

11 KINGDOMS

(READ DEUT. 8:10-18) ¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” ¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

Message:

AND THE ISRAELITES WENT OUT AND DID EXACTLY WHAT MOSES TOLD THEM TO DO, RIGHT? HARDLY. THEY WENT OUT AND DID EXACTLY WHAT MOSES WARNED THEM NOT TO DO.

GOD DID HIS PART: HE LED THEM INTO THE PROMISED LAND, HELPED THEM CONQUER MOST OF IT AND SETTLED THEM DOWN TO ENJOY THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH. AS IF THIS WERE NOT ENOUGH, HE LATER MADE DAVID THEIR KING AND HELPED HIM CONQUER ALL THE NATIONS THAT SURROUNDED ISRAEL. GOD TURNED A WANDERING TRIBE INTO A SMALL EMPIRE. AND THE ISRAELITES PRAISED AND THANKED GOD FOR HIS GREAT BLESSINGS.

BUT DAVID'S SON, SOLOMON, WAS A HORSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR. SOLOMON STARTED OUT WORSHIPING GOD JUST AS HIS FATHER DAVID HAD WORSHIPPED HIM. BUT THEN HE BEGAN TRUSTING IN HIS OWN WISDOM RATHER THAN GOD'S WORD. HE MARRIED FOREIGN WIVES AND ALLOWED THEM TO BRING THEIR PAGAN RELIGIONS INTO ISRAEL—SOMETHING GOD HAD STRICTLY FORBIDDEN. AS A RESULT, PAGAN RELIGION SPREAD THROUGH ISRAEL. THE ISRAELITES STOPPED THANKING AND PRAISING GOD FOR HIS BLESSINGS AND STARTED WORSHIPPING IDOLS—IMAGINARY GODS OF THE CANAANITES AND EGYPTIANS AND ETHIOPIANS.

DISSENSION AND QUARRELLING AROSE BETWEEN THE TRIBES AND ISRAEL ENDED UP DIVIDING INTO TWO NATIONS THAT WENT TO WAR AGAINST EACH OTHER. AS THE YEARS PASSED THE ISRAELITES FORGOT ENTIRELY ABOUT GOD AND SO AFTER MANY WARNINGS BY THE PROPHETS, HE DESTROYED THEM—EXACTLY AS MOSES HAD FORETOLD.

(READ DEUTERONOMY 8:19-20) ¹⁹ If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. ²⁰ Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.

A TRAGIC STORY—BUT ONE WHICH HAS BEEN REPEATED MANY TIMES THROUGHOUT HISTORY.

A MAN BY THE NAME OF SIR JOHN GLUBB WAS A BRITISH MILITARY COMMANDER WHO FOUGHT IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND WAS AWARDED THE MILITARY CROSS. LATER HE SERVED AS AN OFFICER IN IRAQ AND JORDON AND FROM 1939 – 1956 COMMANDED THE JORDANESE ARMY. GLUBB WAS ALSO A WELL-RESPECTED HISTORIAN WHO PUBLISHED SEVENTEEN BOOKS ON WORLD HISTORY. HIS MOST WIDELY KNOWN WORK WAS PUBLISHED IN 1976 AND WAS ENTITLED *THE FATE OF EMPIRES*.

IN *THE FATE OF EMPIRES*, THE AUTHOR EXAMINED THE RISE AND FALL OF THE TEN LARGEST EMPIRES IN HISTORY TO SEE IF THERE WERE SIMILARITIES IN WHAT CAUSED THEM TO RISE AND FALL. THE TEN WERE: THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE, THE PERSIAN EMPIRE, THE GREEK/HELENISTIC EMPIRE, THE ROMAN EMPIRE, THE ARAB EMPIRE, THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, THE SPANISH EMPIRE, THE ROMANOV EMPIRE IN RUSSIA, AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE. THESE EMPIRES SPAN HISTORY FROM 859 B.C. TO 1950 A.D.

