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” [Romans 3:23]

Our King is righteous: “You are righteous, Lord, and your laws are right,” [Psalm 119:137] “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather through the law we become conscious of our sin.” [Romans 3:20]

Our King is faithful: “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” [Romans 5:8] “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” [1 John 1:9]

From before the beginning of time God has shown Himself holy and righteous. Every idea we have of fairness, mercy and perfection come from His example. But He is also just. Justice demands that those who have broken the law must be judged guilty and sentenced to eternal separation from God in hell.

However, before time began, God determined that He would redeem mankind by giving His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to pay with His sinless life the debt we owe. His sacrifice paid the penalty demanded by a holy God for sin. But His righteousness – His innate character quality of Personal sinlessness – meant the grave could not hold Him. He rose again and now is a King who reigns in justice.

He has offered redemption. But one day during His reign on earth, He will judge all mankind. His enemies will be condemned to destruction. But those who have received His gift of grace will live under His reign forever.

The Lord our King is mighty and helped His people to overcome great enemies. But He also has a side of compassion toward His people. Psalm 68 states that He is, “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families, he leads out the prisoners with singing; but the rebellious live in a sun-scorched land.” [Psalm 68:5,6]

Although God is a mighty King and powerful to destroy His enemies, He is not out of touch with his subjects. He is tender and kind to those who trust in Him. Verses 19 and 20 of Psalm 68 show the praise He deserves: “Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Our God is a God who saves; from the Sovereign Lord comes escape from death.” [Psalm 68:19,20]

Our Monarch is Just and Merciful. He offers salvation to all and tenderly provides for all – He is the Father to the Fatherless – He is the Husband to the widow. He bears our burdens and lives in our hearts so that we may be pure and holy to come before Him and praise Him in worship.

Our Sovereign Lord knew from before the creation of the universe how weak we were. He knew people would reject Him and selfishly demand their own way, just like the Israelites selfishly demanded to have a king. But He sent His Son Jesus, His only Heir, to come first as our Savior, and return to be our King.

The praise of our Lord is repeated in all of the Psalms in this week’s lesson. Viewing the many facets of our God and Monarch’s character, the Psalmist praised God because of His loving kindness exemplified by His dealings with Israel. “Lord our God, you answered them; you were to Israel a forgiving God, though you punished their misdeeds. Exalt the Lord our God and worship at his holy mountain.” [Psalm 99:8,9] God’s sovereign loving discipline is to be praised.

God served as Israel’s Monarch to exemplify all of His traits as the King of kings. In Psalm 135 the Lord is praised because of His leadership of Israel. Yet even as He exhibited His Sovereignty, God helped Israel know how to approach Him, by setting up worship in the temple. “You who minister in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God, praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant.” [Psalm 135:2,3]

Above all else, God will continue to be our Monarch even beyond our history. One day, our Lord will return to earth and establish His Kingdom here forever. All of the qualities He has demonstrated in Israel's history will be evident in His literal reign on earth.

His Might, His Majesty, His Glory, His Sovereignty, His Justice, His Loving Kindness, His Holiness, His Righteousness, His Faithfulness, His Goodness ...Because of Who He is, Our Monarch is worthy of our devotion. If the Psalm writers of ancient Israel found the joy of praising the Lord, our King, shouldn't we?

"Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness." [Psalm 29:1,2]

Before we pray to close this lecture today, please stand with me and sing the Doxology:

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, the heavenly host;
Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost!
Amen"

Let's pray: We worship you, oh Lord God, as our King! You are worthy to be worshiped for you are our Creator, our King, our Father, our Holy Lord. Help us to learn to have a reverential fear of you because you are the Righteous Sovereign Judge of us all. Thank you for giving us salvation so that we can come before you today and hail you as our King. May your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. In the Name of our Lord and King, Jesus Christ! Amen.