GLUBB FOUND THAT THERE WAS A DISTINCT PATTERN TO HOW THEY ROSE AND FELL. FIRST OF ALL, THEY ALL LASTED ABOUT THE SAME LENGTH OF TIME—FROM 200 – 250 YEARS. SECOND, THEY ALL WENT THROUGH THE SAME FIVE STAGES: THREE STAGES OF GROWTH AND TWO OF DECLINE. EACH EMPIRE BEGAN WHEN A PARTICULAR GROUP OF PEOPLE—A NATION OR TRIBE—WOULD ATTACK AND CONQUER ANOTHER PEOPLE.

FOR EXAMPLE, IN 621 A.D., AFTER THE DEATH OF MOHAMMAD, THE ARABS BURST OUT OF THE DESERT AND ATTACKED BOTH THE PERSIAN EMPIRE IN THE EAST AND THE GOTHIC EMPIRE IN THE WEST, ESTABLISHING AN EMPIRE THAT EXTENDED FROM THE ATLANTIC OCEAN TO THE FRONTIERS OF CHINA. AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE, IN 1211 A.D. GHENGIS KHAN, INVADDED CHINA WITH SEVERAL MONGOLIAN TRIBES AND ESTABLISHED AN EMPIRE THAT STRETCHED FROM THE CHINA SEA TO MODERN DAY TURKEY.

PEOPLE WHO CREATE EMPIRES—PEOPLE LIKE GHENGIS KHAN AND ALEXANDER THE GREAT AND JULIUS CAESAR AND THE MEN WHO FOLLOW THEM VALUE THREE THINGS: AGGRESIVENESS, COURAGE AND TOUGHNESS. THEIR WATCHWORD IS *ACTION*. THEIR CONQUEST IS ALWAYS FOLLOWED BY A SURGE OF COMMERCE. TRADE FLOURISHES AND BRINGS PROSPERITY, WHICH RESULTS IN A PERIOD OF AFFLUENCE.

AS WEALTH ACCUMULATES, A HUNGER FOR WEALTH REPLACES THE DESIRE FOR HONOR OR ADVENTURE IN THE HEARTS OF THE YOUNG. THE “CALL OF DUTY” GROWS FAINT AND AMBITION TAKES OVER. AN 11TH-CENTURY ARAB TEACHER BY THE NAME OF GHAZALI COMPLAINED IN HIS WRITINGS THAT HIS STUDENTS NO LONGER ATTENDED COLLEGE TO GROW IN VIRTUE AND KNOWLEDGE BUT ONLY TO LEARN HOW TO GET RICH. THE FRENCH PHILOSOPHER MONTESQUIEU CALLED THIS THE EROSION OF PUBLIC VIRTUE, WHERE PEOPLE NO LONGER CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY BUT WITH WHAT THEY CAN GET OUT OF THE COUNTRY. JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY SAID “*ASK NOT WHAT YOUR COUNTRY CAN DO FOR YOU; ASK RATHER WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOUR COUNTRY.*” THAT HAS CHANGED. GLUBB CALLS THIS THE “HIGH NOON” OF AN EMPIRE: THE BEGINNING OF ITS DECLINE.

THE STAGE THAT FOLLOWS THE PERIOD OF AFFLUENCE IS FOLLOWED BY A PERIOD OF WHAT GLUBB CALLS “INTELLECTUALISM.” AFFLUENCE MAKES POSSIBLE THE SPREAD OF EDUCATION AMONG THE CITIZENS. THIS BRINGS BENEFITS, BUT IT ALSO BREEDS INTELLECTUAL PRIDE AND THE CONVICTION THAT MAN CAN BUILD UTOPIA BY SHEER BRAINPOWER. IT ALSO BREEDS INTELLECTUAL COMPETITIVENESS WHICH SPAWNS ENDLESS AND UNPRODUCTIVE DISCUSSIONS AND ARGUMENTS.

PAUL ENCOUNTERED THIS MINDSET WHEN HE VISITED ATHENS DURING THE TWILIGHT OF THE GREEK EMPIRE. IN *CHAPTER 17* OF THE *BOOK OF ACTS* WE ARE TOLD THAT, “*ALL THE ATHENIANS AND FOREIGNERS WHO LIVED THERE SPENT THEIR TIME DOING NOTHING BUT TALKING ABOUT AND LISTENING TO THE LATEST IDEAS.*” GREAT GOOD CAN COME OUT OF THE HUMAN BRAIN—SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY BEING TWO PARAMOUNT EXAMPLES—BUT THE NOTION THAT THE BRAIN CAN SOLVE ALL THE PROBLEMS OF MANKIND IS MISGUIDED.

THE WELL-BEING OF AN EMPIRE OR A COUNTRY DEPENDS MORE ON THE LOYALTY AND SELF-SACRIFICE OF ITS CITIZENS THAN IT DOES UPON HOW EDUCATED THEY ARE. MUCH KNOWLEDGE LEADS TO INTELLECTUAL PRIDE AND PRIDE GOETH BEFORE THE FALL. INTELLECTUALISM BREEDS DISSENSION AND INCITES POLITICAL HATREDS WHICH STRAIN SOCIAL UNITY.

FINALLY, THERE IS THE STAGE OF DECADENCE. AS SOCIAL UNITY BEGINS TO UNRAVEL, PESSIMISM ABOUT THE FUTURE SETS IN. “LET US EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY FOR TOMORROW WE DIE.”

DURING ROME’S DECLINE, THE CITIZENS CLAMORED FOR FREE FOOD AND PUBLIC GAMES AND THE EMPERORS KEPT THEM HAPPY WITH BREAD AND CIRCUSES. HISTORIANS IN BHAGDAD DURING THE DECLINE OF THE ARABIC EMPIRE IN THE 9TH CENTURY BEMOAN THE INDIFFERENCE TO RELIGION, THE INCREASING MATERIALISM AND THE DECLINE IN SEXUAL MORALITY. THEY WERE BEFUDDLED AT THE INFLUENCE POPULAR SINGERS HAD ACQUIRED OVER YOUNG PEOPLE AND OFFENDED BY THE EROTIC MESSAGES AND OBSCENE LANGUAGE THAT FILLED THEIR MUSIC—SOMETHING WHICH WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN TOLERATED IN AN EARLIER AGE. YOUNG PEOPLE’S HEROES WERE NO LONGER FAMOUS WARRIORS OR STATESMEN OR ARTISTS—BUT ATHLETES AND SINGERS AND ACTORS. DECADENCE IS A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DISEASE WHICH ENDS UP IN DESPAIR.

TO SUM UP: EVERY GREAT EMPIRE WAS BORN IN CONQUEST, GREW IN WEALTH AND PROSPERITY, SUCCUMBED TO INTELLECTUAL PRIDE AND FINALLY COLLAPSED INTO DECADENCE AND DESPAIR. AND THEN ANOTHER PEOPLE—A VIGOROUS, BOLD, AGGRESSIVE PEOPLE—WOULD ATTACK IT AND A NEW EMPIRE WOULD BE BORN.

I KNOW YOU DIDN’T COME HERE FOR A HISTORY LESSON, BUT THE REASON I WENT THROUGH GLUBB’S ARGUMENT IS THAT IT CONFIRMS WHAT MOSES PROPHESED.

(DEUTERONOMY 8:19-20) ¹⁹ If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. ²⁰ Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.

SO WHERE DO WE FIT INTO THIS? LIKE THE ISRALITES OF SOLOMON’S DAY AND THE GREEKS OF PAUL’S DAY AND THE 3RD-CENTURY ROMANS AND THE 12TH CENTURY ARABS, AMERICANS ARE INCREASINGLY ABANDONING THE GOD WHO GAVE THEM EVERYTHING THEY HAVE IN ORDER TO WORSHIP IDOLS. IDOLS LIKE ACTORS, SINGERS AND ATHLETES WHO HAVE BECOME OUR HEROES. LIKE SPORTS, WHICH HAS BECOME OUR NATIONAL RELIGION. LIKE MONEY, WHICH IS THE GOD WE WORSHIP MOST OF ALL. AND UNLESS THE TREND IS REVERSED, WE WILL END UP EXACTLY LIKE THE ISRAELITES, THE GREEKS, THE ROMANS AND THE ARABS.

SO HOW CAN WE AVOID THE FATE OF EMPIRES? WE CAN TURN AWAY FROM WORSHIPPING ACTORS, SINGERS, ATHLETES AND OTHER POP STARS AND TURN BACK

TO WORSHIPPING GOD WHO GAVE US EVERYTHING WE HAVE. WE CAN STOP PATTING OURSELVES ON THE BACK AND FACE THE FACT THAT APART FROM GOD, WE ARE NOTHING BUT DUST. WE CAN THANK GOD WHO GAVE US THIS COUNTRY AND A FORM OF GOVERNMENT THAT IS THE ENVY OF THE WORLD AND AN AGRICULTURAL BREADBASKET THAT COULD LITERALLY FEED THE WORLD. WE CAN THANK AND PRAISE GOD INSTEAD OF OURSELVES.

SOMEONE ONCE SAID THAT THE ONLY THING WE LEARN FROM HISTORY IS THAT MEN NEVER LEARN FROM HISTORY. THE FATE OF EMPIRES SEEMS TO BEAR THAT OUT. IT'S NOT HARD TO SEE WHERE AMERICA FITS IN WITH THE PATTERN THAT HAS BEEN FOLLOWED BY ALL PREVIOUS EMPIRES. AND THE ONLY WAY WE CAN BREAK OUT OF THAT PATTERN IS BY ACKNOWLEDGING OUR DECLINE AND OUR DECADENCE AND TURNING BACK TO THE GOD WHO GAVE US ALL WE HAVE.

DID YOU KNOW THAT THE BIBLE ALSO SPEAKS OF TEN EMPIRES? GOD DESCRIBES THEM IN THE *BOOK OF REVELATION*. HE SAYS, "*THE TEN HORNS...ARE TEN KINGS WHO HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED A KINGDOM, BUT WHO FOR ONE HOUR WILL RECEIVE AUTHORITY AS KINGS....*" KINGDOMS COME AND GO, AND THEN THEY ARE NO MORE. THE FATE OF EMPIRES.

BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, THERE IS ANOTHER KINGDOM, AN 11th KINGDOM WHICH IS GREATER THAN ALL OF THE OTHERS PUT TOGETHER. A KINGDOM WHICH WILL LAST FOREVER. A KINGDOM WHICH WAS NOT BORN IN INVASION AND CONQUEST, BUT IN LOVE AND SACRIFICE. IT'S CALLED THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND WE ARE ALL CITIZENS OF THAT KINGDOM.

SO THIS THANKSGIVING, LET US PRAY THAT GOD WILL HELP US ACT LIKE GOOD CITIZENS. AMEN.

Deuteronomy 8:6-20

⁶ Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. ⁷ For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; ⁸ a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ⁹ a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.

¹⁰ When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹ Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. ¹² Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. ¹⁶ He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. ¹⁷ You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me."
¹⁸ But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

¹⁹ If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. ²⁰ Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.

Psalm 2

¹ Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?
² The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the LORD and against his
anointed, saying,
³ “Let us break their chains
and throw off their shackles.”
⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
⁵ He rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
⁶ “I have installed my king
on Zion, my holy mountain.”
⁷ I will proclaim the LORD’s decree:

He said to me, “You are my son;
today I have become your father.
⁸ Ask me,
and I will make the nations your
inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.
⁹ You will break them with a rod of iron;
you will dash them to pieces like
pottery.”
¹⁰ Therefore, you kings, be wise;
be warned, you rulers of the earth.
¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear
and celebrate his rule with trembling.
¹² Kiss his son, or he will be angry
and your way will lead to your
destruction,
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

Revelation 17:1-2, 6b-8, 12-14

¹⁷ One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. ² With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.”...

⁶ I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God’s holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. ⁷ Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. ⁸ The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come. ¹² “The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. ¹³ They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”